

## General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

### Hidden Treasure

From the mid-seventies through to the mid-eighties, Urgyen Sangharakshita led many seminars on a wide range of texts for invited groups of [Order members](#) and [Mitrās](#). These seminars were highly formative for the FWBO/Triratna as Sangharakshita opened up for the still very young community what it might mean to live a life in the Dharma.

The seminars were all recorded and later transcribed. Some of these transcriptions have been carefully checked and edited and are [now available in book form](#). However, a great deal of material has so far remained unchecked and unedited and we want to make it available to people who wish to deepen their understanding of Sangharakshita's presentation of the Dharma.

How should one approach reading a seminar transcription from so long ago? Maybe the first thing to do is to vividly imagine the context. What year is it? Who is present? We then step into a world in which Sangharakshita is directly communicating the Dharma. Sometimes he is explaining a text, at other times he is responding to questions and we can see how the emergence of Dharma teachings in this context was a collaborative process, the teaching being drawn out by the questions people asked. Sometimes those questions were less to do with the text and arose more from the contemporary situation of the emerging new Buddhist movement.

Reading through the transcripts can be a bit like working as a miner, sifting through silt and rubble to find the real jewels. Sometimes the discussion is just a bit dull. Sometimes we see Sangharakshita trying to engage with the confusion of ideas many of us brought to Buddhism, confusion which can be reflected in the texts themselves. With brilliant flashes of clarity and understanding, we see him giving teachings in response that have since become an integral part of the Triratna Dharma landscape.

Not all Sangharakshita's ways of seeing things are palatable to modern tastes and outlook. At times some of the views captured in these transcripts express attitudes and ideas [Triratna has acknowledged as unhelpful](#) and which form no part of our teaching today. In encountering all of the ideas contained in over seventeen million words of Dharma investigation and exchange, we are each challenged to test what is said in the fire of our own practice and experience; and to talk over 'knotty points' with friends and teachers to better clarify our own understanding and, where we wish to, to decide to disagree.

We hope that over the next years more seminars will be checked and edited for a wider readership. In the meantime we hope that what you find here will inspire, stimulate, encourage - and challenge you in your practice of the Dharma and in understanding more deeply the approach of Urgyen Sangharakshita.

*Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team*

## **Preordination Course 1981 Tuscany 29.11.81**

### **Concluding Remarks -**

A Talk by the Venerable Maha Sthavira Sangharakshita

Upasakas, old and new, and mitras or is it mitra? Oh no it's mitras, sorry. (laughter). I don't know if anybody's been keeping any record but today is the ninety-fourth day of this course. We've been here now ninety-four whole days and nights, and this ninety-fourth day is the last of the course proper. So it seems only appropriate that I should give a few - what I have called - 'concluding remarks'.

This is not a talk. This is not a lecture. It's not even a sermon (laughter). It's not even an exhortation, and I'm not getting in any little practice, so to speak, for India. It's just a few concluding remarks at the end of this course.

Now I was rather intrigued to notice earlier on, when we were having the various speakers' classes that quite a number of people dedicated their talks. I was quite touched by this. I'm not quite sure where this habit or practice, or if I may say so, this fashion of dedication, of talks arose. It certainly didn't arise from me. I can't remember ever having in my life dedicated a talk to anybody. Perhaps I should have done so. So I thought it might not be a bad idea if this evening I caught up with this fashion (laughter). Even though rather belatedly. I thought it might be rather a good idea if I dedicated this, I won't say talk, but these concluding remarks. So the question, of course, arises - to whom am I to dedicate these concluding remarks? Well, first I thought, 'Well, perhaps I should be a bit original. Perhaps it should be the [2] sort of dedication that nobody has attempted before.' So I was thinking, 'Well, to whom could I dedicate these concluding remarks?' I thought, 'Well should I dedicate them, for instance, to my mother? (laughter) who is certainly thinking of me - perhaps at this very moment, and who has been an excellent mother and never got in my way or contradicted me once in my life (laughter), even when I was quite small.' But no, I ruled out my mother for one reason or another. Then I wondered, 'Well, perhaps I could be really original and dedicate these concluding remarks to Maisie the cat (laughter) at Padmaloka because I've known Maisie now for ten years which is rather longer than I've known anybody here - and she's an excellent little cat, apart from catching the odd mouse. But no, I ruled Maisie out. Then I thought, 'Well perhaps I should dedicate it just to an absent friend. Perhaps I should dedicate these concluding remarks to Kovida who's holding the fort, so to speak, at Padmaloka Or perhaps I should say should say he's supporting those little lotus buds that we left behind, and is preventing them from sinking back too deeply into the slime while we're away. But in the end I'm afraid I ruled out Kovida too and I thought, 'No, there's only one thing for it. These concluding remarks must be dedicated to all of you. Especially to the twenty new Order Members.'

(Pause)

Devapriya, I think it was, the other evening speaking, happened to remark that if it wasn't for me he wouldn't be here, but then equally if it wasn't for all of you I wouldn't be here at Il Convento, Batignano, either, as far as I can tell. I wouldn't have had the opportunity of spending the last three months in this lovely place. And certainly the last three months have been, very very - what shall I say - it seems difficult to find the appropriate adjective -

exciting, stimulating, worthwhile, valuable, impressive, entertaining - the last three months have been all of these things.

[3]

In the course of the last three months, as you all know, we've done quite a lot of things. We've done them to an extent perhaps that we haven't had an opportunity of doing them before. We've had an opportunity of studying, exploring the Dharma, going into it at times quite deeply. We've had an opportunity of meditating regularly. We've had wonderful pujas. I think if, from the purely Dharmic point of view, if someone was to ask me whether from the Dharmic point of view there was something that had really stood out, in the course of this three month course, I probably would say that the two big special pujas that we had, the one for what was it?

(Voice says 'Full-Moon Day')

Full-moon day, and the other of course for another full moon day which also happened to be Sangha Day. I wrote in fact, to somebody in England, to one of the Order Members there that these were the best, the biggest and the most elaborate pujas that I remember ever having attended in the whole course of the FWBO from the very beginning even. So there were those pujas. There was also communication, not just by way of the communication exercises, but in all sorts of other ways, in the course of the discussion groups, even maybe while out on walks, during meals, and so on. So in this way we've passed a very valuable, a very unusual, even a unique, even an unprecedented, we may say, three months of our lives.

There are certain other things, I think, which I can mention as being a bit outstanding so far as I'm concerned, in connection with the last three months. First of all, I discovered, or perhaps I should say I had pointed out to me, at least two mistakes in 'The Survey' - that was certainly quite useful. I also managed to translate three new chapters of the Dhammapada and I've also had the opportunity of seeing rather more of people than I usually do manage to see when I'm in England. I've got to know, I think, quite a bit more about people than I would have got to know had I remained in [4] England and had you all remained in your various centres and communities there. If it hadn't been for this course, I don't think I would have discovered, at least not for quite a while, for instance, that, Sudhana has such a talent for telling stories, not to say genius for telling stories. That is one of the discoveries of the course so far as I am concerned. And we can also say that not only has this last three months been significant for us personally, not only have we been able to explore the Dharma, practise meditation, experience communication and so on; from the point of the FWBO generally, from the point of view of the Movement generally, this has been quite an important event, because there's not been really anything like it before. Yes, people have been ordained before, yes. A hundred and forty people. At least there's at present a hundred and forty people in the Order. More than that have been Ordained. A few, especially in the earlier days, have dropped out but, yes, one may say a hundred and forty plus people have been ordained before, but none of them had the advantage one might say of being ordained in the course of, at the end of a course of this sort. So it is, this course of ours, quite unique, quite unprecedented and I think we may say that it constitutes a landmark in the whole history of the FWBO so far. In fact I would even go so far as to say that this three month preordination intensive course of ours is probably the most important event to have occurred in the history of the FWBO since the opening of the LBC And that is no doubt saying quite a lot. We've gathered together in the course of these three months all sorts of threads. Order Members, newly ordained Order Members in the past,

unfortunately have only too often had to pick up their information, especially about the workings of the movement and the workings of the order, bit by bit. Sometimes it hasn't even been possible for them to get into their visualization practices very quickly, sometimes even [5] the texts haven't been available, but in the course of those taking this course, everything has, as it were, been laid on. Everything has been complete, everything has been there. Everything that you needed to know, at least for the next ten or twelve years, as an up and coming young Order Member, as an up and coming young Upasaka. It's all been given to you. You've been provided with the whole equipment, as it were. If you like, with the whole armour. And a precedent has been set, we may say, for the future. Because I think we can say that this course having been held, this very important, this unique, this unprecedented course having been held, the movement can't be the same again. It won't be possible also, to go back. It won't be possible to do things in the old way. We'll have to have other courses like this. I expect up and coming new young Order Members are going to demand them anyway, and there might come a time when one looks back on this course and expresses some surprise that it should have lasted only three months. This is a quite likely, quite possible future development. So there's a precedent for the future. We're going to have, I'm sure, other such courses. Some of you probably know that already some people have been invited on the next series of retreats which will lead up to the next Preordination course. We don't know where that course is going to be held. It may be held here, if it's possible to be held here. We may have to hold it somewhere else. If we can't hold it in Italy perhaps we'll hold it in Greece. If we can't hold it in Greece, perhaps we'll hold it in Spain. If we can't hold it in Spain, we'll jolly well go to Mexico! (laughter) - hold it there to somewhere like that and hold it. But one thing we can be pretty certain of, we're not going to hold it in dull, cold, rainy, old, England, if we can possibly help it! (laughter) Oh, oh dear, I seem to have committed myself. (laughter).

I happened to write in a letter to somebody writing a few days ago that Buddhism and sunshine seem to go together. (laughter), sunshine [6] and Buddhism seem to go together. So I don't want to rule out the possibility of propagating the Dharma still in the more temperate zones, but perhaps we should give a little more of our attention if not to the torrid zone itself, certainly to somewhat warmer climes. So this, this concerns the future; but as I have said, I'm sure that we won't be allowed by the up and coming mitras, who are thinking in terms of Ordination, to provide them with anything less than a three-month intensive Preordination retreat, and that is going to make a tremendous difference to the whole movement, just as I'm sure this course will itself, in any case, make a tremendous difference. So we've been here for ninety-four days. We've a few more days left for sightseeing and other purposes. We've been here for ninety-four days; we have explored the Dharma more deeply, we have meditated, we have performed pujas, we have communicated, we've done all sorts of other things. We've had walks, we've perhaps done a bit more reading than usual, a bit more private study. Perhaps we've learned a few Pali words, a few Sanskrit words and so on. But time does pass very quickly.

I don't know whether any of you before this course began had the thought, when you heard that it was going to be for three months: 'Well, what a long time.' Well if you did, I'm quite sure you didn't have that thought, you didn't feel like that, in the course of the course itself. To me, certainly, the three months have gone very, very quickly, and I wouldn't be surprised if, to you, they've seemed to go even more quickly. But they've gone, they've very nearly gone, and in a few days we shall all have parted and Il Convento will be, I won't say, 'Just like a dream' but perhaps like a vision that we had. A vision that we had but which in a sense is also still

with us. It's strange, I sometimes think, how vivid an experience can be, how very, very much you can be with something, what an impression it can make on you. You can be so deeply immersed in it. But a few days later, certainly a week or two later, it's as [7] though it had never been. You're so remote from it, it's so far away, so long ago, in a sense you've become alienated from it. So this is the sort of thing that happens. But I hope that it won't happen in the case of these three months that we've spent here at Il Convento with one another.

The majority of you, I know, are going back to those centres and those communities, those co-ops, even in some cases those families from which you came. You're going back to give them, I hope, something of what you've gained here. So far as I'm concerned myself, I'm going off to India; not directly, not straight from Italy, but after a few days at least, in England, a few days in Norfolk, a few days in London. And the mention of India reminds me of something.

I was thinking the other day, I was thinking back to a course which I conducted there. The first course of this kind which I ever held. And I was thinking about it and recalling that this course was held almost exactly twenty years ago. One or two of you I think weren't in your present incarnations (laughter) at that time. But I remember it very well, it was held in Poona, to which place I, of course, will be going, Poona being the centre of our FWBO activities in India. It was held in Poona in the bungalow of a friend of mine. This friend lived in Bombay. He wasn't a Buddhist, he was a Parsi with a religious movement of his own, but he was a good friend of mine so I managed to persuade him to give me the use of this quite large bungalow of his in Poona, which had originally belonged to the Raja of Kohlapur in fact the principal building was the Raja's former elephant stables (laughter), but it was quite spacious. And there was a large hall-like room paved with black stone flags and that's where we had this course. It wasn't a residential course, people came in the evenings after their day's work in the factory and so on. I don't remember how many [8] people we had. I think it was about thirty-five or forty, but they came every evening for ten evenings, and I remember that in the course of those ten evenings I expounded the whole of the Dhammapada verse by verse, gave a number of lectures, and we also did the mindfulness of breathing and the metta bhavana, so it was all good familiar stuff. So I couldn't help recalling that early experience, that early course, because that was the first course of this kind that I ever took. And of course this is the latest. So look how far we have come since. In those twenty years, quite a lot has been accomplished. That is illustrated, as it were, by the difference between the two courses, the first in India with just these thirty five or forty ex-untouchable Buddhist friends coming along in the evenings for ten days, for ten evenings, and this course for three whole months, here in Italy, here in Batignano for so many people, twenty people! - who are taking the Upasaka Ordination. Anyway this is just by the way. These little reminiscences just crept in simply, as reminiscences sometimes will, even against one's wishes.

So, to return to the main subject, the main theme, the majority of you are going back to your original centres, your original communities, even your original co-ops. But you're not going back quite the men that you left. I won't go so far as to say that you left as boys and you're going back as men, that would be a gross exaggeration - I mean in the sense that you weren't boys in most cases when you left. (laughter). But you're certainly going back very, very different. You probably won't realize the difference fully until you actually get back. I'm quite sure that during the last three months the majority of you, if not each and every one of you, has actually changed quite a bit. In some cases I've seen the change. But you yourself may not have noticed it and others may not have noticed it because it's little-by-little. Little bit this

day, little bit the next day, next week, and so on; but the people to whom you are going back, whether in your centres, communities, co-ops families, your social circle, they will not have seen you for three [9] whole months. For three whole months you will have been out of sight and perhaps in some cases frankly out of mind. (laughter) People don't think about us quite as often as we sometimes like to think. But, they'll see the difference, they'll feel the difference, if they are at all sensitive, if they are at all aware of you because, as I mentioned earlier on, you will have deepened your understanding of the Dharma. I'm quite sure that there are some aspects of the Dharma that you've come to understand, that you've come to grasp, which at least some Order members perhaps don't understand or don't grasp as well, in the case of those particular aspects at least, as you've been able to do in the course of this course. So you're going back with an enhanced, an increased, a deepened, a widened knowledge of the Dharma. That makes a great difference. You're also going back, I hope, with a greater capacity for communication. Greater clarity, greater sensitivity, greater warmth, and so on. So you're taking back to your centres, to your communities, to your co-ops, quite a lot. Your going back, I hope, in fact I'm convinced, your going back will make quite a difference to those centres, communities, and co-ops, because above all, what you will be taking back is not just a greater knowledge of the Dharma, not just an increased capacity of communication - you'll be taking back yourselves, and you'll be taking back not your old selves, you'll be taking back your new selves, your changed selves, your selves which have been, to some extent at least, transformed. You'll be taking back your committed selves, your fully committed selves, your explicitly committed selves, your selves committed in body and speech and mind.

So an important point arises. We've come across this point quite often in the past in connection with our families and their attitude towards us. It very often happens that one's family doesn't wish to recognize, doesn't wish to acknowledge, that you are not what you were. Sometimes it takes the rather extreme form of your family not [10] being willing, not being ready to recognize that you've just grown up, that you're no longer two, you're twenty-one. Sometimes it's quite difficult for mothers to appreciate this. They go on treating you sometimes as though you're two when you're really twenty-one. So we do come up against this sort of difficulty even in a quite ordinary sort of way, even quite apart from any question of Buddhism. But what very often happens is that if the son, let us say, of the family just goes away and he's away for sometime, maybe for years - in my own case I was away for twenty years - and then he comes back, it's much easier to put things on a new footing, a fresh footing, than it would have been if you'd been there all the time even though, while you were there you were changing all the time. Because if you've been away and changed and then come back, you have an opportunity to sort of establish things, to put your relationships with people on a new footing. So this is the sort of opportunity that you've got in a more specifically Dharmic kind of context. As I've said, you've come from different centres, you've come from different communities, different co-ops. No doubt all those people there have got ideas about you, impressions of you - even judgements of you, perhaps based on their experience of you two or three or four years ago. So when you go back now, when you go back in a few days' time, with the strength, let us say, and the confidence, let us say, of this course behind you, you've got an opportunity not only to go back as a new person, but to insist on being a new person, a different person, in relation to your old friends, your old contacts and so on. Not just the old folks at home, but the old folks - the old Order Members, Mitras, friends - in centres, communities and co-ops. You've got to be very very, careful that you don't, as it were, allow them to go on treating you as you were, when in fact you are not now what you were. You're something, someone, different, because you've changed. You've

[11] got, as it were, to take the opportunity of getting them to acknowledge that you've changed and take the opportunity of putting your relationship with them on a new and a more positive basis. It may have been very positive before but it's still got to change - because you've changed. It's to become more positive still. So this is one of the things that you very much need to do. This is one of the things that you have the opportunity of doing. So if you can do that, if you can bring back into the old, if you can bring it back into the old situation, the, as it were, old centre, community, co-op, whatever you've gained on this course and above all, bring back your new self and get others to acknowledge that new self and to recognize that you have changed, then you could have, all of you between you, a tremendous effect throughout the whole movement. You'll have an effect anyway just by virtue of the fact that you bring back a deeper understanding of the Dharma and so on, but you'll have a still greater effect if you not only go back into the old situations as a new, as a new person but if you can get others in that old situation to see and to acknowledge that you are a new person, and to deal with you and treat you on that particular basis, on those particular terms. Perhaps you don't fully realize how much you do have to give when you get back? Perhaps you don't realize how much you've learned. I know it very often happens with people, when they've been in contact with the Dharma for a while, say for a few months or a few years, they don't know how much they know; they don't know how much they have absorbed. They don't know how much they have picked-up, how much they've imbibed, sometimes as it seems almost by way of a sort of process of osmosis. But one day someone asks them a question and they find they know the answer (laughter), the answer's there. Out it pops (laughter), and they're a bit surprised. They didn't know that they knew, but they did know. That little piece of information had been stored up somewhere, they'd heard it. They hadn't registered it very consciously; but [12] they'd taken it in and it was possible for them to produce that, that piece of knowledge in the form of an answer to a question when it was needed. Because we don't, so to speak, constantly review all our knowledge all the time. It isn't as though everything that we know is spread out in front of us and we take it all in at a single glance all the time, that doesn't happen. I don't say that we forget things, but things aren't always necessarily present to our mind, even those things which we know. They become present to our mind, we call them up, we remember them, or at least recollect them, when they are actually needed and this of course happens when someone asks us a question. So therefore we won't, I think, in many cases, realize how much we've gathered, how much we've learned in the course of these three months until we get back into these sorts of situations, when we find we are able to answer people's questions, we are able to explain things in a way, perhaps, that we weren't able to do before. So in this way everybody has got a lot to give. If you can give it also as an acknowledgedly new person, so much the better, so much the more powerful, the impact. You can give to the old order members. I won't say that some of them are a bit tired and weary, uh? Yes, they've been working hard but it's always a very delightful thing to have a crop, as it were, of fresh enthusiastic youngsters coming along and putting their shoulders also to the wheel. That's very, very - well, very, very gratifying, let us say, when that happens, uh? It's very, very encouraging that others are also with you, others are coming up, a fresh generation, a fresh crop ready to help, ready to take their share of the responsibility.

And then, of course, Mitras. It wasn't so long ago, though now it may seem a long time ago, that you were mitras. It was what? - ten whole days ago (laughter) - but it seems a lifetime ago already. Already you're seasoned old Order Members, but chronologically speaking [13] well, ten days ago you were mitras. And perhaps if you think hard enough you can remember what it's like to be a mitra. (laughter). You can remember their little difficulties, especially their little difficulties perhaps, with Order Members. And perhaps when you go back into

those old situations, when you meet your old friends and maybe new friends, who are mitras, you can give them the benefit of your experience in this situation, remembering what it was like in your case, all those moons ago, to be a mitra. And of course, you can give so much to new Friends, people who have just newly, you know, come into the movement. Perhaps they'll make a B-line for you because perhaps you have a bit of freshness, a bit of energy and a bit of inspiration that some of the others perhaps haven't got, eh? But! and it's a very big 'but' you can do all this only if, and it's quite a bit 'if', and it is only if you don't lose what you've gained here. It's very easy to lose what one has gained. You all know the story, the myth of... He rolls a great heavy stone, a great boulder, up to the top of a mountain with tremendous effort and struggle and difficulty every step of the way, but when he gets to the top, or very near the top, it just bounces all the way back down to the bottom again. That happens of course, very, very easily. There are other verses of poetry, I ought to be able to remember the original Latin, but I can remember the English translation. It goes something like this; something about descending into hell, descending into lower states of consciousness, er, 'Short', What Is it? It's Dryden's translation, 'Short is the way', or words to that effect, 'But to return, and view the cheerful skies, therein the toil and mighty labour lies.' It's difficult to gain, very easy to lose. It's very easy to fall, it's very difficult to rise. You can give to others, you can share with others, what you've gained on this course only if you are very, very careful to preserve it. It's as I have said, very, very easy to lose what one has gained. We all know... one knows that from one's experience even on previous short retreats. At the end [14] of a week-long or fortnight-long retreat, you're feeling in a wonderful state: calm, peaceful, mildly exhilarated. Er, at peace with the world, full of metta, but you go back into the city - well, it may even happen on the bus - you lose it. It's gone. Something you've done, something you've said, some distraction has arisen, its gone. Now you've been here for three months. Oh yes, you've gained a lot. Maybe something quite solid has been achieved, but unless of course you've gained stream entry, it can all be undone. You can lose it in a matter of days but certainly

in a matter of a week or two, if you aren't careful. So you've got to be careful to preserve what you've gained. You've got to be careful that you don't lose it. You've got to be careful especially that you don't 'blow' your energy and your inspiration when you get back. This is the sort of thing that sometimes happens. What happens is, you can get into a very positive mood, a very happy mood, joyful mood, inspired exhilarated mood and because of that you start losing your mindfulness. You become as it were, over-confident, or you become confident in a foolish sort of way, a silly sort of way, and you start doing things that you shouldn't do, unskilful things. And in this way whatever you've gained starts draining away, trickling away. So you must be very, very careful as you get back - maybe even before you get back - that you don't start blowing your energy, blowing your inspiration. Maybe someone says when you go back, 'Come on! Let's go to a party'. You know, that's the way to blow your energy and then your inspiration. Or you bump into your old girlfriend - well, that's another way to blow your energy, blow your inspiration. It trickles away. So one must be very, very careful to guard against situations of this sort. And of course there are certain positive steps that one can take. Most importantly, one has to keep up one's practice, keep up one's meditation, not just the mindfulness of breathing and the metta [15] bhavana, but the visualization practice which one was given just a few days ago. Just keep it up steadily wherever one is, under whatever circumstances, however difficult it may be. And perhaps here a little word of warning. It is important to be careful not to talk about it too much. I think probably you aren't aware that in the early days of the movement when people were given these visualization practices, especially in connection with... with Ordination, they were asked or at least it was suggested to them, that they didn't talk about them with other people



except with those who had the same practice and even then not to talk in a just conversational or chatty sort of way but only in a serious way comparing notes perhaps about their experiences, their respective experiences, and perhaps sorting out difficulties, you know, clarifying things for one another. But as the years went by, and I think more especially after I left London, certain changes took place and people started discussing, in some cases, some Order-members, started discussing their practices, their visualization practices very, very freely indeed, even with non Order Members. Well this was something which was not envisaged in the early days. The Vajrayana tradition is, for instance, quite emphatic here that in fact I myself was specifically told this in connection with certain Vajrayana initiations - that you do not discuss the practice which you are doing within the Vajrayana context with anybody who has not received that same practice from the same teacher. This is quite a strict rule, and in Tibetan Buddhist circles certainly practices of this sort are not made the subject of general conversation. So, while I don't exclude the possibility that those who have, especially the same practice might like, you know, to get together and talk it over, one should nonetheless be very careful not to talk about it too much or in the wrong sort of way, or with people who aren't in touch with - have no personal experience... [16] You're just supposed to do it! Rather than talk about it. So I do have the feeling that in the Order over the last few years, perhaps the last four or five years, people have been a little careless in this respect, have spoken or talked about their visualization practice especially in a rather too free and easy way, especially with people outside the Order. So one has to be quite careful of this for one's own sake, to begin with and also for the sake of others because sometimes it happens that people are quite interested in getting hold of some new practice. They've done, maybe, the mindfulness of breathing, done the metta-bhavana, then they hear that Order members have got some special practice that they do that nobody else does and they're all agog to find out about it, and very often they want to do it just because other people do it.

Just because Order members are doing it, they think, 'Well, why shouldn't I do it.' So one must be very careful that one doesn't encourage that sort of attitude among mitras and even Friends or even just very, very new people indeed. Because in the West generally this tendency to grab at spiritual practices before you're really ready for them is very, very strong, is very, very acute. So one shouldn't encourage that. So think in terms more of doing one's practice, and experiencing something for one's self rather than talking about it too freely almost to anybody. In India it is very strongly believed that if you talk too much about your spiritual practice, especially your meditation practice, any benefit that you have gained from it is likely to leak away. You've sort of externalized it, or if you're not careful, even vulgarized it. You've cheapened it even, and this isn't desirable. So, yes, talk about your practice and your experience of your practice with fellow Order-Members who have that same practice; maybe to people who have other practices, but circumspectly, huh? Er, not in a general sort of way and certainly not in a conversational way [17] when others are present who cannot be expected to understand at this stage what those practices are all about. So this is something one needs to pay some attention to, as well as to actually keeping up one's practice. And of course, another thing that one can do to safeguard what one has gained in the course of these last three months is to keep in touch with one another. Some of you'll be doing that anyway because you happen to come from the same centre. There are some of you though who come solitary from this centre or that. You are the only representative, so to speak, of that centre on this course and you'll be going back to your centre, your community alone. But it would be very, very good if all those who've had this quite unique experience over the last three months could keep in contact with one another, and possibly strengthen and deepen whatever it is that one has gained during this period. And of course if you possibly can, keep in touch with me

too, at least to the extent of writing letters. Sometimes still people think, even people in the Order, that, 'Oh Bhante doesn't want to be bothered with more letters.' Well, I don't really look at it like that. I don't regard it as being, you know, bothered by letters, especially letters from Order members, because apart from the 'Reporting-in' which is often very brief and inadequate, my principal source of information about those Order Members that I don't personally meet is their letters. So if I don't hear from you the likelihood is that I don't really know very much about you or what you're doing. So please do keep in contact, as regularly as you possibly can, by writing letters and letting me know what you are doing, what you are thinking, what you are feeling, what you are reading, etc.; how your meditation is going, etc. But, of course, I must make it clear that I may not be able to reply. But if I don't reply it doesn't mean that I haven't been happy to receive the letter. It doesn't mean that I haven't enjoyed reading it. Many letters, in fact, I read [18] twice. I read them first once quickly, when I get them and I usually read them a second time after two or three days more slowly and deliberately. And then if necessary, and if I can, I write a few lines in reply. But with so many Order Members and Mitras and Friends and other correspondence it's sometimes very, very difficult to get around to answering everybody; but I do appreciate all letters. My best correspondents, I must say, and perhaps this is natural, are in New Zealand. There are often days when most of my letters, and I've quite a big pile of post, most of my letters come from New Zealand. And they are usually quite long letters, well-written letters, full of facts and information, and views and ideas and experiences, from Order Members and Mitras and Friends. No doubt because they've been encouraged to write, from the very beginning of the Movement in New Zealand, and also partly because they like that form of contact because they're so far away from the rest of the movement. So this is, yes, the sort of thing I appreciate, hearing from people in this sort of way, to this extent, because even if one hasn't met them, and that is the case with many of these correspondents in New Zealand, I haven't met them, they, you know, some of them have started coming along since I was there last. But one can get to know people quite well through letters also. And if one already knows them to some extent, if one's already had a good contact with them especially, then letters certainly do help to keep the ball of communication rolling. So keep in touch if you possibly can in this way. And if, of course, you can from time to time also, come up to Padmaloka. If you feel the need to brush up your studies. If you have a need to consult that Pali-English dictionary, or that Buddhist dictionary, or that Sutra, or Sutta, or Tantra, or whatever, well come up to Padmaloka. Give yourself a sort of Dharma holiday and spend a few days or a week or so browsing in the Order library - Preparing talks, preparing lectures and revising whatever you might have studied or learned in the [19] course of these, these three months. It does occur to me, this is only an idea, I don't know whether anything will come of it. It does occur to me that in addition to keeping in touch with one another it might be a good idea if say in a year's time we could have a grand reunion somewhere, that all those that were on this course could meet together, at least for a weekend, and I won't say recapture the spirit of this course because by that time you'll have moved on huh? But continue your communication, continue your friendship, and deepen it. So, this is a possibility for the future perhaps, after a year perhaps, after eighteen months, perhaps after two years, but it would be good if we could, all of us, get together in this way from time to time.

Now, as sometimes does happen, I've gone on speaking a little longer than I intended. I purposely kept my notes very, very few. (laughter), and I wasn't going to say very much, because these, after all, are only concluding remarks. But I really am going to conclude with a few concluding 'concluding remarks' because there are just a few things that I'd like to emphasize, a few things that I'd particularly like people, I'd particularly like to see people

doing when they get back to these centres and communities and co-ops which by this time must be really looking forward to their coming back. I'm sure they're not going to be disappointed. There are just, well, perhaps three things in particular, in addition to the things that I've mentioned that I'd like to see; or perhaps they overlap to some extent with the things that I've mentioned. What I'd like to see in all the centres, communities and co-ops... it makes quite a nice little jingle doesn't it, these three 'C's... is among other things a greater emphasis on the Dharma, a greater emphasis on the Dharma. Well if a greater emphasis on the Dharma, then a lesser emphasis on, what? Well, for instance, a lesser emphasis on let's say psychology. I must say, over the last few years I've started getting really quite fed up with psychology. It makes me almost slightly ill when I [20] hear too much about it. I don't know, I don't say psychology as a science but this sort of very subjective, sort of self-psychoanalytical approach, er, to the spiritual life itself, looking at it in a sort of psychological way, using sort of psychological terminology. It seems to me more and more that the traditional approach is so much more effective, so much more meaningful, so much clearer, avoids confusion to so, to so much greater extent, that it would be very much better if we relied more on this traditional approach. I know I did myself some years ago use psychological terminology, speak the language of psychology to some extent, but it seems to me to be less and less useful. It seems to me to bring in less and less by way of returns. It seems to be more and more counterproductive. So I'd like to see less emphasis, for instance, on a psychological approach and more on a truly, a genuinely, a traditionally Dharmic approach. More and more emphasis on the Dharma itself, and less on activities and attitudes which are really quite peripheral. Cultural activities are very good, maybe one day even political action will be quite good, but they've got to spring, all of them, from the Dharma. And the Dharma, of course, has got to be there first, very solidly planted before they can spring from it. So I'd like to see in all the centres, in all the Co-ops, in all the communities, a much more definite emphasis on the Dharma without any compromise, without any delusion, without any sort of watering down. And another thing that I'd like to see is ... I've touched on this a little bit already... much more Kalyana Mitrata for Mitras. We've quite a few Mitras around the movement, we've got a couple of hundred men and women. Naturally in your case you'll be more concerned with the men Mitras, the men Friends; but I'd like to see them getting much more Kalyana Mitrata. It really does seem more and more that Kalyana Mitrata is, as the Buddha said, virtually the 'be all' and 'end all' of the spiritual life. To the extent that people get Kalyana Mitrata, they will grow. To the extent that they don't get it, they won't [21] grow. I think it's as simple as that. I have said in the past that if every Order Member took, so to speak, under his wing two people - two friends, two mitras - and in the course of - hope I'm getting my arithmetic right - two years helped them to become ready for Ordination - then it would mean that every two years the Order would double. Well, it would more than double because you'd have the original members there, but you see what I mean. And that doesn't really seem very much. If in the course of the next two years, you, by your intensive Kalyana Mitrata, or with the help of your intensive Kalyana Mitrata, help just two people, two other people, to become ready for Ordination, ready that is to say, to commit themselves to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. That doesn't really seem very much to ask that you should give that amount of time and attention and care to only two people over a period of only two years. And then you've got two more Order Members.

You've got twice as many, well you've got about three times as many, including you. And think at what a rate the Order would then grow. So if we've only got a hundred and sixty Order members now of whom a hundred and fifty are really active, after, what is it? fourteen years - well' the rate of increase hasn't been as much as might have been expected. I know of

course that our standard has been going up all the time so that has, in a way, slowed us down. But again one could say, the higher the level of the Order Member, the higher the level of the Upasaka, the more easily he should be able to draw and attract mitras and Friends. So pay very special attention to this question also, that is to say, giving genuine Kalyana Mitrata to Mitras especially but even Friends, anybody else with whom you come into contact. Because if, you know, the movement is to go rolling on, if the Order is to go rolling on, if we are going to have twenty, twenty-five, even thirty people on the next 'Il Convento', wherever that may be, well, it's up to you, because even when I'm in England I'm at Padmaloka. [22] Padmaloka is not a public centre! So I don't come into contact, usually, with new people. So who is it who comes into contact with new people? It's all of you. Who is it that comes into daily contact with Mitras? It's all of you. So it's upon all of you as well as on other Order Members that there depends, largely, the rate of increase and growth of the whole movement. So therefore, give this special attention, this special emphasis not only to the Dharma as such, but to Kalyana Mitrata in whatever situation you may happen to be. Right, just one final matter. Er, as I mentioned earlier on and as you know, I'm going off to India. So India is, India has been, very, very much in my thoughts. I mentioned this course, this Dharma course as we called it, which I conducted twenty years ago, that ten day Dharma course, and er, as I mentioned also, a lot has happened since then, not only in England, but in India. We now have a thriving movement in India. I say thriving, it's quite small, but compared with anything else that anybody else has been able to do for the ex-untouchable Buddhists, it really is thriving. Nobody else has been able to do anything like it. Nobody else has been able to achieve anything like even that modest success that we've achieved, and we're growing and expanding all the time. With every letter that I get from Lokamitra, and I get quite a few letters, Lokamitra is telling me of an invitation here, an invitation there; so many people in that town wanting him to come, so many people in that city, that village, so many invitations coming in, from all quarters, he's not able to cope. Even with help of Purna, Jyotipala, the Indian Order Members - he's not able to cope. There are more invitations coming in than he can handle. But wherever he does go, he has a very successful programme; and just to mention one particular fact - some of you know about it already but it's illustrative - we have, as you know, a Marathi Buddhist magazine called "Buddhayana": 'The Way of the Buddha'. [23] This has been coming out now for three years. It's a quarterly and the last issue Lokamitra printed 4,000 copies; the current issue he's printed five thousand copies. It does seem as though we're just going to go up and up steadily, more and more copies spreading, almost flooding all over Maharashtra, because, again there's nothing like it. It seems extraordinary, it seems incredible that, here are these three million odd Buddhists in Maharashtra but they've not been able to produce, yet, a decent Buddhists magazine in their own language, but that's the fact. But this is what we're producing. It's mostly material translated from my talks, translated from Lokamitra's, with a few other odds and ends, you know, news of activities and so on, and this is giving a lot of people exactly what they want. And as Buddhayana spreads round -and don't forget, in India for every one copy of a magazine or newspaper there are ten or twelve, if not more, readers. It's not like individualistic England where everybody has his own copy. No, they can't afford that, that's a luxury, they share copies. So don't forget, there will be so many people reading and because "Buddhayana" is circulating so widely the FWBO, or the Trailokya Maha Bauddha Sangha, that's becoming more and more widely known in India, and this is having a great effect on all these ex-untouchable Buddhists who, since the death of Ambedkar and since my return to England have had very, very little provision so far as the Dharma is concerned until Lokamitra went there and started up activities. So, this is all by way of introduction to the fact that one of the things also that I'd like all of you to take whatever interest in you can, is Aid

For India, because we're doing all this in India but we're not taking money from the people with and for whom we're working. My idea from the very beginning was that what we do there, especially what we build there initially should be a sort of Dana, a sort of gift from Buddhists in England [24] to those in India. Don't forget most of them are very, very poor. Those that were in contact with and working along with, including our Order Members there, are probably quite a bit better off than most, especially ex-untouchable Buddhists living in the villages and in the slums of the big cities like Bombay. Their condition is still quite deplorable. So it seems quite wrong that we should ask them for money even to help them. It seems much better that initially we should get things moving with funds, with resources from England. So Aid For India has been started as you all know, with that purpose in mind. But from what I've been hearing recently, Aid For India, though functioning very well, is very short of people. They haven't got very many people for their next round of door knocking so if you possibly can, if you can be spared from your centre or your co-op or your community or all three, or only two of those for a spell of Aid For India work, please do consider it very, very seriously. It won't only do you good, it'll do a lot of good to the movement in India, a lot of good so far as these ex-untouchable Buddhist people are concerned. So there is quite a lot here in a way, I suppose.

I've covered quite a lot of ground, touched upon quite a few points but I would just like to remind you in conclusion really, at last, just of those three things that I've mentioned as requiring special attention. Giving that emphasis on the Dharma throughout the FWBO, giving Kalyana Mitrata especially to Mitras, and giving whatever help and co-operation one can to Aid For India. And if one can do all these things, if one does perhaps even not very much more than these three things, though no doubt most of you will be able to do quite a lot more, then one's stay at Il Convento in the year 1981, will certainly be bearing much fruit. I'm not going to say anything more. I'll just conclude with two well known and familiar words which probably put the whole matter in a nutshell. And they are: 'Apamadena Sampadetha'.

## Questions and Answers at Tuscany 1981

Tape 32: The FWBO and the traditional Buddhist movement, other religions, and other groups

Sangharakshita: Recently, in these morning meetings, we've been talking about the theme of responsibility. In a way, we're continuing that theme this morning. Some of you may remember that some weeks ago a question arose at one of these question and answer meetings about answering questions when one was an Order Member taking a class at a Centre - answering questions on the subject of Christianity. And I think I made the point then that, whatever one's feelings about Christianity might be, it wasn't always advisable to jump straight into the deep end and start off a dogmatic argument, especially if the person asking the question seemed to be putting it in good faith and didn't seem to have any particular theological axe to grind, and might well even quarrel with the use of such words as 'God and so on.

In a way, our continuation of the subject of responsibility is connected with that sort of area - because clearly when one is functioning at a Centre and one is answering questions one needs to be very responsible and in fact one needs to be responsible not only with regard to Buddhism itself and one's own practice of the Dharma but to be responsible towards the larger field of traditional Buddhism, and to have a responsible attitude towards that as well.

So in this way we arrive at our topics for discussion in questions and answers this morning, that is to say, first of all, the FWBO and the traditional Buddhist movement, and the FWBO and other religions and other groups. On my original list I've even got, following that, the subject of politics, Marxism, socialism, those sort of groups too; no doubt there won't be time to get around to those. We'll probably have to deal with them quite separately on some other occasion. But this morning: what about the FWBO and the traditional Buddhist movement? Buddhism in the East? Buddhism in Ceylon? Buddhism in India? What about the FWBO and Buddhist groups in the West? Groups other than the FWBO. And what about Buddhism and these other religions? What is our attitude actually towards Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism? Comparative religion?

So if you've any questions on these sort of topics, in this sort of area, then now's the time to bring them up and let's see if we can deal with at least some of them. Perhaps we can start off with the FWBO and the traditional Buddhist movement and perhaps expand then into other fields, other religions.

Ratnaguna: I've got a question. Do you think it's worth Order Members actually reading up on these things?

S: I would say that it isn't necessary from the spiritual point of view for Order Members to read up about or know these things. You can progress perfectly well spiritually with your commitment, Going for Refuge, observance of precepts, practice of mindfulness of breathing, metta bhavana - one can do all that perfectly well without knowing anything at all about religion or Buddhism as [2] practised in the East. In fact, one might even say, from a certain point of view, that one could get on better without knowing about Buddhism in the East, because you might even be discouraged by some of the things you learn about Buddhism in the East. So from the spiritual point of view you don't need to know. The contents of your 'Mitrata's' are quite sufficient!

But nonetheless I think it would be good if there were some Order Members - those who feel so inclined - who did have some knowledge about Buddhism in the East; traditional Buddhism, as it is functioning now. What is the condition of Buddhism in, say, Ceylon? Or in India? Or in Thailand? Because, sooner or later, we may get around to functioning in those areas. Or we may have people coming along to us from those areas - well, in fact the trickle has already started. We have one or two Sri Lankan Buddhists coming along to us who prefer us to what they find at home. We've Malaysian Buddhists coming along to us; they also are quite intrigued - to say the least - by what they find in the FWBO.

So it would be a good thing if some Order Members at least take an interest in these sort of matters. But it certainly isn't spiritually indispensable.

Steve Francis: Talking of dealing with people in the Centres, one very often gets a feeling of a lack of depth in terms of knowledge and experience among Order Members - that they know their FWBO Dharma quite well, but a wider knowledge is quite lacking; it doesn't seem to be present. I'm wondering whether that would constitute a skilful means; not directly pertaining to spiritual practice but certainly useful for dealing with people.

S: Well, I think it would be useful in dealing with other people only if those other people had already some knowledge - or even some misunderstanding - about traditional Buddhism that

needed to be sorted out. But in a way the reply's the same as before: that if any Order Member feels inspired to follow up this particular line of enquiry and to learn more about traditional Buddhism or the history of Buddhism - well, that's fine. It would be good in fact if there were some such Order Members around. But I think nonetheless one has to make it clear that that knowledge is not spiritually indispensable. And in dealing with questions from people coming along to the Centre, people who have perhaps read about traditional Buddhism, one may have to make the point that what they've read or what they've learnt is not in fact very useful from a spiritual point of view. And one is concerned with those - as it were - everlasting aspects of Buddhism which are useful and practicable here and now.

I mean, you might find somebody coming along who was extremely interested, say, in the teachings of some obscure sub-school of Buddhist logic. It would perhaps not be reasonable to expect each and every Order Member to be able to answer questions based on that person's studies. And you might have to point out - no doubt you would have to point out sooner or later - that though that might be a very fascinating little corner of Buddhist research [3] it did not really have very much to do with the living of the spiritual life - and that was what the FWBO was concerned with. Do you see what I mean?

So one can go along with such people, their enquiries and questions, to a certain extent, but sooner or later you have to come back to the main point: that the FWBO - in fact, Buddhism itself in principle - is concerned with the spiritual development of the individual, not with purely intellectual enquiries or historical studies, however fascinating they may be. Nonetheless, as I said, if some Order Members have what I termed a broader knowledge of the historical development of Buddhism, that's fine. But one has to make it clear it isn't spiritually indispensable. And anybody coming along to the Centre has to understand that sooner or later.

In fact, I think some people more acquainted with traditional Buddhism might find the attitude of the FWBO really strange; lots of things that they might have been accustomed to thinking about and talking about would just not be present. And all sorts of things they hadn't really associated with Buddhism might be flourishing under the auspices of the FWBO - things like vegetarianism, meditation, right livelihood. They'd be quite surprised - some people, perhaps - to think that these things were really important, or had very much to do with Buddhism. Some people have got such an excessively theoretical attitude towards Buddhism as a result of their more traditional studies. I remember myself, when I came back to England and started appearing at the Buddhist Society summer school, those who were vegetarian were considered to be mildly eccentric and making things difficult for British Buddhism.' (General amusement)

Another thing which someone more familiar with traditional Buddhism might miss at the FWBO would be robes. Some people genuinely feel that if there aren't robes around there's no Buddhism. This almost amounts to a micchaditthi and this view can be directly controverted from the Pali Canon - straight out of the Dhammapada in fact - but nonetheless this is the sort of thing that people do feel. So this is the sort of attitude that one may be called upon to correct. You may encounter people who feel that because you are not wearing a yellow or a red or a blue robe you cannot be a serious Buddhist, you cannot be serious about Buddhism, and your views and your opinions are not worth listening to; the man who knows is the man in the yellow robe, and the man in the red robe - by virtue of the robe he wears.

Alan Angel: I remember someone coming along and asking: Where's the monk? Where's the bhikkhu? I said: 'Well, he's in Norfolk.' They don't take you seriously...

S: Yes, you not worth talking to. You may know ten times as much as monks in the East, you may have practised meditation much more, but that doesn't count, that doesn't matter. In fact, it's really an extraordinary attitude that sooner or later we'll be encountering.

[4]

Mike Scherk: Is there anything one can do when one encounters this attitude? There was a variation on this: I said something to some fringe person, some simple, basic FWBO thing - and they said: No, I just saw on television in the 'Religion of Man' series some great maha-something-abbot from Thailand say something directly contrary and of course he must be right because he's been an abbot for forty-two years and he must know what someone without robes can't know.

S: Well, one has only to enquire into the basis of this micchaditthi; it's authority. And one can say: Well, the Buddha asked us to examine everything. You can quote the Kalama Sutta. The Buddha's asked us not to accept anything on authority. And you can even say that so-called traditional Buddhism in some of the South Asian countries has come to be out of step with the Buddha's own actual teaching, even according to the Pali Canon, which in the case of the Theravadins they profess to follow.

We in the FWBO are trying to get back to what the Buddha really taught as we understand it. We concerned with the spiritual life and development of the individual.. So one can at least put across that sort of point of view. With some people it won't register very well at all. But at least one can try.

Very often people are looking for an authority; they want an authority. I was reading something about the history of Christianity the other day and the author was discussing the rash of conversions to the Catholic Church which had occurred in Britain at different times. There seemed to be two waves: there was the Tractarian wave in the '40s of the last century and then there was another very small wave in the '20s of this century with people like Chesterton. And it would seem that what these people were looking for was something unchangeable, some unchanging institution, some infallible authority to which they could give their unreserved confidence, or even hand over their judgement so that they didn't have to think for themselves. They wanted to take refuge in the bosom of something that could do all their thinking for them.

The Catholic Church itself has changed somewhat since Vatican II; it is no longer so obviously the unchanging and authoritarian and infallible Church that it was. So a lot of people who might not so long ago have turned to the Catholic Church are no longer turning to it. The Catholic Church doesn't any longer speak with such an undivided and certain voice.

But people still want certainty. And all sorts of Eastern gurus, and sometimes Western ones, are prepared to give them that. And one way of giving people certainty is by saying that you yourself know and you know because you are it, you are God, or you are an incarnation of God; or you've got such-and-such an authority; or you occupy such-and-such a position; or you such-and-such an eighth or tenth or fourteenth reincarnation. All this bolsters your authority so that people can take it that what you say is absolutely true; all they've got to do is



believe and accept that and be a devoted, not to say blind, follower. This sort of tendency is very, very strong. So people are looking, one mustn't forget, for authorities. And the Buddhist attitude [5] that in the last analysis you are your own authority, your own guide - this doesn't appeal to them very much. Even within the context of Buddhism they're looking for these infallible authorities, whether they're Mahatheras of forty years standing, Tibetan incarnate lamas, or great Zen meditation masters, or the umpteenth in descent from Shakyamuni, and so on. One has, as best one can, to point this out: that their attitude is not truly Buddhist. They are looking for authorities. But they won't find that in the FWBO. (Pause)

Sometimes, of course, you have to point out that conditions in the East are different from conditions in the West and we are trying to practise the Dharma under the conditions of Western life and civilization. So the way in which we practise it may be different; but it is the same Dharma. (Pause)

Of course, one must be clear about one thing: in principle, if someone has had an actual experience of the Dharma, has deeply studied the Dharma, has practised the Dharma for thirty, forty years, well, yes, it might be expected that that person knows more about it than you do. But the mistake that is often made nowadays in the East is that if someone is wearing a particular kind of robe, it is assumed that he knows the Dharma or has practised the Dharma: he has a sort of honorary knowledge of it, an honorary practice of it, and expects to be deferred to on the basis of that. So it is this which is quite unacceptable.

You may find, of course, on occasions, there is a Buddhist coming from the East, or someone who has studied Eastern Buddhism, who genuinely has a deep knowledge of it, who has practised it. So one must be able to recognize that. But if someone does have a genuine knowledge and understanding of the Dharma, and has practised it, and even if he is wearing a particular kind of robe, I think one can expect to find that he will be prepared to communicate in a genuine sort of way. Whereas others rely just on the robe and have really nothing to communicate; they merely expect to be respected. So one should be able to distinguish quite easily between these two sorts of people.

Vessantara: Could you give some guidelines for being in situations where you come up against traditional Buddhism - say a bhikkhu coming into your Centre or community, something like that, or being in a public situation where there are bhikkhus and you perhaps pushed gently to one side ..

S: I think one has to sort these things out beforehand. If you feel that people are going to have a tendency to push you to one side just because you not wearing a particular kind of robe, the best thing is probably not to go along to that sort of gathering at all. Or it is better not to make one's position clear beforehand and say that, if you representing the FWBO, you don't expect to be just relegated to a corner. This is one of the things for which the FWBO stands: we not prepared to give undue recognition to people just because they wearing particular kinds of robes. So you cannot go along with this. If the meeting's organized on that sort of basis, you don't want [6] to be any part of it. One can, of course, make one's position clear, if possible, in a friendly, personal sort of way with the organizers; one doesn't have to be aggressive or difficult. Just point out gently: this is our principle.

I must say that, when I was in India, and even for some time after I came back to this country, I used to go along with the traditional system. At first I even believed in the traditional

system; it did work up to a point. But a time came when I felt that you can't go along with that corrupted traditional system beyond a certain point. For instance, when you know from your personal knowledge and experience and contact that certain people who are being given the most honourable place are really completely unworthy of it and don't know anything of the Dharma, then one can really no longer go along with it. Do you see what I mean? If that just happened occasionally, or there was the odd case of a bhikkhu who didn't really understand the Dharma, well, fair enough: accept the traditional system. But it isn't like that. So often one finds at these sorts of gatherings bhikkhus who are no more than globe-trotters going from one meeting to another, given pride of place, prominent positions, - and they just don't know what they talking about. It is not any part of our work to help bolster up that sort of system. We quite ready to have an honest one-to-one contact and communication with anybody, but not to lend our at least tacit support to that sort of situation. And as the years go by, I feel this more and more strongly. And also this sort of attitude is thoroughly in accordance with the Buddha's own teaching!

Alan Angel: Is that the catur-varga, or 'four companies', being the Sangha?

S: No, I mean that you should deal with individuals as individuals. You shouldn't be impressed by position, you shouldn't be impressed by robes. The Buddha says in the Dhammapada that if a man is filled with truth and righteousness, he is the bhikkhu, he is the sramana, he is the Brahmana. All these terms are used. And again he says that even though a man may be richly dressed, and wearing ornaments - that is to say, a layman - if he is filled with righteousness and truth, then he is to be honoured.

Malcolm Webb: Should one not go along to other groups too much to minimize the support we might be giving them?

S: Well, what does one mean by 'going along to other groups'?

Malcolm Webb: With particular friend, with whom it might be skilful to keep up contact, and they into a different form of Buddhism - a Tibetan group or a Zen group. You might be unwittingly lending support to that particular situation by going along there.

S: You can always keep up contact with them individually. I certainly wouldn't say that if you've got friends, especially old friends, who do belong to other Buddhist groups, or even other religions, that you shouldn't keep up contact with them. Keep up contact by all means. But let it be mainly individual contact, because then there is more possibility of communication. [7] But don't go along to any particular group or activity if you feel that by going along, you are supporting something which isn't very skilful. You just have to use your own judgement in each instance. Certainly don't break off personal relations; there's no need to do that.

Alan Angel: Over the years, one difficulty or area of unclarity I've come across is that of hospitality and one's welcome to members of other groups, particularly bhikkhus .

S: What do you mean in this instance?

Alan Angel: I'm thinking of one instance when some years ago I was living with a member of the Nichiren Order and that was generally felt to be quite heretical. I think that was because

there was a view of the Nichirens around which might have been generally rather well-founded, but that wasn't taking into account the individual involved. There does sometimes seem to be a blanket reaction against other people as if they are all just "off the track".

S: I think the main factor is: do those people want to communicate? I think this must be the criterion. If there is anybody coming along from some other form of Buddhism or even from some other religion - the criterion is: do they want to communicate with you? Are they willing to listen? Usually, unfortunately, they don't want to communicate and they don't want to listen.

I certainly found this with the Nichiren people. To begin with, they were delighted with the FWBO. Why? Because I'd just given a series of lectures on the White Lotus Sutra. So they thought that we were ripe for conversion to their school or their sect, which stresses the White Lotus Sutra. So they were quite keen to involve us with their movement; we didn't wish to be involved. I myself had several talks with Terasawa and one or two of the others - but they just weren't open. They didn't want to hear what we had to say. They weren't ready to communicate.

So it's just the same when the odd bhikkhu comes along to the FWBO. It doesn't always happen, but more often than not he comes along on the assumption that you know nothing about Buddhism; he knows all about it, and he's going to tell you all about it. Contact with people of that sort is just a waste of time! It's an even greater waste of time to have time living with you in the community! They may be nice enough people in other ways, but if they not open, if they not willing to communicate - which doesn't mean necessarily agree with us - if they assume their own superiority and their own knowledge, then the less one has to do with them the better. There's nothing to be gained.

Michael Scherk: Extending that slightly - is there really any point in people from the FWBO going along to any sort of formal or organized meetings with other religions or sects of other religions - under almost any circumstances?

[8]

S: Again I go back to my Indian experience and early experience in this country. I used to go along to a few of these sort of 'inter-faith' meetings. My feelings about them were mixed. I think you can say that there are two sorts. There are some which are quite genuine. They are organized by people who genuinely feel that religious difference is undesirable, has led to conflict, and therefore followers of different religions should get together, should get to know one another, in the hope that they may be friends, even though they follow different religions. Some people organize meetings on this basis; this is quite honest. So if one is invited along to a meeting of this sort - well, if one feels interested and feels one might make some interesting and useful contacts, by all means go along and represent, as it were, Buddhism.

If you are given the opportunity to speak about Buddhism in front of a lot of people representing other religions or interested people who are, perhaps, still shopping around, why not take that opportunity? But this is assuming that the basis of the whole organization is honest.

But sometimes these sort of meetings are organized on a not-very-honest basis. I remember

there was one a few years ago organized by a Sufi group. And there were, as far as I remember, three main speakers - first of all there was a Christian, then there was a Buddhist, and then there was the Sufi. I think it was Vilayat Khan - was it? So Vilayat Khan - the Sufi whose organization had arranged the meeting - not only presided, but gave the summing-up address at the end. And he did it in such a way as to make out that the Christians represented one extreme, the Buddhists represented the other, but the Sufis synthesized and harmonized it all and they were the best and greatest.

So that sort of set-up we shouldn't lend ourselves to. You'll just have to make proper enquiries beforehand to find out whether you intended as trophies for somebody else's circus or whether it is a genuine effort on the part of certain well-meaning people to bring followers of different religions closer together. So this is the criterion. Again it's a question of communication. I certainly don't rule out participation in these inter-religious gatherings altogether. I think it's probably not a bad thing that all Order Members at some time or other should have some experience of going along - those who are decent speakers - and speaking on Buddhism at gatherings of this sort because you certainly rub up against people with very different views - and that tends to sharpen or clarify ones own understanding. And if there are public sessions where people representing different religions speak about their particular religion it may be that in the audience there are some people who will be attracted to Buddhism and who will come up afterwards and speak to you. It's another possible outlet for our activities.

[9]

David Luce: Can't there be a tendency in some of these meetings to try and find a sort of woolly common ground?

S: This is true. This also does sometimes happen. But I think one needn't bother too much about that, providing that you are given sufficient time and space to explain what you think Buddhism is, and you may have to openly controvert that sort of woolly thinking. You may have to say: Well, we don't all have to believe the same thing in order not to be at each others throats! Buddhism has a very definite line of thought and practice; but, on the other hand, Buddhism is the most tolerant religion known to history - certainly the most tolerant of the successful religions. So one can make that point.

Dave Rice: One of the dangers in England that I have run into quite a few times is that the people present assume that I am a representative of the FWBO and I had to continually say that I was just an individual, that I had my own views and my own feelings about things. But in spite of that, I was still interpreted as being a representative; that what I said was what the FWBO taught.

S: Well, that sort of thing you have to clarify before you accept the invitation. You have to sort out in advance on what basis you are speaking. And usually such gatherings don't want people speaking just as individuals. In a way, that is understandable. If they want to bring together the different religions of the world, they want someone who knows something about Buddhism to speak about Buddhism, someone who knows about Catholicism to speak about Catholicism. Usually it's someone who belongs to that particular religion. So you can't blame them for regarding you as a representative because that's what they usually want on such occasions.

Steve Francis: There was an occasion not so long ago when Nagabodhi was asked to appear on a radio programme in London. There were a couple of things about that. He didn't use his ordained name; I was wondering whether you feel it would be more skilful to use it or not. The second thing was: just how do you present yourself? Do you say: I am an individual Buddhist? Or: I'm here on behalf of the FWBO?

S: In the first instance: I think whether one uses one's Buddhist name, wears one's kesa - this just depends on the particular situation. One just has to try and see which would be the more skilful thing to do. I think it's quite impossible to lay down general guidelines. Just try to see what would the effect if you use your Buddhist name or use your ordinary name, if you wore your kesa or if you didn't. One has to just see that particular situation, the kind of programme.

With regard to the other matter: most Order Members will not be, from the point of view of the media, of sufficient [10] interest for the media to want their views as individuals. They may be interested to know their views as Buddhists or as members of the FWBO. So you have to be quite clear in what capacity you being invited or regarded. You may be interviewed just as a Buddhist. In which case you can speak just as 'a Buddhist', you can say, 'This is what Buddhism teaches, what Buddhism says.' And if it seems to be skilful, you can introduce a reference to the FWBO.

Or you may be interviewed as a representative of the FWBO. The interviewer may be especially interested in, say, the co-ops set up by the FWBO. So in that case it would be unrealistic to speak just as a Buddhist. In that sort of situation you speak not only as a Buddhist but as a member of the FWBO.

So it depends on the particular situation which degree of emphasis, what relative emphasis, you give to your being a Buddhist and your being a member of the FWBO. Sometimes your being a member of the FWBO may not be particularly relevant, on other occasions it may be. You just have to be well-primed about the nature of the situation - the nature of the programme, the sort of interview. And in what capacity you are being interviewed, in what capacity you are being regarded. Be clear in your own mind about all these sorts of things beforehand. Usually, people who invite you for radio and TV interviews are quite sympathetic and co-operative and will be quite happy to clear these things with you beforehand. But you mustn't stumble into things.

Michael Scherk: Would you say that in general it's quite important for us to be careful about being representatives of the FWBO? Even knowing in advance about the set-up? Unless we feel we quite capable of dealing with perhaps hostile fellow members of a panel?

S: I think that when invitations come in, they should be discussed by the Council of the Centre or the Order Chapter. They should sort out who should be sent or who should accept the invitation. If you are invited in your personal capacity and you not quite sure, raise it with your fellow Order Members. But I think it's unlikely to begin with that you'll be invited in your personal capacity; an invitation will come to the Centre asking for someone to represent Buddhism or the FWBO, and then the most suitable available person will be sent. But whoever is sent must be well-primed; he must know what he's talking about; he must be articulate; he must be a good communicator.

Interviews are probably more difficult than talks. If you to give a talk at some interfaith

meeting, and even answer questions afterwards on your talk, that's comparatively easy. You can prepare your talk. You can even write it out and read it. But when you are interviewed for radio or TV you have to have your wits about you to a much greater extent. You may even get trick questions some of the time - though [11] most interviewers are quite honest and quite straightforward. Sometimes they might even show you the questions that they're going to ask you beforehand. Or even if they don't do that, if you ask them what sort of areas they are interested in and what sort of things will they be asking you about, they'll usually be quite happy to tell you.

Subhuti: It's usually very helpful to talk to the interviewer for some time before so that there's some communication going.

S: Yes, they sometimes like that too; it helps them as well as helping you. (Pause)

I think some of you who haven't had any experience at all of Buddhist groups outside the FWBO or of Eastern traditional Buddhism, and who perhaps haven't had any experience of interfaith meetings, are in for a few surprises if you do get involved in those sort of things. But it might not be a bad thing - it might broaden your outlook in some ways! Might make you acquainted with a few more micchaditthis! And there's always the possibility of making contact with some interesting people. You can go along with the determination of enjoying yourself anyway, whatever other people might do.

David Luce: They might be contacts that could be helpful.

S: Contacts are always useful; take that as a sort of axiom.

Cieran Saunders: You said something the other day, Bhante, about Mitras not going along to other groups ...

S: Well, it's not so much that Mitras are prohibited from going along to other groups, but if you still going along to other groups, you're not ready to be a Mitra. Because, as I've explained before, there are Friends, Mitras, and Order Members. A Friend is someone who just comes along sometimes, may come along very occasionally, who may be 'shopping around', may be looking at Buddhism, Sufism, Christianity, Tibetan Buddhism, Buddhist Society, the FWBO. As far as we're concerned, that's fine; let people shop around as long as they like. But there are some people who, sooner or later, start thinking or start feeling that they prefer the FWBO, that the FWBO is the group or the movement that they want to be involved with. They are ready to be made Mitras.

So therefore if one asks if a Mitra is supposed not to go along to other groups, it's based on a misunderstanding of what a Mitra is. Because the Mitra is supposed to have passed that point where he or she is still shopping around.

If, of course, there's some special event - for instance the lecture by the Dalai Lama - by all means go along to that. That's in a rather different category. But the Mitra is certainly not expected to be still shopping around. If they're [12] still shopping around, they not ready to be Mitras. So if a Mitra does want to go and hear some well-known Buddhist teacher who happens to be passing through London, that's fair enough. But if they dividing their time between another Buddhist group and the FWBO - well, that is certainly not appropriate for a

Mitra. It contradicts the very idea of a Mitra.

Rudiger Jansen: Concerning contact with other Buddhist groups in the West, Bhante, would you suggest that it's a good idea to take the initiative, to make contact with other Buddhist groups?

S: I think one has to be clear what one is talking about. What is one making contact with? How does the contact proceed? If it is a question of making contact with individuals who happen to belong to other groups and establishing personal communication with them, that is one thing. But if it is a question of an official approach by a Centre to another Buddhist group, that is quite another matter.

Rudiger Jansen: And what do you think about these? I was more thinking of the latter.

S: In the case of the former, the individual contact, I would say that is certainly not to be discouraged if the other group is willing to communicate. Obviously, you will have to listen to him and hear what he has to say about his group, the way they look at Buddhism. But he should also be prepared to listen to you and to hear what you have to say, and very often, as I indicated before, in the case of certain more traditional groups, or groups that regard themselves as more traditional, they don't seem to feel that anyone in the FWBO has got anything to teach them. So the avenues of communication are closed. There's no point in your going along and just hearing what he has to say if he's not willing to hear what you have to say.

As regards organizational contact: there doesn't really seem to be much point in it. Official contact between an FWBO Centre and some other Buddhist group - there doesn't seem to be any point, it doesn't seem to serve any purpose. Except to some extent the pooling of information. This does happen to some extent between the LBC and the Buddhist Society, especially when Subhuti was down there and Burt Taylor was the Secretary of the Buddhist Society. It happens less now because Burt Taylor has left and his successor is not so well-disposed towards the FWBO. But, yes, you can have a working relationship where the Secretary of the FWBO is able to ring up the Secretary of the Buddhist Society about a matter of common interest and vice versa.

Steve Francis: How do you feel about situations where you come across another group which is putting forward a piece of information which they claim to have come from the Buddha which is quite definitely erroneous? How do you deal with that kind of situation? I'm thinking of Rajneesh in particular. [13] They do seem to pick up bits of Buddhism which are quite definitely, you know, off-beam.

S: First of all, one has to make the point that people of this sort are very difficult to deal with - because Rajneesh is their authority. Well, he is the Buddha, according to them. So whatever he says must be right; what Buddha Rajneesh says cannot differ from what Buddha Sakyamuni said. So supposing you point to the scriptures, they will say that the scriptures have got it wrong, because the monks handing down the teaching over hundreds of years must have misunderstood the Buddha. Bhagawan Rajneesh will put them right! Do you see what I mean? One came across this with the Theosophists. For instance, when I was in India, I'd quite a lot of contact with Theosophists. On the whole they were very well disposed towards Buddhism and towards me, and I often spoke under the auspices of the Theosophical Society.

But sometimes we got into difficulties, because someone would say, 'Well, in "The Secret Doctrine" on such-and-such page, Madame Blavatsky says that such-and-such is the teaching of Buddhism. Is this so? What have you to say about this? So I would say, 'No, Buddhism doesn't say that; Buddhism says something quite different.' And then they would turn round and say, 'Ah! That's the exoteric teaching! Madame Blavatsky has given the esoteric interpretation of Buddhism.'

So, even when it was clear that Madame Blavatsky had not understood or had got it wrong - and after all the poor old soul was writing a hundred years ago and more, when not much was known about Buddhism - whenever there's a discrepancy or she's clearly made a mistake, the Theosophists said, 'Ah! That's the esoteric teaching! And you can't do anything about it.'

So don't underestimate the difficulties of this sort of situation. Don't think that people are open to sweet reason and light. Oh no - they've got a vested emotional interest here. But try if you please! Because there may be some people a little open to correction. If something has appeared in print, you can write and contradict it, giving your reasons. But if you're present at a meeting and someone makes a statement which you disagree with or which you know misrepresents Buddhist teaching, you can ask a leading question. If he says that the Buddha said so-and-so. Well, 'Could you please tell me where, in which Sutra?' So if he says, 'Oh I can't remember off-hand,' you can say, 'Well, I'm a Buddhist; I've studied the Buddhist scriptures, and as far as I understand Buddhism, it's completely different from what you've been saying.' Express yourself a bit modestly and mildly, don't rush into the breach, as it were! But at least make the point that not everyone would see eye-to-eye with that interpretation. And, depending on the situation, you may be able to follow that up or not. You may find that someone comes and asks you to pursue the matter afterwards. But some people aren't easy to deal with.

[14]

Dave Rice: Bhante, in the case of the Bhagwan Rajneesh people, you're not going to be able to change the view of the devotee who sees him as Enlightened. So it reminded me of what Bob was saying last night that the Buddha isn't in fact infallible - you can point out cases where he isn't. Well, you could point that out; that being an Enlightened being doesn't mean that you infallible .

S: But there's a distinction that Bob didn't make, which was that the Enlightened mind is not infallible with regard to mundane things; he is infallible with regard to the Path to Enlightenment. This is what the Pali texts say at least. The Buddha did not claim the kind of all knowledge that the founder of Jainism is said to have claimed; he repudiated that sort of all-knowledge. But he did have a complete realization of Enlightenment. One should be very careful not to give the impression that the Buddha is not infallible, meaning thereby that there is some defect in his Enlightenment itself. Do you see what I mean?

Dave Rice: I was thinking that perhaps you could suggest that an Enlightened being isn't infallible to the Rajneeshis, because I think they do have this kind of viewpoint: that no matter what the guy says, it's got to be the truth. Perhaps they never thought he could never make quite a simple, mundane mistake.

S: I don't think he makes mundane simple mistakes,- more colossal errors! (Great laughter) And it's not very easy to explode those. As I said, some people have got a vested emotional



interest; they want to believe that he's Enlightened. And probably nothing you can say will shake that. But it could be that there are sort of 'semi-followers' around, people who are just enquiring, and it may be that some point that you raise they find of interest or significance.

But if you feel like exploring a little or flexing your muscles as a newly-ordained Order Member, well, fair enough. I think you'll soon get tired of it. I got tired of it years ago. It's so fruitless, very often, talking to people like this. But if they're people who are still searching and haven't yet made up their minds, you could probably have a very interesting contact and communication. But if they're people who've really made up their - well, I won't say 'minds'; they almost don't have minds to make up - but they've made up their emotions, let us say ...

Alan Angel: If someone was telling me about this Enlightened being somewhere in the Himalayas or wherever and seems to be trying to convince me of that, then all I would do would be to ask them why they standing here talking to me about it. Why aren't they out there with their guru?

S: If someone said that there is an Enlightened being out in the Himalayas, you can't say, 'Well, no there isn't.' Because strictly speaking you don't know; there might be. But when [15] they start reproducing sayings of this allegedly Enlightened being, then you can say, 'This doesn't agree with what another Enlightened being - a being generally agreed to be Enlightened, namely the Buddha - is regarded as having said. So I'll follow my teacher, you'll have to follow yours.'

Malcolm Webb: Bhante, is the Buddhist Society still the official representative of Buddhism in this country?

S: I don't think it ever has been. I think in the past it has tried sometimes to pass itself off as such. But I don't think it ever has been the official representative of Buddhism in England. I've been giving them a few little raps on the knuckles over the past three or four years over this sort of matter. I think they've got the message. They disclaim that they regard themselves as official representatives of Buddhism; we've got it in black and white!

Malcolm Webb: Is it important for the FWBO to get official recognition? I'm thinking of government bodies or civil authorities which might seek opinions from religious bodies ...

S: I think we should make ourselves acceptable in this way. They're not going to do it very willingly, but we can have a sort of nuisance value. For instance, there was the Commission sitting on the reform of the criminal law. People were invited to send in contributions and I sent in an unsolicited contribution. I sent in a copy of 'Buddhism and Blasphemy' because they were considering changing the blasphemy law. And then they in return sent me a copy of their interim report and asked for further comments on their proposals. I'm not sure if this is in my personal capacity or as representative of the FWBO. So here we've been invited to give our opinion, to express the Buddhist point of view. So certainly we should function in this way. And if we put our point of view across often enough and forcibly enough, we shall gradually come to have a sort of nuisance value, and they will come to realize that they have to consult us in certain matters and certain areas. They will probably try to ignore us as much as they can but we will have to see that they can't do that.

Mark Bowden: Are there not also cases where it may be useful for Order Members to be

regarded as Ministers of Religion in the official sense? For instance, in visiting prisons?

S: That's true.

Bob Jones: Also, as far as being official representatives of Buddhism goes, could we not lobby the media so that when they want a Buddhist representative ...

S: Certainly. For instance, if there's some programme on [16] the media which gives a picture of Buddhism which is completely misleading according to us, then we should write vigorous letters of protest and demand time to put the record straight. Or we should say that this is Eastern Buddhism or this is corrupt Buddhism, this is not anything to do with the Buddha's real teachings. And demand an opportunity to correct the wrong impression that has been created. You have to be careful what sort of language you use but nonetheless we should write in and we should protest when necessary. You may find that the media is sometimes a bit more responsive than you think. You mustn't assume that they're not going to take any notice. You must make the effort.

And another thing you can do is write letters to the Press. If there are items of concern to Buddhists, write a letter to the Press giving the Buddhist point of view. This is all a little publicity anyway. I think we should do a lot more of this sort of thing. But don't be a fool rushing in where angels fear to tread. Check your facts; make quite sure you've got it right, that you're not laying yourself open to some crushing rejoinder. Show your letter to others who may be more experienced than you are. Be very careful what you write; don't make a fool of yourself - that's quite easy to do.

Alan Angel: How would you suggest that we signed that letter: as a minister of religion? Or just 'a Buddhist'? Or as an Upasaka?

S: You can put your signature - either the lay signature or the Buddhist signature, whichever you think appropriate - and in brackets you can put 'Western Buddhist Order' if you just want to make clear your membership of a religious order. Or if you're writing officially from a Centre, you can put 'Chairman, FWBO Such-and-such' or 'Secretary, FWBO', depending on the nature of the communication. There are some situations where individual letters from people in their personal capacity are more appropriate and others where an official letter from an office-bearer in the FWBO is more appropriate. Or perhaps a letter signed by a number of people. It depends on the issue raised.

Bob Jones: When I used the term 'lobby' I was thinking more that ... everybody in Britain associates Buddhism with Christmas Humphreys, so one imagines that, say, a radio producer that wants to wheel out a Buddhist just rings up Christmas Humphreys. And presumably we need to work on those sort of people so that when they want a Buddhist they wheel out a ...

S: Yes, it would be good if some of these people were made to realize that there are others in the Buddhist world besides Christmas Humphreys. And some of them are beginning to realize that. Unfortunately, he's sometimes replaced by people who [17] are even worse. There's Anne Bancroft, who's an old friend of ours - she's a dear old thing, Anne is, but she hasn't got a clue where Buddhism is concerned.

Malcolm Webb: Isn't there a minister, the Reverend Jack Austin - he seems to be...

S: He's now a Shin Buddhist. He used to be very prominent at interfaith gatherings and he's very strong on Buddhism and the family and all that sort of thing. Poor old Jack!  
He's another good old friend of ours - well, he's an old friend of mine - I've known him since the early 'fifties. But ... (meaningful silence followed by laughter from all) ... I don't really know what to say.

Subhuti: It's really he and Christmas Humphreys and Anne Bancroft who dominate those circles.

S: Yes, I think more people must write in protesting against what they say, where what they say is not really in accordance with Buddhism. And even questioning why they had been invited. Maybe it's a bit late now because when you've been invited a hundred times over twenty or thirty years, well, you're regarded as reliable. If you say it, it must be Buddhism.

One of the things that has struck me over the years is how important it is to get in first. The Buddhist Society was here first, years before us. So they do have an established position and for a lot of people in Britain they represent Buddhism; even if not officially, certainly unofficially. Because they got in first. And once someone has got in first, it's very difficult to question the idea that they really do represent what they purport to represent. So therefore I think it's very important that we get in first wherever we can in different situations, in different areas. We did get in first in New Zealand for instance, but we didn't develop there rapidly enough to preclude the development of all sorts of little tiny sectarian groups, which is a pity. But we should get in first wherever we can, whether it's a city or a country. This saves quite a lot of trouble and complications. There are certain fields where we've got in first. We got in first with Buddhist co-ops. Now if anyone wants to know about Buddhist co-ops, well, they turn to the FWBO. We'll be regarded in due course as the authority on Buddhist co-ops, even if other groups start up co-ops. Probably the people we've established contact with will still be having recourse to us when it's a question of finding out about Buddhist co-ops - because we got in first. Same with communities.

Gerald Burns: Do you also think that we ought to be looking for areas where we can get in first, where there aren't people already?

[18]

S: I think if one has a choice between getting into, say, a city where there is no Buddhist group at all and never has been, and getting in where there are already one or two groups, it's better to choose the first, other factors being equal.

Gerald Burns: Sometimes there's the idea that the ground has been prepared in a way by other groups but that doesn't seem to be the case.

S: No, it doesn't seem to be the case. One wouldn't call it preparation, no. (Laughter)

Peter Shann: As regards other groups and other teachers, people quite often say to me that so-and-so is obviously a Bodhisattva or obviously Enlightened - this is someone who's come to the West to teach. And they'll be quite involved with the Friends apart from that. So I was going to ask you as a matter of interest, are there any Bodhisattvas working as teachers in the West in your view?

S: Oh dear. Bodhisattvas are very rare, anywhere in the world. I wouldn't like to commit myself to any outright statement. I think one can say, more generally, that of the various people, the various teachers who come to the West, they seem on the whole to be of a certain type, most of them. Most of them seem to be people who are quite extrovert and who are very keen on proselytising. And, more often than not one finds that those who are perhaps more genuine teachers don't have that sort of ambition, don't get around in that sort of way. There are a few exceptions, but I think that probably one can say that if an Eastern teacher comes West, there's something suspect about him already, going by my existing knowledge of people. Again, not that there might not be exceptions, but one might ask, well, who are those exceptions? Again, it isn't very easy to name names but I would say that if, for instance, one takes the case of the Dalai Lama. I won't say that he's a Bodhisattva. But from all the contact that I had with him, I believe he's a completely different sort of person. He really has studied Buddhism, he knows about Tibetan Buddhism, he's certainly well-meaning and he's certainly sincere. So if one was to want to go along and listen to him, I see no objection at all. He certainly has something good to say, even though he may not be able to put it across very effectively. But as an extension of one's Buddhist experience by all means go along and listen to the Dalai Lama.

But when one finds Tibetan lamas giving courses at the end of which they going to give high Tantric initiations to all and sundry, one can't help really doubting their credentials.

If someone seriously believes such-and-such is a Bodhisattva or is Enlightened, well, that's not really something to be argued about. You can just shrug your shoulders and say, 'Maybe.' I shouldn't get into an argument about it.

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There are a few people who come quietly to the West and there's not much publicity about them; they just gather a few disciples and they are completely genuine. But you probably won't hear about them. They don't operate in that sort of way. One who does have a very good reputation is Kalu Rimpoche, who's a very old man, well over seventy. He's not an incarnate lama; he's a Kargyupa. Usually just teaches meditation to a few people. So from all I've gathered he's a very genuine sort of person. But those who come under a great hullabaloo and, you know, 'His Holiness This' and 'His Eminence That' and 'The Great Tantric Whatnot', well, one can't take such people seriously. I just refuse to any longer. I think at my age I can be allowed to know and to speak my own mind on such matters. For twenty, thirty years I just accepted what I was told in good faith. And I think that isn't a bad attitude to have to begin with. But gradually my eyes were opened. And I've met in Kalimpong allegedly great incarnate lamas, but I knew just by taking one look at them they not great lamas, they're just crooks. They're sometimes just very good businessmen; they good communicators in the social sort of sense. And of course they've got the official position, just like medieval bishops, but with no more spirituality than those medieval bishops. But they're good administrators, good talkers, good personalities, and all the rest, but when it comes to Dharma and the spiritual life, they're really nowhere. A Mitra is probably in a better position than many of them. So how can one fly in the face of one's own knowledge and observation?

I was reading something about Christianity the other day, and apparently, after Pope Pius X, all Popes were regarded as 'honorary saints'. So a lot of these people are 'honorary Bodhisattvas'. But we don't want to say anything against them, do anything against them, but we cannot be expected to go along with that sort of racket, to subscribe to it, and just be

dragged by their chariot wheels. This we can't agree to. And so I'm afraid the FWBO will probably continue to have a reputation of being uncooperative and that sort of thing. Well, never mind. I think we shall probably outlast some of them.

Steve Francis: You have said in the past that Buddhism won't take off in England until the country has become pagan again. In view of the influence of Christianity there doesn't seem to be much chance of that. So how does one deal in a general sense with Christianity. Could it be converted as the Bon religion was? Or do we have to take a different approach, and if so, what approach would that be?

S: I think that in one way it's true to say that Britain won't become Buddhist until it's pagan first, but also it's probably true to say that it can't become pagan until it's [20] Buddhist first, if you see what I mean. There's a sort of circular relation between the two things, because after all the damage has been done. People aren't pagans, mainly due to the influence of Christianity; so you've got to undo the influence of Christianity. And it'll take Buddhism to do that. In that sense it's not possible to really be a pagan before you a Buddhist, at least to some extent.

Christianity as an institution - I really don't know what's going to happen to that. It does seem to be waning all the time; fewer and fewer clergymen are being ordained all the time; more and more churches are being closed down, churches sold off, hundreds every year. Oh yes, hundreds every year: redundant churches are a serious problem now for almost every church in Britain, certainly for the Church of England, for the Methodist Church, for the Baptist Church. They've got more churches than they need. But that doesn't mean that Christianity is on its last legs. There's been a quite surprising revival of fundamentalist Christianity and Charismatic Christianity, which is in a way the most difficult to deal with - it's the purely emotional irrational type of Christianity. That has undergone some revival; that is much stronger than it was a few years ago. And quite a number of revivalist sects have sprung up and have flourished quite remarkably. But the established Churches are still steadily declining. The fundamentalist revivalist people I don't think you can do very much with; they usually completely inaccessible to argument. There are certain Christian sects of American origin which are doing quite well in Britain. The Mormons are doing well; they only semi-Christian. Jehovah's Witnesses are doing very well. All these more extreme sects are doing well. That is perhaps significant.

I think the Church of England and the Catholics are becoming shaky. You can have quite good discussions with Church of England clergymen and Catholic priests; they to some extent quite open-minded, would probably go along with you in certain respects, but they'll continue to function as clergymen, as priests. You might infiltrate them a bit, in a friendly sort of way; that's not impossible. I did have a friend who was a landowner in the West Country somewhere and he had a church on his estates and he had the presentation of the living. And he used to say jokingly that he was going to present a Buddhist to that living one day. When he used to interview prospective candidates for that incumbency he used to make a point of asking if they knew anything about other religions, especially Buddhism, and if they didn't, he wouldn't appoint them! (Laughter) But there aren't many of those livings in private gift still around; there are a few. So if you have a wealthy friend who has vast landed estates and a church, he could probably present you to a living and you could preach Buddhism every Sunday morning! (Laughter) And lead a very comfortable life for the rest of your days! I don't know what the local Bishop would say about it - but he could probably be brought to [21]

regard it in the light of an interesting ecumenical experiment! (Laughter) So one must keep one's eyes open for all these sort of unusual opportunities.

It's not impossible. Because it happened with Bon in Tibet and it happened for a while with Hinduism in India and it happened with Confucianism in China and Shinto in Japan. Admittedly, Christianity is a much more highly developed religion, one must admit that, but it is perhaps a question of whether Christianity swallows Buddhism or what it thinks is Buddhism, or whether Buddhism swallows Christianity. I'm quite confident we can swallow Christianity - so let us see what happens .

Does that more or less round off this question of the FWBO and the traditional Buddhist movement and other religions and other groups? Are people reasonably clear about these things? Perhaps it would be a good idea to have something written sometime or other covering this field.

Alan Angel: Have you and Subhuti between you got quite a clear idea of the legal status of the Upasaka?

S: No, I don't think we've gone very much into this; it's still an obscure field. But we are gathering information on these sort of topics all the time. At present, of course, an Upasaka has no sort of legal status ...

Subhuti: It depends on the situation.

S: Ah, there are one or two exceptions. For instance, one Upasaka in New Zealand was registered for the performance of marriages. Not every Upasaka would agree that that was a good idea. But anyway that was possible and he did that. So a Buddhist marriage performed by him would be a legal marriage, whereas we can have in England a marriage blessing ceremony the law has no objection to that - but a man and woman undergoing that ceremony are not thereby legally married.

Subhuti: We could set that up because the Centres are registered as places of religious worship.

S: We could set that up if we chose to do so. It just depends to what extent we want to align ourselves with the establishment. I think this is something to be considered very carefully. For certain selected purposes it may be useful. But I think on the whole my personal feeling is that we should avoid it as much as possible.

Subhuti: One useful piece of information is that Members of the Order are exempt from jury service under British law. In fact, we not allowed to do jury service.

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Malcolm Webb: I tend to think that we should stop being intimidated by 'authorities' and 'the establishment'. As soon as you realize that they themselves aren't very much anyway, well, what's the point of being legally accepted? What does that mean, anyway?

S: One of the great points that Christmas Humphreys and the Buddhist Society have always made from the beginning is that they want Buddhism to be accepted in Britain. They seem to

see acceptance very much in terms of their being given, as Buddhists, a niche in the establishment, that there should be a niche in the establishment reserved for Buddhists. And they consider acceptance very much in those sort of terms.

Malcolm Webb: I feel it's very useful to know how to use the establishment to set up things. You can use it to set up co-ops and so on. Other than that it's useless.

Peter Shann: How do we stand as regards, for instance, if there was a war? Would it not be of use to us to be in a position where we were ...

S: Yes, people in holy orders are not liable to conscription. But we would have to establish that we were people in holy orders in that sort of sense. And we'd have to do it well before any war broke out, of course!

Subhuti: The trouble is that we tend to think there's a sort of official category to which we can be assigned. But for each area of law, the law will look at us in a different way. So we just have to work it out as each thing comes along. But no doubt there are already draft laws which can be brought into action if there is a war - I don't know how they'd regard us.

Alan Angel: I think one of the first things that would happen under a state of emergency is that pacifists would be rounded up! So it might not be to our advantage ...

S: ... to have them knowing who you are.

Alan Angel: Because that seems to be one of the advantages of the Order; it's not on paper.

S: It's not a legal entity. (Pause)

Anyway, no doubt there are quite a few more topics which could be pursued, but perhaps we'd better leave them for some other time.

End of Tape

Transcribed and Typed by Prajnananda

Seminar: Personal Responsibility.

Question and Answer session, Tuscany Preordination retreat, 29 October 1981.

Day 31, tape 31,

Bhante: You may remember that the other day we talked about health and a number of topics connected with health. This of course suggested, implied, that one has a responsibility for one's health. One has a responsibility for one's surroundings inasmuch as they effect one's health; in other words one has on that particular level or in that particular context a measure of personal responsibility. So this morning we're taking up for consideration the whole topic of personal responsibility in general. The importance of personal responsibility. The importance of a sense of personal responsibility. Connected with that there are various topics which have been suggested as needing to be covered. Such things as doing what one wants to

do as compared with, even opposed to, doing what needs to be done, because here too obviously the question of responsibility arises. Then again connected with that the question of 'being oneself' and 'being good', seen in inverted commas. And I see also further down on these notes, someone has made a suggestion that we should discuss work and responsibility, because clearly in the field of work, responsibility is highly relevant. So no doubt, ever since Vessantara put the notice up about personal responsibility, being the topic for discussion this morning you've been thinking about the subject, and no doubt some of you have got questions or things that you want clarified. But let's keep first of all to personal responsibility in general and try to clarify that, and then maybe moving to different specific areas. So who's puzzled by it? Who thinks it's completely obvious?

Dave Luce: I did have one thought about it. That often our idea while thinking in this area of individual responsibility is often limited by a very narrow view of the individual or of oneself. I know it would be a bit abstract to say one's self expands much beyond the idea normally that one has of oneself. But following Buddhist teachings it is actually quite realistic to see oneself as actually extending into other people, other situations, especially when one's working with the dharma. And if one has a very narrow, somewhat psychological and problematic view of oneself, one's individual needs and one's responsibility is in quite a small circle. Quite practically, actually, we could think of ourselves as being much bigger. I don't know if you have any thoughts that may clarify my opinion?

Bhante: Well this involves obviously the question of responsibility for others. There is of course, to begin with, personal responsibility in the sense of responsibility for oneself. Responsibility for one's, as we saw last time, physical health; responsibility for one's state of mind. Responsibility for one's work; the work that one has agreed to do. But also one might say, especially in the case of the order member, there's responsibility for other people. Even within the ordinary group situation sometimes you are responsible for other people. Especially say, if you're a parent, you're responsible for others because they aren't as yet able, if they're children, to be responsible for themselves. [2] So you have to think for them, you have to anticipate for them. Perhaps you have to plan for them, you have to be far sighted for them. They are in a measure dependent on you; sometimes almost totally dependent upon you. So you see something of that sort or something analogous to that sort of situation when you are say an order member. When your, for instance taking a class, say a meditation class, you are responsible for ensuring that that meditation class goes in the best possible way. And of course being responsible for that situation and for other people in it, and being responsible for yourself, are very closely interconnected. Because your responsibility for other people in that group would involve being responsible for yourself in such a way that you arrive for the meditation class, fresh, bright, positive, on the ball, and all the rest of it. So even though there is, yes, responsibility for others and responsibility for the wider situation, as well as responsibility for oneself, it does seem that they are interconnected. So one can even think, yes, as Dave says, in terms of an extension of oneself. Thinking of oneself even in wider or broader or more inclusive terms. It's not just a question of keeping one's nose tidy as they say.

Voice: Do you think that one can be responsible for others unless one is responsible for oneself?

Bhante: Well it does seem that responsibility for oneself does come first, in the sense that if you're not responsible for yourself, you can hardly be expected to be responsible for others.



It's as though one's feeling of responsibility towards others is an extension, an outgrowth, a development of one's responsibility for oneself. I mean it parallels the metta bhavana. If you can't really feel metta for your self, it's unlikely that you're going to feel genuine metta for other people. So in much the same way, if you're not responsible for yourself - if you don't look after yourself - you can hardly be expected to be responsible for, to look after other people. So to take again the example of the parent, supposing the parent looks after his child's health very carefully, but supposing he neglects his own, and if he neglects his own to a certain extent, maybe the child will be left fatherless. So is he in fact being really responsible even towards the child, even though in a sense he's looking after the child and caring for the child? His caring for the child would also involve caring for himself inasmuch as the child is dependent upon him. Though this is very much the attitude of the bodhisattva in the Mahayana Scriptures. It's as though all living have an investment in the bodhisattva. So it's the bodhisattva's responsibility to look after himself, otherwise all sentient beings are not going to get their money's worth! (laughter) If he doesn't look after himself, if he doesn't train himself, if he doesn't develop himself, all sentient beings are not going to be able to get very much out of him. He's not going to be able to help them very much. So he looks after himself because he considers, in a manner of speaking, that he belongs to other living beings, and he doesn't belong to himself. The Mahayana Sutras sometimes put the matter in that sort of hyperbolic manner just to emphasize the point. So especially if one is working in a situation with other people, if you're part of a centre team, or if your living in a community, or if your working with other people in a co-op, it is part of your responsibility towards others to be responsible as regards yourself. [3] Because if you don't keep yourself up to optimum standards, as it were, if you don't keep yourself positive, somebody else in the group, somebody else in the team, is going to have to make up for that. In other words, to do extra, if you are not in that respect, pulling your weight. So if you are not responsible with regard to yourself you are in effect being also irresponsible with regards to the particular team or community to which you belong, of which you are part. You are letting them down because your mental state will effect your degree of efficiency, will effect the whole situation.

Rudiger Jansen: I'm a bit confused at the moment by the use of words. I always understood responsibility in a way that everybody basically is responsible for themselves. That one can act without awareness of this but we have to bear the consequences anyway - maybe karmic consequences or whatever. But there seems to be responsibility in other ways.

Bhante: One can regard responsibility as something objective which already exists, or one can regard it as something which does not yet exist, and which has to be brought into existence. Do you see what I mean? But in either case the important point is you have to feel responsible. Even if you haven't the responsibility objectively speaking, that is no value at all, unless you feel that your responsible for yourself, or for others, or for the situation otherwise you won't act upon that responsibility. Also there is the question of in what sense one is objectively responsible. Whether in fact, really, responsibility in the ethical sense, is an objective category at all. Because you have to agree that you are responsible. It's no use somebody else coming along saying 'Well your responsible for that.' You might say "well, who says I'm responsible for that?" You have to agree to be responsible, you have to accept the responsibility. Especially when it is a question of, say, working with other people. As for instance, say, what work is divided, you agree; well, I'll be responsible for this, you'll be responsible for that. You accept that responsibility.

Kevala: Can you talk about specific and a general responsibility. Those things you were just

talking about sound like specific responsibilities for certain tasks, whereas actual responsibility, in the sense you were talking about earlier, responsibility for one's positive state to others, is more a sort of general. There are two types.

Bhante: Well responsibility for one's personal state, especially one's personal state of mind, is a specific responsibility. There's no such thing as a general responsibility really. There are only specific responsibilities, some of which are narrower and some of which are wider.

Bob Jones. What about a situation where you have a general responsibility as for instance, men's teams and community situations will have. So to some extent you're responsible for a final product which other people are involved in. How do you handle them acting responsibly because presumably, to some extent it's your responsibility to see that they act responsibly?

Bhante: Well that depends upon the situation [4] in general. For instance supposing it is a co-operative set-up. Since it's a co-operative set-up, morally speaking, ethically speaking, everyone has equal responsibility for the success of the project. But not every body may have the same skills so one might say that the person with specific skills has an extra responsibility within the area where those skills apply, and that maybe also the case with somebody who it is agreed should function as the manager or the foreman of the particular project or the particular venture or the particular team. His responsibility is specific in the sense that it's limited to that particular project, but it's general in the sense that, it is not that everything for which he is responsible is cut and dried in advance, because situations will arise which were not foreseen. And then his, as it were, general responsibility, comes into play. Do you see what I mean? Sometimes in ordinary work situations some people disclaim responsibility. "Oh I wasn't told that that had to be done!" - "No one said anything about that to me!" They deliberately limit themselves to the very letter of the law, as it were, because they've no interest in the project as a whole. But clearly within the sort of co-operative context, one can't take that sort of attitude. If some unforeseen development or emergency arises, well, one accepts that one is responsible for that. Do you see what I mean? So one can, in that sense, make a distinction between general responsibility and a specific responsibility, in a sense that your responsibility is not necessarily exhausted by specific - well specifications. Do you see what I mean? The unforeseen is likely to arise. So if you have the spirit of responsibility you'll be quite prepared to meet that. But if you're only concerned with fulfilling the letter of the law, and being responsible, or fulfilling your responsibilities, in a purely technical sense, then you won't rise to the occasion.

Bob Jones. The difficulty seems to come, and it's very difficult to discuss it theoretically, but if you are part of a team or, as it were, you might be leading a class, and the person who always makes the tea comes along and says 'my mental state is such and such and I don't think I can handle coming to the class!' You might be in a position where you've got to make the tea unless you make this other person fulfil their responsibility irrespective of their mental state. Well I know you can't judge it without the details of the situation, but those sort of situations seem to crop up quite a lot in any team situation.

S. Well I think where the team is a co-op, within the context of the FWBO and every thing that that implies, every member of the team should be prepared to accept responsibility for the success of the project as a whole, to the measure of his ability. Not that I only agree to do such and such and I'm not going to do any more than that. No, if emergencies arise, everybody should be prepared to do, as it were, a bit extra than they agreed to do. In a sense

they shouldn't when they originally agree limit themselves too much. Yes, there's a sort of rough and ready understanding. 'I'll do this and you'll do that' But it's not a hard and fast cast-iron thing, where 'I'm only going to do this and I'm not going to do any more than that.' That's the sort of situation you get in the outside working world, but one shouldn't get it inside the FWBO [5] So everybody should be prepared to take on, I won't say take on a bit more responsibility, but recognize that his responsibility like everybody else's, is coterminous with the whole project ultimately. I mean limited only by his actual capacities. Do you see what I mean? Now I'll go a bit further than that. Supposing it's found that, say, one particular person within the co-op team is, let us say, persistently slacking. All right, let's say for the sake of argument that other people, being very responsible, have on every occasion, done a bit more to make up for what that person is not doing. Then the question arises, how are you going to deal with that person? Obviously it's not good either for the team or for him that that sort of situation should be allowed to continue. All right, the best thing to do obviously, is that it's discussed in the open meeting of all members of that particular co-op or that particular project, and it's pointed out to that person, tactfully, but firmly, 'This is what's happening, and to the extent that you're not being fully responsible, you are not really fulfilling your obligations as a member of this co-op or this particular team.' You may need for one reason or another - obviously it's difficult to generalize, to talk with him outside. He may have particular problems or difficulties etc., etc. Some of which may be subjective, some of which may be objective, and so on. But having given him a certain amount of leeway, a certain amount of rope, whatever you consider objectively justifiable, if then he still doesn't change, then you may have to consider asking him to withdraw from the co-op. Because people may be willing to make up for his short comings for a while. But if it's going on for too long, other's may, human nature being a bit weak, start thinking 'well if he can get away with it why can't we?' Or they may start feeling a bit resentful, even though they actually do what is needed. So you need to sort out the situation without delay.

Alan Angel: In that situation you suggested that you'd first bring it up in a group meeting rather than those individuals feeling this would speak to that person ...

S. I'm assuming in this case that everybody is aware of the situation, is having to do a bit extra. Yes, if there's one or two people who are in that situation by all means let them take it up individually. Again, there's no hard and fast rule. But it seems to me quite simple and quite straight forward.

Steve Francis. The thing that seems to come out of that though is that people tend to go to the other extreme. Or, I don't know if you'd describe it as an extreme, maybe not, where you produce so much work for yourself. You're working twelve hours a day just to sort of keep on top of it; so that it actually goes to the other extreme where your really having to spend all your time just working - people will do that.

S. Well the answer is that everyone must be responsible. You must be responsible towards yourself. If you genuinely feel that, yes, that you're able to do it, do it! If you can't, you can't. And you should know your own capacities, your own capabilities, your own limitations. Also, bearing in mind your objective situation and its needs. Sometimes you may feel that it's objectively necessary that you should push yourself a bit more than you perhaps would like to do. But certainly it's irresponsible both towards oneself and the objective situation to work yourself to a standstill so that you have to take several months off to recover. Certainly [6] that wouldn't be a very responsible action. It also suggests that you have to know yourself,

have to know your own capacities, know how much you can do and sometimes it's difficult to know that in advance. You have to think carefully before taking on responsibilities, especially extra responsibilities.

Bob Jones. I suppose the point of my question Bhante then was to what, okay you may sometimes push yourself more than you wish to, but to what extent can you push other people more than...?

S. Actually you can't push other people because they won't allow themselves to be pushed. You can encourage them or inspire them. But I would say don't even try to push them. If they don't want to work, put it to them - well either they stay with you and work or, if they don't want to work, OK they can leave you; it's really as simple as that, but you should be careful not to put yourself into a situation where for one reason or another, they have become indispensable because of some particular skill, then they will almost sort of blackmail you perhaps because they know that they've got that skill and you haven't got that skill, or you need that skill in the team. You should be very careful of that situation, better just to do without them even. Or dispense with their services as quickly as possible because that's a quite impossible sort of situation. Whereas you can't really push someone who doesn't want to be pushed. I mean, there's a well known proverb in this connection. "Induce the equine quadruped to elements aquatic, expatriation it is said must still be automatic" (laughter) Or in the vernacular, "You can lead a horse to the water but you can't make him drink".

Malcolm: I have a question Bhante. Quite often it's come up in the team I work with people want to work part time. Three days a week, four days a week..

S: Yes.

: ... That's quite a usual thing that they want to do. It's more difficult to delegate responsibility to somebody that wants to work part time. And it happens that full-timers would have to take responsibility. How far do you think it is the responsibility of those working full-time to stretch themselves so that the people who want to follow up the... I'll give you an example.

S: I know the sort of situation that you mean, because I studied it in some other particular context. But what I would say in this connection is this. That you must be very careful that you don't take on people who want just to work part-time purely for the sake of their own convenience, without a feeling of responsibility towards the work team or project as a whole. You have therefore to be quite careful in taking on part-time workers. Because very often it happens that all they want is just a convenient amount of work per week and a certain amount of money, but no responsibility for the project for which they are working. They seem to, in some cases at least, to take it for granted that the responsibility for running the show rests with the full-time people. So in a way there's a slight element of exploitation. Now it may be that, depending upon the kind of work, that you have got room for a few part-timers, and it's possible, because of the nature of the work, for part-timers to take a bit of responsibility, or to have responsibility delegated to them. But if that is not possible, and in some working situations it won't be possible, then I think you have to seriously consider whether you're going to have part-time workers at all.

[7]

Malcolm Webb: I can see the possibility of taking on labour, any team could actually turn

down any very cheap labour. That's what it looks like sometimes. But a person might end up just pushing a broom, and that will allow the full timers to take on more skilled work, more enjoyable work. And then you've got a sort of grading of work within the situation. Like a part-timer comes along 'OK, like we could use the labour no doubt but, you just have to do things like push brooms; I can't train part-timers.'

S: You see there is a difference; when the part-time worker is doing inessential work, and when he or she is doing essential work. Do you see what I mean?

Malcolm Webb: Could you clarify that?

S: Well you gave the example of pushing a broom. Well if a broom isn't pushed one particular day, well it doesn't really matter all that much, it can be pushed the next day. So you don't need a high degree of reliability in the person pushing the broom. But if it's a different kind of work, which has to be done on a particular day, because you've got your plans and schedules and so on, then that part-time worker needs to be absolutely reliable. Do you see what I mean? And it's not only a question of the part-time work or the part-time worker but also the kind of work. Maybe you can take on more easily, part time workers in those areas which are a bit peripheral. Which may, yes, release somebody, but if the part-timer doesn't turn up, well the whole project isn't going to collapse. But if there is something which is so important that if it isn't done at the particular place, at a particular time, in a particular way, then it's going to affect the whole project seriously. It's very doubtful whether you should rely on a part-timer for that sort of work. Unless of course, there are always exceptions, you know that particular person very well, for one reason or another. So these other factors also have to be taken into consideration. But one thing I'm quite clear about, you cannot make people responsible, you can't make them work. Sometimes people have said to me in the past, "Well Bhante you should make them do it". But I've no intention of trying to make anybody do anything. If they don't want to do it let them not do it. Their services can be dispensed with. One will either have to do extra oneself or that particular thing will just not have to be done. But it's a very sort of ungrateful situation to be in, to be trying to get unwilling workers to work. And within the context of the FWBO there should be no question of making unwilling people work. You take it that, if they're in and working, well they are working willingly.

Malcolm: An old sea-captain once said "One volunteer is better than twelve pressed men."

S: We'll take it you're all volunteers! (laughter)

Mike S: Coming back to your answer to Bob's question originally you discussed it in terms of someone who is not pulling their weight. In a sense its quite clear they're not pulling their weight up to their abilities. In my experience in business it's unfortunately not clear how much is them objectively not pulling their weight, and how much their ability, their capacity, is just a lot lower than other peoples, because of psychological confusion, lack of integration, who knows what? So it's as if one is trying to figure out, to a certain extent, how much are they slacking and how much they are screwed up? And it becomes [8] quite difficult.

S: Well I think when someone has worked in a co-op for a certain length of time you know whether he can work or not. Whether he's slacking or whether he's screwed up. From the co-ops point of view it doesn't matter very much because he's equally ineffective. So yes, he has to leave the co-op and, no doubt if he remains within the context of the Friends, he needs

individual contact to help him get over those things. Whether it's the problem of slacking or the problem of being screwed up. But in either case if it is found after a certain length of time, whatever is wrong with him prevents him from working as a member of a team, you have to dispense with his services for the time being at least.

Malcolm: One shouldn't feel responsible for that person once he's left?

S: Well yes, one is responsible for the person after he's left, within a wider, different context. Supposing he's a Mitra, you're still responsible for him as a mitra; even though you may not be responsible for him as a member of the work team. So you remain in contact with him, you help him, if you can, get over those difficulties due to which he had to leave the co-op. You help him if possible to come back into the co-op.

Clive P: Isn't the work situation one where people get through their difficulties? If you just dismiss people quite easily, then isn't it, in a way, it is defeating one of the objects of the co-op?

S: The main object of the co-op, well, one of the main objects, is to function. So if individual people working in the co-op are preventing it from functioning, well then they must be asked to leave. But if other members of the co-op, other members of the team are happy to take on a person who is not up to general standard, or level and happily accept the fact that he's not going to contribute so much as others, and help him to come up to the general level, that's quite in order. But they must do it consciously and happily. They must positively accept that responsibility; not just put up with him. There's few things in a way more irritating, more frustrating than working with people whose heart is really not in what they are doing or who are not really competent or are not effective for one reason or another. You're much better off with a smaller, more effective team; I think experience has shown that. If you do take in anybody who is less than fully effective, it must be really doing it consciously, happily accepting the situation in order to give that person an extra chance, but not feeling that you've been forced into it.

Malcolm W: With whom in a working situation does the ultimate decision lie? Is it with an order member? I'm not sure if its everyone's responsibility or if not it should be worked out happily between everybody.

S: I think it's quite difficult to generalize, it depends - decision about what? Because it maybe a quite technical point of say, building and construction, about which no order member present has any information. So clearly that would have to be left to other people. But the overall direction throughout... the, as it were, spiritual point of view, that has to be left with the order members involved. Ideally there should be a sufficient number of order members in any particular team to give, as it were, spiritual weight and spiritual direction to everything that is being done

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Malcolm: Do you not think it's good to have a team working without an order member?

S: I think that should be avoided as much as possible. It's quite undesirable for obvious reasons.

Alan A: We talked quite a lot about responsibility in work. I remember it came down to me that you can't expect someone to be responsible unless they have the power to go with it, unless they have the power to be responsible, unless you give them the space to, which is quite often contradictory in the situation. But particularly in terms of the order having the overall responsibility, but then at the same time expecting say, Mitras and Friends to come up with quite a large degree of responsibility. In the knowledge that they are not a member of the co-op, they haven't actually got a vote, which is something I've come up against.

S: Well, responsibility is, as it were, coterminous with commitment; to the extent that your committed to the situation as an extension of your general spiritual commitment, to that extent you'll feel responsibility. And it's not possible for someone who is not committed fully to the situation to feel the same kind of responsibility for it. So in that sense there's an ultimate responsibility with the order members concerned. Which doesn't mean that those who are not order members are not fully responsible for those particular areas for which they agreed to be responsible and for which they are in fact, they are fully competent. For instance, supposing a project failed, supposing one was left with a debt? Well the order members concerned might feel or should feel, so committed to that situation, so responsible, that they would work to pay off that debt. Whereas others less committed will just shrug their shoulders and say 'well its just too bad', wash their hands of it and go and do something else. Whereas the order members could not take up that attitude, they will think, 'well what will perhaps other people think of us if we just leave the situation like this and don't pay whatever we have to pay?' They will be aware of the wider interests of the movement, of the order, and they'll feel responsible for that. They have, as it were, a residual responsibility in the way that others don't. But why is it, do you think, people are reluctant to exercise responsibility sometimes, because sometimes one does find this? Even sometimes reluctant to exercise or fulfil a responsibility which they have in fact taken on. Why are people sometimes less responsible than they can reasonably be expected to be?

Malcolm: I think it's because of a lack of positive experience in the... That the person never really experienced a very positive point of view. He doesn't see it as a positive thing to be responsible for a particular item. He'd sooner be doing something of a more personal interest that is an...

Alan A: They don't see it as their own creation and obviously it is their own. That's how I see it; you don't feel as if it's part of you.

S: Yes. Let me give you a very simple concrete example then maybe you can get your teeth into that. Supposing your an order member, or even a mitra. You walk into the centre one evening and you see there's a lot of, lets say ash on the floor. All right if your responsible what would you do when you saw that?

Voice: I'd freeze!

[10]

S: But can you guarantee that every single order member walking into the centre, or mitra, seeing that would actually take that action? Can you honestly be sure of that? What is it that prevents them taking that action in those cases where they do not take that action?

Voice: It's somebody else's responsibility.

S: Ah yes, it's somebody else's responsibility! But why do we so easily think in terms of "it's somebody else's responsibility" rather than that it is our responsibility?

Voice: It seems to be infantile.

Vajrananda: It's maybe a compartmentalization of responsibilities, you are somehow 'separate'.

Kevala: But that's a rationalization for something else.

S: Right, well let's take this particular instance of the centre well, there's ash on the carpet, and you don't have enough feeling for your centre just to be offended, so to speak, that ash is there, and to feel that that really must be removed instantly. Do you see what I mean? So what does that suggest, that you don't have that sort of feeling?

Voice: That your commitment is somewhat lacking if you don't have an overall responsibility.

Voice: That you don't want to be unpopular with the person who dropped it.

S: Well let's assume for the sake of argument, that there's nobody else around. You're not going to make yourself unpopular with anybody else by doing his job.

Vajrananda: You don't love your centre.

S. You don't love your centre, yes. It doesn't matter, you don't have any feeling for your centre. This is what it really boils down to. So it's as though you have a natural feeling of responsibility with a positive feeling towards something, whether it's a centre, or what situation is present. Otherwise you see that something needs to be done, you have no feeling for the place. Your first thought is to find, will if you have any thoughts at all, to find the chap whose responsible or you dismiss it, 'that's not my responsibility, it's his responsibility.' And also there's no fellow feeling for the person perhaps who's responsibility it is. Who knows, he might have been taken sick! He might be away or not come down that way for some purely objective reason. But it's as though you don't care - it's his responsibility. So we find a lot of this I'm afraid, in the world at large, even traces of it within the FWBO.

Vajrananda: It's actually quite remarkable, it's quite enjoyable to be that way engaged.

S: Yes.

(end of side one)

Malcolm Webb: ... particular project you have to remain concentrated on that project. You can't take on a whole load of problems. And very often I'll use the phrase - maybe to rationalize too - that 'it's not my problem'. You know you can't say 'this bit of wall is falling down' or something like that - it's not my problem - it's the customer's problem. You have to draw the line somewhere.

S: Well yes indeed you do, but in the instance that I gave you have to draw the line outside the centre, not inside the centre. (laughter)



Malcolm: But the attitude does go on outside but it gets brought into the centre.

S: I'm not suggesting that anyone should even feel responsible for the whole world - leave that to the Bodhisattvas. But certainly [11] you're responsible for your own centre; you're responsible for your own co-op etc. But I'm just trying to probe why it is that people don't always feel responsible in that very limited situation even, for which they can reasonably be expected to feel responsible. And yes, as Pete said, it is to a great extent due to lack of positive feeling towards in this case - the instance I mentioned - your own centre. You know how some men are with their cars. They don't even like a speck of dust to fall on their cars. I mean, they're very responsible towards their cars; why? Because they sort of identify with them, so we're told. At least there's a feeling towards them. Though it may not be a completely healthy one. But towards your own centre and your own community you should have a completely healthy, positive feeling. And that leads you to feel a responsible attitude towards the centre or whatever.

Gerald B: We tend to think of responsibility sometimes as an intellectual thing. Are you suggesting that perhaps it might be more useful to think of it as emotional?

S: Well it's just in the same way as the parent feels responsible for the child. He's not argued into it, he hasn't talked himself into it, he just feels responsible. It's a natural and spontaneous thing. I mean, for whatever reason. So in the same way you come along to the centre and you're there first and you see ash on the carpet or a muddy footmark; well it should be instinctive and natural just to go and happily get the dust pan, brush, broom - clear it up! Shouldn't think twice about it. I'm just trying to probe why it is that people don't always do this. Yes, it does seem to be due largely to a lack of positive feeling towards, in this case, the centre.

Malcolm: Can I ask you about the mitra ceremony? In mitra ceremonies recently, things have been brought up or pointed out, some of the responsibilities or some of the things a mitra should feel, or perhaps, to put it more skilfully, would feel naturally, and this gets brought out. I can remember one person who gets upset by it. But do you think that's a good idea that...?

S: By what? Upset by what?

Malcolm: Well the fact that a mitra has to do this and that and the other. It seems like...

S: Well then if someone's not happy to be a mitra, fair enough! We're not forcing anyone to be a mitra. People can stay just friends if they like, come along, take advantage of whatever is going on, with no responsibilities at all. If that's the deal you want, fair enough - you remain a friend. But if you want to signalize the fact that you consider that you belong, you want to be more steadily involved, well, fair enough. You become a mitra and as part of that particular deal, yes, and as an expression of the fact that you identify yourself to some extent you are ready to help out in any sort of simple way that you can. I think maybe in the case of some people it's just a lack of clarity of thinking. As if to say Mitra is a sort of status; that you can be a Mitra without fulfilling the corresponding responsibilities. It's just a sort of stripe that you get. Some people even think of ordination in this sort of way. But no, we don't insist that anybody who doesn't wish to fulfil any responsibilities should do so. But they remain as a Friend. They can't have it both ways.

[12]

Malcolm Webb: Do you think it would be a good idea to speak about these responsibilities at classes every now and then? Well some people don't seem to have any financial responsibilities.

S: Well I think when anybody is thinking of becoming a mitra or asking to be a mitra these things should be gone into quite thoroughly, with him or with her, by the order members in contact with that person, by the Mitra Convenor. I mean, I always make it clear when I speak about these matters that being a mitra means first of all that you no longer shopping around amongst different groups, different spiritual movements. You decided, well you definitely want to be involved with the FWBO And your going to therefore attend regularly and practice regularly. Secondly, that you want to have a closer contact with order members. And thirdly, that you will help out in any practical way that you can including financial. This indicates a deeper level of involvement, than is the case with the case with the friend with a capital 'F'. He can come and go as he pleases. He might come regularly for a few months and then stop coming for a few months. He might at the same time be going to Rajneesh, or going to a Zen group. I've nothing to say against that, he's just a friend. But the mitra has signalized his wish for a deeper involvement with the FWBO He feels he begins to identify with the FWBO He feels he wants to belong to that particular movement. So as a natural expression of that, he comes regularly, doesn't go to other groups. Associates as closely as he can with order members and helps out in any practical way that he can. Was everybody clear about this at the time that they became mitras, or was it not made sufficiently clear?

Voice: It wasn't.

S: I'm surprised I must say.

Mike S: The general impression I got was that the mitra is a serious Friend which has these implications, but they aren't drawn out.

S: They should in fact be drawn out and spelled out, otherwise misunderstandings can arise. As order members might, say, ask a mitra to do something and he might just express unwillingness. Or, "why should he ask me to do it?" Do you see what I mean? That if he hasn't had this spelled out, that this is in fact what being a mitra involves. Otherwise there's no difference between a mitra and a Friend.

Dave R: Do you think there should be any prompting to join a community at all, in that way?

S: What do you mean by 'prompting'?

Dave R: Well suggestion that they...

S: What do you mean by 'suggestion'? I mean you don't mean press ganging! (laughter)

Dave R: Obviously not.

S: A gentle hint?

Dave R: Yes, that kind of thing.

S: Well certainly, I mean people who come along newly even Friends, get to know there are such things as communities and that it is possible to join. But very often they might know that you live in a community. But the idea that they could join a community might not occur to them. They are sometimes very backward or even very shy. So yes, it is quite in order after a while to put it to someone that, well maybe you would like to consider the possibility of living in a [13] community sometime. You sow a little seed. You don't try to sort of draft them in after they've been coming along for about six months. But yes, make it clear that that possibility is open to them. If they want to take advantage of it and if there is a vacancy and if that community is ready to accept them. Maybe to begin with one should do no more than indicate possibilities. and leave it to the person concerned to think about it for a while.

Vessantara: What happens after a while, do you then encourage them further?

S: If you genuinely feel that that would be a positive step for them to take, well yes, you can gently encourage or even discuss with them any difficulties or reservations that they may have.

Simon M: Ratnaguna was talking about having a responsibility to talk to a mitra, to see that mitra regularly, after a year. So perhaps in a year that person could ask for ordination to become an order member. How far does that responsibility go? How far would you.

S: Well again it's a question of feeling also. That if you as an order member functioning in a centre feel for the people who are coming along you'll try to do the best you can for them. You'll spend as much time with them, you'll try to get to know them, understand them, help them. And that may involve suggesting they join a community: it may involve suggesting they don't join a community. There's no hard and fast pattern. But it would be very surprising if you as an order member functioning at or in, a centre, did not take that sort of interest in mitras or didn't have that sort of feeling. If you don't have feeling for them, mitras and friends who come along, well your better off meditating in the Himalayas or somewhere-or doing accounts! (laughter). Maybe this point needs underlining. If you're going to work with people, which is what actually functioning at a centre involves, you've got to like people. You've got to have a positive feeling for them. You've got to actually feel that you want to help them. Not in a sort of do-gooding kind of way but a genuine human fellow feeling. So if you've got that feeling for people, that'll carry you through, even if you don't know all the technicalities of the Abhidharma, or even if you are a bit deficient in other respects. But that feeling for people is the main thing that you need. I think, presuming that you are order members to begin with, when you're functioning in a centre. Just feeling for people - sympathy.

Malcolm: Do you think there's an order of responsibility, like suppose you've got to be responsible to order members, and to the community, and them to the work, and them to a co-op?

S: In a way yes. But you haven't started far enough up. First of all there's a responsibility to the Buddha. There's a responsibility to the Dharma. There's a responsibility to the Sangha, then there's responsibility to me - I mean don't forget me! (laughter) And then there's responsibility, well as you mentioned, right down to your dog or your cat or what ever. Or the worms in the garden.

Malcolm: Do you think one still has a responsibility to one's parents?

S: Oh yes indeed I do, yes.

Malcolm: Especially if they're old and one dies. Do you think it's quite a responsible thing to go and live with one, even though it's detrimental to your own practice?

S: Well you have to weigh everything. You have to weigh one [14] responsibility against another, and what good you can do to one sentient being as compared to the good you can do towards another sentient being. But no, certainly one doesn't need to leave one's parents or relations out of one's considerations. I mean, help them as much as they'll permit you. Sometimes they're not very anxious to be helped.

Voice: We haven't yet got to the areas of 'being yourself', versus 'being good'. It seems to me.

S: Please say whatever you have to say. I don't particularly have any thoughts in this area, I must admit. I'm sure you all understand what is meant by 'being good' in inverted commas. We just want you to be good without any inverted commas! Some people in the effort to avoid 'being good' in inverted commas, are deliberately 'naughty' in inverted commas! (laughter) Which is even worse because it's much more troublesome sometimes to other people.

Voice: A case I came across sometime ago was that somebody was doing things for the wrong reason and then realized that this was going on and then they stopped. And then they said "well I won't do that because it'll be for the wrong reason" and they stopped doing it. Because they felt basically they were doing it for the wrong reasons.

S: Well we've had this sort of problem within the Friends since it started. So what I always said is take it for granted that whatever good thing you do, whether it's meditation, or whether it's helping around the centre, whatever it is, your motives are invariably tainted to some extent. Do you see what I mean? Don't consider that there's a possibility of your doing anything with a completely pure motive at this stage. That will hardly ever happen. So take it that your motives are very mixed, that they're impure as well as pure. But just carry on doing the meditation, working in the co-op or whatever, with the conviction that working in that way, meditating in that way, will help you to purify the motive with which you are doing these things. But you won't purify your motive in a vacuum as it were. It's not a question of cutting yourself off from all those things and purifying your motive and then going and doing them.

Voice: Perhaps the key word there is purification through the practice.

S: Yes, yes. And of course not only through the practice but through general awareness, mindfulness, possibly other practices as well, outside that particular situation.

Vessantara: It may not occasionally be the case though that somebody is operating in the situation in perhaps absolutely forced or wilfully, and they realize that they're doing that they find that their mindfulness isn't in that situation, isn't strong enough to overcome that motivation. Might it not then be a rational conclusion to move out of that situation for a period of time until your...

S: Well maybe that particular situation, we did mention, or I did mention that things like

meditation for instance. You could hardly give up meditation because you realized your motive for meditating was not really pure. But yes, it may be that you've landed yourself in a certain situation for a motive which is so unmixedly impure that you'd better just beat a hasty retreat. Sometimes that does happen, yes. As with marriage sometimes. (laughter) The question remaining in that situation you know trying to purify your motives are very rarely so.

[15]

Alan A: Being an order member, particularly in the context of public classes, it would seem, one gets, or order members do get projections of authority, all sorts of things projected on to them.

S: Indeed he will. Make up your minds for that. If you function within a class, centre, context, you are almost certain to be the recipient of various projections.

Alan A: What advice could you give with regards to being a good order member and being yourself, particularly in this sort of context?

S: Well you have to be genuinely a good order member. Not an order member keeping up appearances. But you must make a genuine effort all the time. But that's all you can do. But you shouldn't try to appear to be better than you actually are. That doesn't mean that you necessarily have to confess all your weaknesses to everybody who comes along to the centre. You can reserve those for order meetings. You'll probably have your weakness pointed out there anyway. (laughter) But it's not just a question of being your self: Be your best self. For instance, if someone comes along to the centre and it's one of your off evenings, well your not feeling at your best say well, some people might think well, if that new person comes up to you, you're fully justified in giving him a rather rude brush off. Because in so doing your being yourself. Are you really that sort of despicable uncaring sort of person - is that really you? Well it's certainly not you at your best. It's you in a very peripheral manner we might say. So be yourself, but be yourself at your best. Shake of your own mood. Give attention to that particular person. Give him the best that you can. If you feel that that's just not possible that evening, don't go along to the centre. Don't expose yourself to other people or other people to you. But there is this unfortunate impression that, or belief almost, not to say conviction that you are being yourself most when you are being perhaps least pleasant. This reminds me of something that was said ages ago. Someone said 'how is it that most people who pride themselves on speaking their minds, have such unpleasant minds?' (laughter). So be yourself yes, but what is oneself? It's one's best self. It's not just the passing mood of the moment that is yourself. Do you see what I mean? If your really unable to shake of that mood well, just stay away from the centre, stay away from visitors and friends. You're just not fit to be put on public display so to speak, for the time being. But being yourself doesn't mean giving way to every little passing whim, or fancy or irritation or negative feeling; that is sheer self-indulgence. So you must really be good, not just going through the motions of being good. Some of our friends do tie themselves into these terrible knots. You'll also find as order members that some people probably receive more projections than others. Some may have quite unintentionally a more authoritative manner, or a manner which may be more intimidating or something of that sort. So usually order members arrange things between themselves as to who should speak to who. Do you see what I mean? If for instance a mitra is doing something which perhaps he shouldn't do, well then, when the order members discuss this they agree among themselves well, who is going to talk to that mitra? The most suitable person agrees to take on the job. If for instance that particular mitra is very resistant to any

suggestion of [16] authority, you might choose quite a young order member who has no aura of authority surrounding him, to go and talk to that person in a friendly sort of way. Do you see what I mean?

You don't bring up your big guns (laughter) that would be to just invite resistance. So order members learn to handle things in this tactful sort of way.

Alan A: So you have a certain responsibility to anticipate other peoples reactions?

S: Indeed yes. Well don't hit someone on the head and be surprised if he hits you back. And sometimes it's difficult trying to anticipate peoples reactions. But you do have that responsibility. You should try to foresee what their reactions might be, in view of your past experience of them and so on. May be you know that they're sensitive on certain issues so don't sort of trample on their tender feelings unintentionally. If you trample on them intentionally for their good, then that's another matter. Sometimes you may decide that is the skilful thing to do. But you must really know what you are doing. But yes, above all you must have goodwill, metta towards the people with whom you are dealing only then will you feel I think, genuinely responsible. If you don't care for them, you won't care for them. And after a few months as an order member you'll soon find out where your talents lie. Whether your talents do lie with people or perhaps in other fields. When I say with people I mean direct, personal, friendly contact. Some people are better at that than others. Though it is of course to be expected that every order member should be good at it to some extent. But anyway, for some it's something that they are almost born with. For others it's something that has to be painfully learned.

Alan A: Is it true that we have got to concentrate on two aspects of the centre, community, co-operative triad? I've heard that you have said this but I don't know it seems to be able spread yourself across the three fully it's very difficult and that one should sort of emphasize two of them.

S: Well obviously as the Movement gets bigger, as centres, communities, co-ops do get bigger and bigger, well it becomes more and more difficult for one person to bestride all of them. Do you see what I mean? But at the same time if you've got a centre and you've got co-ops and you've got communities, all so to speak in the same area, all interlocked, there have got to be some people at least, who have so to speak got a finger in every pie. Or in contact with people in all these different situations. So one has to be quite careful to ensure that the co-ops as it were, don't go their own way, the communities their own way, the centre it's own way. There have got to be some people drawing everything together and knowing what is happening on all these different fronts. And that may not be very easy, it may not be possible for such people to be fully involved in any of these areas. But they should be sufficiently involved to know what is going on within each area and be able to co-ordinate all these different workings.

Alan A: As a centre gets bigger it can be more difficult to bestride, at the same time the more necessary.

[17]

S: So far I think this has only happened with regard to the LBC and its communities. I don't think any of the other centres are so big, that this is really a problem. And when I say centres,

I mean with their communities and co-ops. But there shouldn't be any activity which is so to speak, out on a limb; without any contact or without any one being in it. Without contact with the rest of the local movement, so to speak

Mike S: This would imply that at a Centre complex every activity should have an order presence in it. Taking the LBC in yoga classes there should be an Order Member theoretically at best in each class.

S: Yes because then at least the order meeting is an occasion Where experience from all these areas is pooled and for instance, problems coming to all these areas are considered. Do you see what I mean? It may not even be a question of a specific policy for all three, but the same spirit; the same feeling of togetherness. At least all the different people, the order members in this case, who are working in these different areas, should know one another, should meet in the context of the order meeting. Some people have said that the LBC cum Sukhavati etc. is too big. I don't personally agree with this. I think it's more a question of better organization and a greater effort to maintain personal contact. I think the whole thing is really still quite small. I'd like to see it bigger, especially the community; bigger and stronger. So I think, in a way summarizing the discussion, one can take it that as an order member, in principle you're responsible for the whole movement. Do you see what I mean? I say in principle because obviously your own limitations have to be considered. But as if to say well, if anybody in the movement, if something goes wrong, someone drops out, you are prepared quite naturally, happily, spontaneously, to step in and do what you can, if you're able to. You don't feel, well, that's somebody else's responsibility. You feel it's your responsibility if you are able to fulfil it. Just like for instance, supposing you heard suddenly that, well, one of the order members working in India has fallen sick, he's out of action. Maybe you're free at that particular time, you just hear that particular person is out of action. Your sense of responsibility is such you think all right, I'll go and do his work for a few months until he's better. You have that sort of feeling. You don't think 'oh well that's somebody else's responsibility or Lokamitra will find someone to replace him, or Bhante will send somebody. You feel that you have a responsibility also. Because you won't just blindly go out there, you'll consult the relevant authorities so to speak, (laughter) and just check that you could actually do something to help as distinct from really being in the way. Well there should be that kind of readiness. And of course nearer home. If the cook falls ill, all right, your quite willing to step in if you're free.

Vessantara: Does this mean this also gives you a responsibility to positive critical feedback or - it's not that - this is their centre and they're running it.

S: Yes, right. This is also a very important aspect of responsibility - that you give positive critical feedback all the time, and that of course includes appreciation, if you see something being done really well, you express your appreciation. [18] You don't allow your appreciation to be taken for granted; you express it. Either openly or to the person or persons concerned. If you see something not quite right, all right you draw up peoples attention to that. If it say, within what is properly their sphere of responsibility. And if someone draws your attention to something which you are not fulfilling properly, some responsibility you've neglected, all right you accept that gracefully and you do something about it; you don't react. Didn't we have a series of talks on responsibility as a Padmaloka weekend? Perhaps it might be a good idea to play those (tapes) and possibly others from time to time, at centres and communities. Because some very good talks have been given at those weekends and it seems a pity just to leave them on tape and to make no further use of them.

Voice: Suppose one took them.. (obscure)

S: Yes. Well, it should be lunch time (a bell rings, followed by laughter.) Real co-ordination eh! ( laughter

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Tuscany Preordination Course 1981

Questions and Answers Session 30

S: When we were back in England and originally talking about this particular course and beginning even to plan it, it seemed that three months was a very long time. I don't know how people feel about that now that they're actually on the course, but in prospect three months did seem a very long time, and it did seem that in the course of three months one would be able to do quite a lot and cover quite a lot of ground, with regard to study, and also in other ways. In fact it seemed then that we'd be having so much time, with possibly some of it hanging a little heavily on our hands, that we thought it would be a good idea to draw up a list, if you like, of various topics, various points, which it would be good to cover during this course, to bring up, to clarify, and so on, all sorts of, one might say, miscellaneous points, everything that the well-informed, well-equipped, up-to-date Order member should know. So not trusting entirely to our own resources or powers of imagination we asked some of our Friends, especially the various Chairmen, to produce, or to suggest, areas which should be covered, points which should be raised, possible misunderstandings which should be clarified, and they were good enough, some of them at least, to do so, with the result that quite a number of topics were submitted to Subhuti, and Subhuti organized them all into six categories. The first category being the Dharma; and the second being the Individual; the third being the Order; the fourth being the FWBO; the fifth being the FWBO and the world; and the sixth being Dharmadhatu, which means simply, if you don't know, messenger of the Dharma. Now quite a number of these topics we have already covered, in the course of Question and Answer meetings and in other ways, but there are still quite a few which have not been covered, points which have not been raised, or possible misunderstandings which haven't been clarified.

So what we're going to do for at least a few mornings after tea is to have a Question and Answer meeting, which shall deal with a small group of these topics. [2] So what'll be happening is this: we'll take up just a small group of topics, I think you know that this morning we're taking up health and fitness, the body, illness, old age and death, which have been included under category two, the Individual - that's a nice, easy, down-to-earth, practical sort of point of departure. So what we're going to do is this: I'm going to make just a few sort of remarks on this particular group of topics, and then we'll, so to speak, throw the meeting open, and anybody who isn't clear on anything connected with any of these particular topics - health, fitness, the body, illness, old age, death and so on - maybe we can bring in eventually allied topics if time permits, can ask any question that they wish.

So obviously this question of health, this question of fitness, and so on, is a quite important one, but it is one that has come to be generally recognized as important, you know, within the Friends, only comparatively recently, say within the last couple of years, or even, one might say, within the last year, and one of the manifestations of that is that people, especially the



men in the Movement, have begun to take more care of themselves physically, and have been trying to get themselves into better working order, so to speak, than they were before. One of the interesting points that has transpired is this - that very often the neglect of oneself physically is a symptom of a lack or an absence of healthy self love, or in other words, of metta directed towards oneself, so that, this question of health, from this point of view, links up directly with the practice of the metta bhavana. If you almost deliberately neglect your own health, if you're careless about your own health, unmindful about your own health, don't look after yourself properly, don't give yourself proper rest, don't allow yourself adequate sleep, don't provide for yourself sufficient exercise, don't take care of yourself when you fall sick in an objective, reasonable sort of way, the chances are that you're lacking in healthy self-love, self-regard or metta towards yourself. So, in this way, there is a direct connection between this topic of health and metta bhavana, therefore with meditation, therefore with the whole spiritual life. Of course one might say that looking after oneself is not always easy, there are sometimes objective difficulties in the way. If, for instance, one falls sick [3] there is the question of what should one do? Should one simply take a few days off or should one seek medical treatment? If one is to seek medical treatment, all right., what sort of medical treatment? Are you going to go to your general practitioner? Are you going to have recourse to allopathy, as it's called, or are you going to go along to a naturopath? Or are you going to get a bit of massage done on you? Or are you going to go along to, say, an acupuncturist? So even if you do decide you need medical treatment these sort of questions also arise and perhaps sometimes people are a little bit in doubt as to how to resolve them.

And then, even leaving aside illness, what about old age? Maybe its not easy for some of you at least to realize this but if you survive you'll probably start growing old and you'll start feeling that you're growing old. What about one's mental attitude towards growing old, eh? What sort of precautions should one take as one grows old? What about death? How does one feel about that? Is that a very real sort of prospect to one yet, er does it seem something impossibly remote that you don't really need to think of it at all? Thinking about it is perhaps a bit morbid, certainly for anyone under thirty, perhaps you feel like that.

And then, expanding a little bit, one can consider, well, health, physical well-being depends very much, at least to some extent depends, upon the sort of environment in the midst of which you live, whether the city, whether the country, the sort of work that you're doing, your immediate surroundings, whether they're attractive, clean and healthy. What about the whole question of hygiene, especially in a community? So these are some of the areas I think we could well cover in this session this morning. So perhaps I hadn't better say very much more but just let you bring up your own questions in these particular associated fields and see if we can thrash out some sort of conclusion.

Gerald Burns: On the subject Bhante, you were saying what sort of medical treatment should one look for ... I'm under the impression that sometimes you've expressed a certain scepticism about certain aspects of medical treatment. Are there any sort of guidelines you think that one could follow?

[4]

S: I must admit that I'm very sceptical about practically all methods of medical treatment. I personally keep as clear of medical treatment as I possibly can, I keep as much out of the hands of doctors as I can and this is based, as some of you know, on personal experience, when I was a child, because I believe there were at one time three if not four doctors treating

me and two doctors said that if a certain line of treatment wasn't followed, well, I'd probably die and the other doctor, perhaps two other doctors in fact, said that if it was followed I would die. So from an early age I was, you know, initiated into the fact that doctors differed and there wasn't unanimity amongst them and therefore that they couldn't be trusted. At the tender age of about nine or ten this fact sort of sank into my soul (laugh) and has remained there ever since, so I have a good healthy scepticism about doctors. My normal practice in India was to stay away from doctors completely. If I needed any sort of medical, I won't say treatment, attention, because I wouldn't let them treat me, you know, just like that - if I needed any sort of medical attention, I'd call in or I'd consult a friend of mine who was a doctor and discuss the matter with him so that I understood what was wrong with me and what he proposed to do about it and if I agreed with his proposals, well, then I'd accept them, otherwise not, and this has been my course all along. I think it's most unwise to place oneself unreservedly in the hands of doctors. Of course sometimes if there's something very seriously wrong with you, especially if you've been involved in some sort of accident, you've no alternative, you can only hope for the best under those sort of conditions. But apart from that I would say, whether it's an allopath or a naturopath or an acupuncturist, keep clear of them as long as you possibly can and also, especially with regards to allopathy, I would say be very careful about taking drugs or allowing drugs to be prescribed for you. Be very careful of those little bottles of pills and tablets and things of that sort, even things like aspirin that should be taken very, very rarely indeed, only when it's absolutely unavoidable. It's probably much better, and probably most doctors in any case would agree with this, to think in terms of prevention rather than cure, and a healthy way of life which is going to keep you healthy so that you don't succumb to disease, rather than carelessly following a way of life which is bound to lead to disease and physical breakdown - when of course you probably [5] do need some patching up, some kind of medical treatment.

I must say, you know, with regard to this whole tendency within the Friends, or some sections of the Friends, towards a sort of almost blind reliance upon alternative medicine. I'm not really very happy about this, it's no use giving up your blind faith in the allopath, in the ordinary GP, and placing yourself no less blindly in the hands of your favourite acupuncturist. I think some people allow themselves to be misled by some sort of pseudo-mystical jargon, talk about energy and, you know, all that sort of thing. I do know some people who have placed themselves in the hands of quite well-reputed acupuncturists and have been treated by them for quite a long time but without any apparent benefit at all. There's no panacea hmm? So one has to bear this in mind too.

I would say, coming to the actual question, it's a very good thing, if you feel you really need medical treatment, to either make a friend of your doctor or make someone who is a friend your doctor and have a personal contact, so that you can discuss quite frankly, you know, what he thinks is wrong with you, what he thinks you should do and why. I think the ordinary medical practitioner often finds this quite irritating, to have to explain to the layman what's wrong with him and what he proposes to do, because very often they don't know, very often they're only guessing or hoping for the best. Medicine is as much an art as a science it seems.

Mike Scherk: When, when you go to India do you take inoculations and vaccinations against cholera and typhoid? Do you take malaria tablets?

S: This is very difficult. The whole time that I was in India, after I left the army, I had no inoculation or vaccination of any kind at all and, apart from just a little bit of malaria every

now and then and a tiny touch of jaundice very early on, I never suffered from anything of that kind. Though travelling round I was a bit careful and later on and amongst the ex-untouchables I normally drank only tea which meant the water had been boiled. But when I came back to England, in order to enter England, I had to have various inoculations and so on. I had those, er, in Kalimpong and they were given me by an English missionary doctor and he [6] expressed considerable surprise I didn't have any reactions. I had a very, very slight sort of, well, not even soreness, you know, but nothing more, I had not the normal sort of reaction. I don't know why that was. Perhaps there was an explanation. So I had them just in order to come back, and I have had them since, but more recently I've come to the conclusion they're not really necessary. You don't need them to get back into the country as formerly I had thought or as formerly I had been led to believe. Apparently your, your right of re-entry into your country as a UK citizen is absolute and they cannot stop you from re-entering because you haven't had certain inoculations or vaccinations. So this time prior to my going to India I've not had anything. Lokamitra in fact advised me not to. Last time they did upset me a bit, especially, as you know, I wasn't very well at the time anyway. So this time I'm taking nothing; I'm taking no malaria tablets either I think I'll be all right just because I was in India for so long and I think I'm now immune to anything of that sort, but I don't necessarily advise others to follow my example because I did spend twenty years in India and probably I am inured to certain things. I have a natural resistance. Vessantara did find out that it was possible to take a course of homeopathic treatment. I don't know what that involves, probably swallowing infinitesimally small tablets over a period of a few weeks before going abroad, instead of taking or instead of getting inoculations and so on, and I believe that homeopathic treatment is, as it were, officially recognized. Yes, so we need to know about these things and not just blindly go, er, following what we think is the only course.

I do believe that even in allopathic circles there is increasing doubt about the efficacy or desirability of all these inoculations and vaccinations. I mean the introduction of what are, you know, really foreign substances into the system can't really do it any good.

I'm not necessarily saying, you know, follow my example if you go to India.

Steve Francis: I've heard it said that you have said that unless you start changing your state of mind before the age of thirty, that you start out on the spiritual life before the age of thirty, that you're going to find it very, very [7] difficult to actually progress if you haven't made a start before then. So what kind of application does that have, for, given it's true, for people entering the Friends, you know, sort of later on in life?

S: It does seem, broadly speaking - here I'm drawing conclusions from my experience with people coming into the Friends - that the older you are the more difficult it becomes. Because you, you know, you've formed so many habits, you've perhaps, you know, formed so many attachments, you've got a rigid set way of looking at things, so it, it does seem, or would seem that the younger one can get involved in the spiritual life, in the FWBO, the better. I'm not saying that there are not quite old people who can break through, and who can make a good progress whatever their age, at the same time I'm not saying there aren't young people who despite all their opportunities sometimes throw them away - that happens too - but broadly speaking, if one is called upon to make a generalization, I think it would be true to say that, other factors being equal, the younger you are the more easy it is, the older you are the more difficult. I don't know why thirty should be especially mentioned, one might perhaps just as well mention twenty-five or, you know, even forty. But yes I think that the older you get the

more difficult it becomes, though never impossible obviously. I mean one doesn't want to discourage anybody and one certainly shouldn't say to the older person coming along, 'Well, I don't hold out much hope for you!' One certainly shouldn't say that and one must always remind the younger person that it's difficult at any age, really to grow. It's just that it's a bit more difficult or even quite a bit more difficult if you're rather older.

Malcolm Webb: Can I ask you are you insured in any way Bhante?

S: I don't really know.

Malcolm: I Do you ...

[8]

S: These matters are usually looked after by the office. I try to avoid having anything to do with them or even any knowledge of them, but if you apply to Subhuti, if he doesn't know Kovida will know I think, but I can't really tell you.

Malcolm: It's a question that sometimes comes up, not all the time (...) question of insurance, whether it's worth taking out insurance against sickness ...

S: I believe we've got something to cover us while we're in Italy, those of us who come from Padmaloka, including myself. I think so, I wouldn't be completely certain about that. I certainly had no such cover when I was in India, I know about that at least.

I must say also, I don't have any very decided views on this particular topic. Health insurance and all that. What is health insurance anyway? I'm not even clear about that.

Alan Angel: Well, there was one policy that I looked at before I came over that would have paid for Steve's flight back to England. It includes things like that.

S: Ah, yes.

Alan: Or hospital treatment, if he had broke a leg ... It would seem quite desirable ...

S: I think we have some such cover, those of us from Padmaloka, but I wouldn't be absolutely certain. Someone did say something to me about it sometime before we left and I believe I sort of agreed it might be a good thing, but I don't really remember anything more than that. Whether they actually went ahead and, you know, did it...

Subhuti: We did make sure that the Common Market arrangements for National Health Service had been extended.

[9]

S: Which they had, yes.

Subhuti: That does raise the point, at the moment probably most of us avail ourselves of the National Health Service but very few of us contribute by way of National Insurance stamps or tax. Is this a situation that should continue?

S: Well, what is the law? I think we need first of all to find out what the law is.

Subhuti: Well (...) we're within the law.

S: Ah, so what is the question then?

Subhuti: Well, the ... presumably the basis on which the National Health Service is provided is that most people will be paying for it by way of their tax and their National Insurance contributions but because of the charitable arrangements of charitable law we're able to not pay tax.

S: Mmm, but all that is perfectly legal?

Subhuti: Yes.

S: So presumably, you know, law makers or people of that sort, they are quite aware of that situation.

Subhuti: I doubt it Bhante.

S: Well I, I would say so long as it isn't illegal that that is quite in order. We certainly shouldn't do anything that is illegal. Of course, apart from that, there is the more general question, in a way the more basic question, of whether you should necessarily go trotting off to the nearest GP, even though you're quite [10] legally entitled to do that. I think it would be, you know, better if, if we had eventually our own doctors, well we have, in a sense, our own doctors, though they're not, you know, practising within the FWBO. I think that would be best, if we had people, you know, well equipped medically within the FWBO, ideally within the Order itself. I think that is the long term solution. And have people, not only medically equipped from the, as it were, orthodox point of view, but who do perhaps independent research into medical matters from a more spiritual point of view, and who are able to treat us in accordance with spiritual principles. I don't mean in some sort of pseudo-mystical kind of way but I mean bearing in mind that, you know, one is leading a spiritual life. So again it would seem the emphasis needs to be on prevention.

Alan: That brings up the aspect of diet because we've got fitness as far as physical exercise but the other very important side of that is diet.

S: Yes, well diet, I haven't mentioned that but that is an extremely important item obviously. But do you feel, does everybody feel that enough attention is given to this within the Friends?

Dave Rice: Personally I don't. I think it's getting there little by little. Just as in the last couple of years the emphasis on fitness has come more into the foreground. But I think if you visit naturopath. and some of these other alternative medical doctors, that they know their stuff, one of the first things they recommend is that you do something with your diet, that you change your diet around, because what you eat does affect you, it affects your body as well as your mind and I think - just one of the examples I can think of is the intake of sugar. There were some figures in New Zealand about this - one hundred years ago the average person consumed fifteen pounds of sugar per year each, ten years ago the figures had changed, they were one hundred and fifteen pounds of sugar per person per year, and there is a connection

that's fairly well recognized amongst a lot of the alternative doctors that an overdose of sugar can in the long run contribute [11] to cancer as well as rheumatism and arthritis which aren't very pleasant things and happen usually later in life.

Alan: I think that that's quite an important point that one's diet might not necessarily throw up ...

S: Right.

Alan: ... weaknesses now, but as one gets into one's thirties, forties, fifties ..

S: But again there is this question which isn't altogether straightforward of what constitutes the criterion for a healthy diet, because one could bring up the question of vitamins, some people though say that vitamins are just a load of rubbish, you know, they're just abstractions, there's no such things etc. etc. So it's not very easy for the layman to pick his path, you know, through all these opposing views and maybe one just needs to be very aware of one's physical state and of the effect which food has on one and maybe experiment a little bit, umm?

I mean Alan mentioned, no you mentioned, just now about sugar and its effects in connection with rheumatism. In a way that, that's interesting because when I was in India I was taking a lot of sugar because Indians take a lot of sugar, it's not only stirred into tea, not to say poured into tea, but there are lots of sweetmeats and I did suffer a bit from rheumatism when I was in India, especially in Kalimpong, and I thought that when I moved to Norfolk, moved to Surlingham, that being a bit damp, I might suffer but actually I haven't suffered. But it might be due to the fact that three years ago, or maybe four years ago, I gave up taking sugar. So I haven't actually since then had rheumatism, or just the odd twinge, it may have something to do with that, that is quite possible. So in that sort of way one needs to study one's own experience and to study one's own physical reactions.

Some years ago, in the FWBO, a lot of people were into Zen macrobiotics, which some seemed to follow in a quite unintelligent way. Some swore by the ten day [12] brown rice regimen, do you remember that? Whether it really did them good or not I just couldn't say. I mean, I personally found that a modest sort of brown rice diet really suited me. It was a simple way of cooking when I was living on my Own, brown rice fried up with onions and other things from time to time suited me fine. I seemed to thrive on it. But whether it was because it was brown rice or whether it was because brown rice had the particular virtues with which it was credited by the Zen macrobiotic people I couldn't say. But I know from experience that that sort of diet suits me. So again it's as though one must keep one's eye on one's reactions. But probably there are certain things which are known to be bad for us. For instance I think white sugar, I don't think there's much disagreement about that and white bread not being as good for you as is brown bread. So in our communities we need to observe these sort of things and I think on the whole we do. But I have noticed that quite a few people while fully agreeing with everything I've said and everything you've said, still have a sort of liking for junk food, and I wonder why this is. Is it that they feel they're doing something naughty, something that they shouldn't, and do it with a certain glee, you know, rubbing their little hands (...) (laughter)? This isn't really approved of and we shouldn't be doing it. Or is it that, you know, left over from previous days they have a sort of hankering still after these sorts of horrible things?

Dave: I think it's got a lot to do with habit. Years and years of doing this sort of thing is quite hard to shake.

S: Mmm. Certainly one needs to think about these things.

Mike: With regards to the problem of how to make one's mind up as to which of the various sources are actually giving you good information on nutrition and diet or whatever, one of the very few points on which most of these sort of schools actually agree is that, the thing that Alan mentioned, lots of problems only arise, are only revealed, over time. Like there's one school of fairly orthodox medicine [13] that feels that most Americans suffer from malnutrition from a shortage of certain sorts of vitamins because they never eat things such as brown this or brown that, it's all white and polished and refined. But these sort of diseases will only show themselves after twenty, thirty or forty years which means that one must unfortunately combine not only experimentation, but also a certain amount of projection into the future.

S: Mmm.

Mike: And the one problem in following a lot of schools is they quite obviously have an ideological axe to grind, such as the macrobiotics are the prize example of this.

S: I don't know what has happened to all our friends who years ago were following the strict macrobiotic regime. I don't know whether they're all alive still. (laughter) Or perhaps they're making up for lost time with chips and cream buns.

Dave: They probably found it was too heavy going. I don't know whether you'd agree with this Bhante, but the formula I came up with is that food is just basically good for you if it's natural, organically grown and whole. You can't really go wrong with that kind of combination unless you have some kind of ailment that's hereditary or something.

S: On the other hand, I remember that, when I was living in Kalimpong, I was living among the Nepalese and most of them ate stuff that they'd grown themselves or which was grown in the locality. They were fairly sturdy people but they weren't healthy people. And they very rarely reached a great age. They usually died off in their fifties and early sixties. I sometimes wondered at the time why that was. They were eating vegetables from their own garden, they were eating unpolished rice, they were eating maize from their own garden, plenty of fruit, especially oranges, a bit of milk, bit of cheese, which they took unlike Indians [14] down on the plains, and some meat and dried fish. So one would have thought that would have kept them pretty healthy but it didn't seem to. I don't know if there were other factors involved, but I really noticed that.

Murray Wright: Sir Edmund Hilary did a lot of work...

S: Pardon?

Murray: Sir Edmund Hilary ... and he did a lot of work in Nepal and one of the main areas he was working in was vaccination against smallpox and chickenpox. They seemed to have a lot of diseases that only Western medicine could cure (...)

Dave: To add to that natural wholefood approach, if one can gain as much variety as possible (...) that also helps.

S: Mmm, yes right.

Dave: That way you get a balance of everything including the small elements which are quite important like zinc.

S: Yes right.

Steve Francis: You implied in your introduction that there was some way in which, you know, growing older, one should sort of always prepare yourself, er, mentally for that progress. Would you like to expand on that just a little?

S: In some ways I don't think any special preparation is necessary because if you're leading a spiritual life you're prepared for anything including old age, even death. I think probably what is important is that as you grow older, I mean as you start growing, so to speak, noticeably older, noticeably to other people, you should accept the fact eh? And not refuse to accept it, not rebel against [15] it and insist on doing physically whatever you were doing before. I think that is a weakness with many people in the West, that they refuse to grow old gracefully. They insist on keeping up with the youngsters in one way and another.

This applies both to men and to women. Men of course try to keep up very often by trying to do more in the way of, you know, exercise than they should and therefore, thereby strain themselves. Women of course very often, you know, try to keep up in the way of appearances, you know, making themselves up to look maybe ten to fifteen years younger, hopefully, than they actually are and they too don't accept the fact that they have grown old. It's sometimes quite pathetic to see women of seventy and eighty with their faces plastered with paint and powder as though they were really young, well of course really young women don't need to do that anyway. In the same way it's really ridiculous to see men in their sixties and seventies prancing around as though they were twenty years old. Well, if their bodies really permit that and it's natural for them to do that, well that's fine, but if clearly the old joints are creaking, well then it's a bit ridiculous.

Malcolm Webb: Evidently road running is something you can take up as you get older.

S: What is?

Malcolm: Road running ... or, long distance running, and you can actually go on to over forty-five and start to really sort of get good at it. There are things you can actually do when you're older.

S: Well one needs to inform oneself probably and not try to do those things which you're just not able to do any longer. I believe older people can swim quite easily, as far as I know.

Mike Scherk: That's probably quite a good example in fact because what you can do in swimming changes with age because, in terms of competitive swimming, your peak is around between sixteen and eighteen. So everyone here is down the hill [16] already for that but in terms of just fitness you can continue 'til you're dead. (laughter)



S: With luck you could even die in the water.

Gerald Burns: (...) one does get old Bhante. You've spoken about actually looking at one's surroundings and, er, ... How important is it as well to look at just one's mental state perhaps and how that has effected one's health?

S: Has effected?

Gerald: Yes, I mean if one (...)

S: Mmm, yes, well certainly one should look at that because it may be that your illness is psychosomatic in which case ordinary medical treatment wouldn't be of much use. You, you know, might have fallen ill as just a pretext for having a rest. Some people feel they can't rest, a rest is not justified, unless they're ill. So their system so arranges it that they conveniently fall ill and they have to take to their beds. But one should try to see through this sort of thing and allow oneself sufficient rest so that the body doesn't have to protest in that sort of way. It isn't always easy because sometimes you do need to work especially hard, the situation requires it, you may even have to drive yourself, but you should be able to recognize the point beyond which you shouldn't drive yourself and take a rest, or take a holiday, or take a change in time.

Murray Wright: Someone told me in Norwich that you said that T'ai Chi was the best form of exercise because yoga was too passive and karate was too vigorous and T'ai Chi was the balance.

S: That may be so. I don't remember saying that. It may be so but I wouldn't like to be sure about it. It would be nice if it was true, eh? Maybe those who [17] have been doing all three in the course of this course could inform us?

Clive Pomfrett: You need to do all three.

S: You mean you need to do all three anyway?

Clive: I think that with all those three things, tai chi, yoga and karate, if, as far as I can see, they're all done seriously and with effort then any of them are very good for physical health.

S: Mmm.

Andy Friends: Bhante, did you do any physical exercise?

S: No, I don't think I've ever done any in my life, but that was because when I was a child I was identified as an invalid having heart disease and therefore prohibited from doing any exercise. It was only in my late teens that I started suspecting that maybe there wasn't anything wrong with me, certainly nothing of that sort. So I have actually done no exercise at all except a bit of yoga in my early days in India, that's all. So I don't hold myself up as a shining example in this respect.

Bob Jones: What about in your army days? Didn't they have you doing things... ?

S: I avoided it. (great laughter) Because, you know, I was whipped into the army, I was conscripted of course, I didn't volunteer, but, er, I couldn't understand how I had been passed fit because I had been brought up to believe I was an invalid and hadn't been allowed to do anything vigorous or, you know, even fast. I wasn't allowed to move quickly, even to walk quickly, to get up quickly. Then I found myself, you know, whipped into the army, so I thought well maybe it's, you know, just a mistake, because already I knew that doctors disagreed [18] amongst themselves. The one who happened to examine me on my medical board, er, in fact there were two, I had two medical boards, passed me fit B2, but they might have made a mistake so I decided to go carefully, but I didn't get much sympathy from the medical officer attached to the unit. I told him my background, yes, so er, I said this is what I've been told, so he said, oh that's all right, he said, if you collapse he said, just report sick. (laughter)

## SIDE TWO

S: Well I thought I'd best take care of myself, I clearly can't rely on these people, so I just avoided, so with a certain amount of ingenuity I avoided all PT sessions. I avoided all bayonet training which I thought was quite strenuous (laughter) (...) intended deliberately to cultivate unskilful mental attitudes (laughter). In any case the basic training only lasted six weeks, after that we were on technical training, and I was, you know, clear. So er, in this way I never did any sort of, you know, physical exercise or training, even in the army.

: What about later on though? Didn't you do a lot of walking?

S: Yes, walking never seemed to bother me except uphill, walking (laughter) uphill was always (...) lower bit, even now (laughter), but otherwise if it's on the flat or downhill I'm pretty good. (laughter) I must admit though I'm not quite so good as I was. I did a bit better a few years ago. But I think my heredity is in fact quite good, I think that has been the saving factor, otherwise I might have been a bit of a wreck by this time. But I have quite a few relations living well into their late eighties early nineties and keeping very fit and healthy right up to the last, so I'm keeping my fingers crossed and trusting to my heredity. But as I say I certainly don't hold myself up as a shining example, so, not in this area at least (laughter). So, you know, please don't let anyone say Bhante didn't take any exercise when he was younger, he seems all right, more [19] or less, now, so we need not now. This is one of the areas in which people can do, hopefully, better than I did, because they're having better advice.

Mike Scherk: Presumably, with regards to exercise, one should avoid the other extreme - I don't see anyone in the Friends falling for - the narcissistic body builder or the California health addict who becomes obsessed with physical fitness and health for its own sake. I don't see any dangers but presumably it's something we should guard against maybe in other people.

S: Mmm. Perhaps we should get now on to another point I mentioned; that is the whole question of environment and hygiene in the environment. This is one of my, in a way, pot peeves if you like, especially at Padmaloka, because people seem in a community often very neglectful of hygiene, especially leaving dishes, even plates of food uncovered, even though flies were swarming around. I noticed the same thing at Sukhavati, even on a comparatively recent visit. I had to draw peoples attention to this. I think that is something we must be really

careful about.

Dave Rice: Bhante, we've had this question of the flies on our plates as it were for the last few weeks at our house meetings and it seems to be those that would like to get rid of the flies by knocking them off, those that deliberately would like not to do that, and finding some alternative, and these that don't say anything. What is your view on flies? Well, they are sentient beings are they not?

S: Mmm. Well flies are sentient beings yes, human beings are sentient beings too. If one can live and let live, well that's fine, but I think if flies or anything of that sort endanger health they must be discouraged, one must do something about it. Again prevention is better than cure. You don't have to have flies breeding all over the place. In India I've noticed that. Where do flies breed? They breed in rubbish dumps and people have got a dump of rubbish [20] just a yard or two from the back door. If one attends to those sort of things, if one doesn't allow rubbish to accumulate and one empties rubbish bins regularly and if there is a rubbish tip a good distance away, more often than not one would find that the flies tend to congregate there rather than where you are. So these sort of precautions should also be taken.

Also, for instance, if someone is sick or someone has a disease, it might be infectious, well don't allow that person to cook, don't allow them even into the kitchen. If necessary, you know, let him have his own plate and knife, fork and spoon, cup and saucer, and wash them up himself. These sort of precautions must be observed because in a community this very quickly makes the rounds and everybody is sick. I've seen this down at Sukhavati in the old days when living conditions were, unavoidably, quite primitive.

Murray W: This brings up another point. Sometimes in the meditation room, particularly if there's a cold going round and you've got people with very bad colds and everyone, and everyone's quite close together, I feel it' like a hive of disease. I have wondered before if people who have bad colds or maybe 'flu should absent themselves from the meditation and meditate in their own room 'til such time as...

S: Well it isn't only a question of meditation because there's also the question of meal times. I think if anyone has the 'flu, I think they should certainly isolate themselves in their own room.

: Perhaps we could adopt the Chinese habit of wearing surgical masks and stop spreading disease.

: There's actually the case of once you've manifested the cold you're no longer contagious.

Alan Angel: I believe...

[21]

Mike Scherk: There's quite a few diseases that the infectious period is before the symptoms have shown.

S: Well one must find out about that obviously and maybe, you know, try to sort of recognize symptoms as they're coming on and not, you know, take action when it's really too late.

Any other aspects of community hygiene?

Dave Rice: Bhante, in Sydney in our community we were overrun with cockroaches and it got worse and worse and worse and there was no way we could prevent it, no matter what we tried so eventually we had to make the decision to wipe them out. Do you have any scruples about doing that if it comes to that point?

S: Well certainly one has scruples because taking life is unskilful but sometimes you yourself have forced yourself into a situation where, in a way, you've no choice. You've no choice in the sense that you yourself may fall sick. Supposing you're a family person, well, your children may fall sick, they may even die, so you've put yourself in the position where you're not able to do anything but harm them perhaps. You just have to do the least harm that you possibly can, but again, cockroaches breed only in dirt, if there's no dirt you won't get cockroaches. That's why, you know, you must be very careful, one of the reasons why you must be very careful in a community or elsewhere, to keep the kitchen especially spotlessly clean. Otherwise, if there are cracks and dirt accumulates, that is where cockroaches breed. And cockroaches are especially dangerous, they are carriers of the germs of quite a lot of diseases. So you just shouldn't allow them to get a foothold. They are quite difficult to get rid of sometimes when they have gained a foothold. Again they do breed in dirt and scrupulous cleanliness is the long term answer.

Mike Scherk: There's a slightly different tack; a lot of places in London tend to have mice. I know here we're talking about flies, one day the fact that mice [22] were accumulating after the cat had left came up as well. There were far more people who had scruples about doing anything with the mice than the flies. And in most communities in the Friends people either put up with it or get cats or something like this but if it's a community that's also a centre the presence of mice or the smell of mouse dirt does really put off some people so it might be bad for beginners. Do you have any comment on that?

S: Well I don't think one should allow the situation to get so much out of hand that, you know, the smell of mice can be perceived. That would suggest that people have been very careless about leaving food about. I think that if you keep all food under cover and no food can be got at the mice will very often go away. Apart from that I myself don't have any real objection to a few mice being around. I think that one must accept that. At Padmaloka we've got a few, a few come into my study. I don't bother them, well, they don't bother me. I don't do anything about them. In fact one became quite tame one winter and used to come up on to my armchair and then across on to my desk and finish off whatever was left in the bottom of my teacup and I just had to put my finger out and just touch his back and he wouldn't move. So occasionally that sort of thing happens. I ... they seemed, so far as I could see, clean little field mice. I wasn't bothered but, one doesn't want an epidemic of them obviously. So I think again the best thing to do is to discourage them by just not letting there be food around and not letting ... if any crumbs fall to the floor, immediately brush them up. That is the solution really. They come for food.

Clive P: They also come inside for warmth in winter.

S: Mmm. Well those at Padmaloka were of this variety. I wouldn't be bothered by them, just a few mice, you knew, coming in for the winter, fair enough, but even so, you know, don't encourage them by scattering crumbs and things of that sort.

Malcolm W: It seems to me quite a skilful thing if it's a choice of you or him. It's more skilful you live and practice the Dharma than those cockroaches, or what have you, have the run of the place and push you out.

S: But at the same time you must realize that, well, your life must truly be more valuable than that of a cockroach. You really must practice the Dharma because, you know, you've got to make up for a certain amount of unskilful activity in eliminating the cockroach. At least let the world be the better for having you in it rather than the cockroaches. Cockroaches may not do much good but in some ways they don't do much harm either, spread a bit of disease perhaps but, you know, you might have knocked somebody down with your car, you might even have killed somebody, you might even be spreading micchaditthis which are far worse.

Malcolm W: At the moment Bhante I'd say it was more skilful that you lived than I lived in terms of choice, a hypothetical question (...)

S: Oh, yes, probably you are correct.

Probably. (laughter) There was a very interesting discussion about this once on the Anglo-Dutch retreat. I forget how it started, yes, someone was trying to sort of nail me about, oh yes, eating meat, that's what it was, eating meat. (laughter) So one of our Dutch friends, er, yes it was Vajrayogini, she asked me if I was, you know, shipwrecked on a desert island, would I eat meat in order to preserve my life. So I said certainly because I believe that my life is valuable. So then I said; "And if you were shipwrecked with me, if necessary I'd eat you". (loud laughter) This really delighted her but it rather, well it shocked, not to say shook, some of the other people present, quite disturbed them. So or, she added; "Well you'd have to catch me first". (laughter) I said; "Yes, not only catch you, I'd probably have to boil you for quite a long time" (laughter) "to make you tender". So in this way we did engage in quite a lot of repartee and quite enjoyed it but other people became more and more uneasy (laughter) (...) So yes you're right.

[24]

What about other aspects of the environment? The effect of the environment upon... what about pleasing environment?

Alan Angel: More in terms of aesthetics?

S: I'm sure this has a physical effect too, an overall effect which includes, you know, the body, the physical condition as well as the mind.

Murray W: Certainly the lounge at Padmaloka springs to mind, it's an area we could upgrade quite a lot, especially seating...

S: Oh yes, we have talked about this quite a lot, especially me. I'm afraid it comes down to LSD, it's as simple as that, because it's quite expensive, but yes, (laughter) (...) That would be (...) Everything needs upgrading, not only at Padmaloka, which isn't too bad compared with some other places, but throughout the Movement. Everything needs to be upgraded so that people have pleasant and positive surroundings in which to live.

Gerald B: At the moment, Bhante, it seems we centre our communities in the centre of big

cities. Now, while I can appreciate that there's ... it's important to have centres in, in the centre of cities, do you think it may be advisable, you know, if it's possible, to have communities, say, on the outskirts, just keep them away from the centres of big cities as much as possible?

S: Yes, well there are two things here. Mainly, again, it's a question of money because there is the question of the support of a community and if it's going to support itself, and that seems to be the pattern, the Movement not being able as yet to support communities in the country, then it has to engage in some kind of business, co-operatively. You can't usually do that in a rural area, perhaps not even on the outskirts of a town always. Very likely you have to be right in the thick of it. So there is that factor to consider, but we are thinking with [25] regards, say to Padmaloka, about trying to set up some kind of, you know, business which will enable people perhaps to work half the time in the city and live half the time in the country at, say, Padmaloka. Because it does seem that sometimes people get a bit too much bogged down in work in the cities, to the detriment of other activities. Not that one is against work, no, one is all in favour of it, but there are other aspects of the spiritual life that need to be given due attention - meditation, study, not just, you know, an hour or two a day or a week, but, you know, for stretches of time, concentrating say on study for a few months of the year - that's desirable. So I think we need to experiment a bit with ways of, you know, making that sort of thing possible.

David Luce: There is that slightly intangible element of, I suppose you'd call it stress, we discussed that a little bit in this morning's discussion group, that seems to be quite a factor in a lot of ill-health...

S: Mmm.

David Luce: ... and is quite connected with living in cities and overwork.

S: Yes right. There is also the point that stress is sometimes not so much due to external conditions as your attitude towards them. So that also needs to be attended to.

Clive P: I think maybe attention could be paid to the environment around a centre. I'm thinking of how the area around Sukhavati is developing and could develop: it could be a little sort of oasis.

S: It could, maybe it should, look different from the rest of the area. It's not easy because sometimes, you know, people around about are often untidy. I often notice, you know, outside the shop, the health food shop, there's papers all over the pavement. Well very likely we haven't been responsible for those [26] but there they are. It would be good even if from time to time we tidied or swept them up, even though it isn't our mess, but in a way, in our own interest, for the sake of our environment, maybe we should make ourselves responsible.

What about dress? That's another aspect of environment, that's your immediate environment, apart from your skin. That has some effect too doesn't it? At least on other people. Anyone got any thoughts on this?

Murray Wright: I think you should wear what is comfortable primarily.

S: Comfortable?

Murray: At the same time with an eye to what is pleasing, or what you can afford to buy out of a Salvation Army store.

Peter Hill: Actually I've noticed a change since I've been involved. People were I think pretty scruffy two or three years ago actually, but they seem to have smartened up quite a lot.

Alan Angel: But that I think is to do, to a large degree, with money. You don't have to go to jumble sales because that's the other alternative.

Subhuti: I think there was an idea it was sort of virtuous to get clothes from a jumble sale.

S: Well I think it was a sort of hippie attitude. I can remember people who definitely had money, I mean, outside the FWBO, or very loosely connected with it, who, as part of their revolt against their middle-class upbringing, used to dress as dirtily as possible. And make a great point of it. I think one of the things that has been happening is that people are getting over that sort of reactivity, those who did originally suffer from it. I mean some people wouldn't wash because, you know, their mothers had made them wash every day etc. etc.

[27]

Malcolm W: I can remember actually be scorned for sort of caring about, you know, (...) dress (...) It seems to have changed completely.

Dave Rice: Do you think its connected with what you said at the beginning, a lack of self-love to be scruffy and dirty?

S: I think that that is, in the case of some people at least, an aspect of it, yes. I think it's quite significant in the case of women er, women that don't care for themselves just look scruffy. And I've noticed a change in this respect with certain women coming into the FWBO, that in the course of, say, two to three years they start smartening themselves up and it's ... even combing their hair in some cases, and it's quite clearly due to the fact that they've been practising metta, not only towards others, but towards themselves. It's quite clear in the expression of their face has changed meanwhile. Maybe their complexion has improved, not because of cosmetics, it's all due to meditation and, you know, more positive attitudes in general. It's not appropriate to talk in terms of make-up in this sort of assembly, no one has recourse to it as far as I know. (laughter) But one should still discourage the ladies of one's acquaintance, if any, from, from making themselves up. First of all because most cheap cosmetics are definitely harmful and damaging to the skin. You notice older women who have been using cosmetics, cheap cosmetics, all their lives, have got horrible skins and have to use more and more cosmetics to cover up the fact. So if you have a wife or a girlfriend and they are very sensitive to your approval or disapproval more often than not, if you see them, you knew, making up, tell them it isn't necessary, they look better without it etc. etc., and encourage them to wash their faces with soap and water. (laughter) Sometimes it is as bad as that, rather than putting on a coat of powder when they go out. Even soap isn't really necessary unless you get really dirty. But if you think of the millions, the billions of pounds wasted on cosmetics it's awful, and they don't need it.

Dave Rice: So many of them have animal products.

[28]

S: Hmm, there's that too.

Mike Scherk: In the Friends Foods shops, I think in all of them, we sell certain special lines of natural cosmetics which do not have animal products in them and tend not to have petroleum based oils in them, which in theory are good for your skin, they're based on cleansing creams and this sort of thing, but I mean its net ...

S: But in what sense are they good for the skin?

Mike: Well apparently the oils that the skin often loses in the city, this is, I haven't, I don't have much experience with them myself (laughter) but it's... one of the main reasons we sell them is because there's a lot of profit in them. And most of the shops, well all of the shops, can do with it.

S: What sorts of things are they actually?

Mike: Soaps, shampoos, moisturisers, cleansers...

S: But what do you mean, cleansers?

Mike: Forms of special ... usually special soaps I think for the face and skin.

S: But what's wrong with soap and water?

Mike: Too low a profit margin. (laughter)

S: Does ordinary, let's get down to basics, does ordinary soap and water not have a fully cleansing effect? Is this what people are saying?

Mike: Apparently not actually on the face or if you've got oily skin.

[29]

: (...) soap and water and then get a bit of cotton wool and some cleansing cream, the cotton wool comes off dirty (laughter) (...)

S: But is it not natural to have a certain amount of 'dirt', inverted commas, on your skin? Can it be completely clean? What ... does one mean a little perspiration or, you know, whatever?

: (...)

Alan Angel: I think you can see the sort of thing if you're living in the city and you have a sauna bath. The pores sweat out an incredible amount of ingrained grime which I think some of these creams tend to absorb, suck out as it were.

S: Well I certainly notice it after, say, travelling by tube. You definitely get grime on the face and the hands, but I've always found, well maybe I'm wrong, that er, I was under the impression that soap and water got it off. (laughter) Perhaps I've been wrong all these years. That seems a bit, as it were, permissible but, er yes, I think, yes, permissible, but certainly ordinary cosmetics are I think absolutely out. I mean one might even say that if a woman is



still using ordinary cosmetics she hasn't yet really got involved with the FWBO. I'd put it as strongly as that. And also another thing, hair, I mean you see people, and here again it's mainly women, having things done to their hair. When I was a youngster women all had perms and some of them have ruined their hair with perms. Their hair becomes dry and brittle and it starts falling out prematurely. Women, older women, suffer from this sort of thing. And I've found that there are nowadays young men having their hair permed, and this is terrible. So please don't (laughter) This isn't necessary. And I have heard that too much shampooing damages the hair and or, the natural oils of the scalp. Is there anything in that?

Mike Scherk: I think that that is actually a relevant thing. If you're working [30] on a building site you probably want to wash your hair almost every night, you've got plaster in it and things, you have to use shampoo for dry hair which leaves as much oils as possible in there.

S: So one must just watch that sort of thing.

Sthiramati: Most women seem to go through a phase when they come into the Friends of cutting their hair very short, you know, sort of short and spiky.

S: What, pseudo-masculinization? Wearing these dreadful dungarees! I've practically got them to stop wearing, er, I always express disapproval of dungarees if I see them wearing them. (laughter) It's totally unaesthetic, well, if they're working on a building site, fair enough, but not for social purposes.

Clive P: I think that saunas are a quite good idea, seeing as we have connections (with Finland?) it would be quite good if we started having saunas in our communities.

Steve Francis: You don't feel that that point about dungarees is really just a matter of personal taste rather than an actual final judgement on (...) (laughter)

S: Well I rather question the taste I think of a woman who wears dungarees. Well yes, there are dungarees and dungarees, I accept that. (laughter) Occasionally a woman does look almost smart in dungarees, but if they're old and baggy and greasy one really does wonder why she's wearing them or what her mental state is. Do you see what I mean? Whether she really loves herself, this is basically what it is.

Steve: It just seemed like something of a hard statement to have made.

S: Well I'm just making a strong statement for the sake of, as it were, hammering [31] it home a bit, and especially as it doesn't directly concern you, oh? But I can recall mental pictures of women looking absolutely awful in these dungarees. Yes one does wonder why they do it. What they can feel about themselves. But I think women have, to generalize about women just for a moment, they have a sort of infinite capacity for deceiving themselves in this sort of area, where fashion is involved. I remember, not so long ago, I overheard a conversation between two young ladies, must have been teenagers, about these ridiculous sort of boots with very, very high heels. I think they must have been about, oh, six ... its incredible, and there was one poor girl, you know, tottering along in agonies wearing a pair of these, what do they call them? They had a ...

: Platform ..

S: Platform shoes, and she was talking with her friend and her friend asked her a question about them and the girl who was wearing them said; "Oh, they're ever so comfortable!" And she clearly believed that they were comfortable, she'd kidded herself that they were comfortable. And there she was sort of tottering along, you know, able to walk only with difficulty. So, I mean, this is the sort of thing one has to, you know, make people a bit more aware of, well, clearly mainly women, under the influence of fashion. Though it seems that at present in England, well in London at least, fashion is beginning to affect men more and more. I wonder to what extent that is a very helpful sort of development.

Murray Wright: Well, I went into a shop in Cambridge, it was about three or four months ago, to buy a pair of trousers and I tried about three pairs and all of them ... I got them on and zipped them up and I could hardly walk. Finally (laughter) (...) and I kept saying to the lady, you know, I want a pair of looser ones (...) They didn't actually have any in stock. She just said, oh, that's what everyone else is wearing.

S: Well the extreme example of that sort of thing in the last century where [32] women were concerned was tight lacing. You know, tight lacing was very, very harmful, it compressed the internal organs and, even down to the beginning of the present century in fashionable circles, a woman was considered, you know, beautiful if a man could get his hands round her waist, or if a man's collar could go round her waist. And it displaced the internal organs and some women used to faint on occasion because they were so tightly laced. But this was all in the interests of fashion. So here fashion comes directly into conflict with health as well as with comfort. So therefore away with all cosmetics and, you know, tight trousers and things of that sort and these shoes which really do do harm to the feet. Again I remember that when I was a boy ladies wore very tight fitting shoes with points, and so did gentlemen, and these deformed the feet. A lot of older people have got feet which are actually deformed. I think probably this isn't so common now. But again, you knew, the platform soles that I mentioned are an example. So here's something that we need to look into from the health point of view. Anyway that was the bell reminding us that food is also necessary for health, so let's close there for today.

END OF SIDE TWO

Mitrata Omnibus 1981 - Tape 29

S: ... who's ready with the questions this morning?

Vs: We went through the rest of the miscellaneous sections at the end. We went through 'formality and informality', 'on dealing with Mara'. We've already talked a bit about Mara in 'question and answers'. We wondered why, what the significance was of this sort of more external Mara being called Devaputta Mara ... why ... in what sense ... (mutter).

S: Well this is just to distinguish him from the other three Maras; to make it clear that he is so to speak also in addition to being whatever else he is, an objective.. objectively existing 'personality' - inverted commas - existing in a particular sphere

Vs: But why 'Devaputta'? Why 'Son-of-a-God'?

S: That's just the Pali idiom. 'Son-of-a-god' means a god! It's like Kulaputra means: someone

belonging to a good family. So Devaputra is someone belonging to the Gods; someone born of the Gods... i.e. a god It's simply an Indian idiom.

Vs: Is there an Indian tradition of where Mara comes from - sort of equivalent to...

S: Well, Mara, just like the Brahmas, and others, is an ex-human being. He has risen to that position from the ranks of humanity. (some laughter) It should also be said that Maras are plural rather than singular. Several Maras are mentioned by name in the Pali scriptures: there's Dusi Mara for instance, huh, but there is also The Mara, you know; 'Mara that of ilk', as it were, simply the king of Maras... and when The Mara, or just 'Mara', is referred to, it's he who is meant.

[2]

I think I've mentioned that full information on the subject is contained in Trevor Ling's 'Mara and the Mythology of Evil' which is a quite interesting sort of popular book on this subject. It used to be in the Order Library, but I can't vouch that it is still there.

Vs: Then we moved on to talking about 'on Buddha nature' ... in which ... you're distinguishing between the Upanishadic view of the Atman and the Buddhist view...

Brian had a question.

Brian: It was to do with the Atman, where you were saying that in the Atman, it's sort of like regarding a self with a large 'S' behind the existing personalities, which everybody shared in, and I was wondering what the sort of standard justification for the treatment of, for example, a high-caste Brahman towards a low caste Brahman. How could they justify this if they were all connected to this one self. Surely there would be a feeling of...

S: Well, there are several things that could be said here. One is that Brahmins are never short of justifications. That's one point. (general amusement) The other point is that the Upanishadic teaching, in that sense, is not accepted necessarily by all Brahmins. Many of them follow other schools of philosophy. But if you pressed, even a Brahmin who did accept that Upanishadic teaching he would probably say there are degrees of manifestation. That the Atman is more manifest in some than in others, and that therefore, on the relative plane at least it's quite justifiable to treat some in the way that the Brahmins, for instance, do the lower castes, especially the untouchables. They certainly wouldn't [3] be at a loss for a reply. They certainly wouldn't feel embarrassment, or anything of that sort. If one thinks of them as a sort of fumbling for an answer or being a bit discomfited by one's questions, you know, then one is completely mistaken. They are so utterly convinced, (that is to say, - of orthodox Brahmins), of their innate and inherent superiority.. and the rightness of the treatment that they accord to the lower castes. Some Brahmins, that is to say Western educated ones, do have some doubts, and there are a few who even reject the whole system. Though even they, in practise, you know, find it very hard to get away from it because, if you're a householder and you're living at home, if you're married... have a wife, if you have a mother a grandmother, aunts, especially... it's very difficult not to practise the caste system, at least at home... because if you try to rebel against it then you'll soon have your womenfolk down on you and that can make life rather difficult. So you usually in such cases, you know, keep your more liberal views for when you go outside, with your non-Brahmin friends. But at home you remain the orthodox Brahmin. Some Westernized Hindus; some Westernized caste Hindus

maintain that sort of double standard not to say, double life. They go out with their non-Brahmin friends, for instance: have tea with them even, but they'd never bring them home because they know that their womenfolk would be scandalized and would probably refuse to serve them. The womenfolk are usually even more conservative than the men. (pause) But if you want to verify my statement for yourself you should go to India and meet some of these people and ask them how they justify their position. You might find it, perhaps though, difficult to meet them because some of them would not have much to do with Europeans who, so far as they are concerned, are, at least socially, are beyond the pale, who have all sorts of, you know, unspeakable and unmentionable habits that a decent Hindu sort of shudders to hear about. (some laughter) I hope my information is not out of date. I don't think the situation has changed very much over the last twenty years. Since I was there for any length of time. If things haven't changed in the last 2,000 years, they're not liable to change in twenty. Anyway, what other questions were there?

[4]

Vs: Arising out of that - what arguments would you bring against somebody who did hold the Atman view?

S: I think argument is useless. I remember a little incident in this connection. I happened to be in Sarnath. This is quite early on in my career, and two young Indians were ordained as Sramaneras. Immediately after their ordination they seized on the nearest Brahmin, and were asking him in a very challenging way - what was this Atman? - what did he do? - what was his work? what was his function? and how the Brahmin justified, you know, the Atman's existence, etc. etc. But no good came of that discussion.

I think if anybody has that belief very firmly fixed there's not really much you can do about it theoretically. One has to ask him what his views are, say, with regards to spiritual life. He might very well believe that spiritual life consists in the realization of that Atman, hm, and he might say that spiritual life involves certain practices, for instance: meditation. He might very well believe in of course meditation on that Atman. So you might say well, we don't believe in an unchanging Atman. We believe that that makes spiritual practice impossible because that makes change impossible. But at least you believe in spiritual practice; we both believe in spiritual practice, so perhaps we'd better leave it at that and get on with our respective practices and let's see whether we discover an unchanging Atman at the end of the path or not.

I think it's best to adopt some such approach rather than try to argue the matter out logically - and I might quote, yet again, that little couplet:- 'A man convinced against his will remains of the same opinion still.' It's not so difficult to silence somebody if you're more skilled at argument than he is. It's very much more difficult to convince him. You haven't convinced someone, necessarily, just because you've silenced them, or they can't think of a further counter-argument... But I think you're unlikely in the West to encounter people who believe in the Atman; in an unchanging Atman in this sort of way. In India of course one encounters such people all the time.

[5]

Vs: You get people who believe in higher self. It seems to be a bit akin to the Atman.

S: Sometimes of course people use that expression in a very loose sort of way. It represents a

sort of hypostatization of a higher possibility one might say.. Well if they just use it loosely there's no need to quarrel with it.

Vs: People sometimes seem to hold on to something like that and they hold very strongly to the ideal that also the Buddha didn't deny a self, in that sense.

S: Well I think in that case one can say "well as a matter of historic fact and record, the Buddha did just simply say "Well, if you're not prepared to accept my word for it, as one who has read Buddhist scriptures, I suggest you simply study them yourself". He might of course claim to have done so, but people often make such claims. Perhaps in the end one discovers they have no more than a passing acquaintance at best with the 'Light of Asia' or something of that sort.

Devapriya: Do you think that in this connection, I sometimes feel in a vulnerable position when someone says, well where is it in the scriptures? I'm at a loss for an answer.

S: Well, if it is a question of where it is in the scriptures that the Buddha maintains the existence of a higher self and maintains that religion consists in the uncovering of this higher self, then the answer is 'Nowhere'. If you believe that it is there, please go and search and find it and show me. I'll be interested to see it. In India, especially, people are very ready to say 'This is in the scriptures'. The Hindus do it with their own scriptures. They say: well such-and-such is in the Vedas. Chances are that it isn't at all. It's their way of saying that such and such a thing is true, and I believe it, utterly. For [6] instance if you read Tulsidass's Hindi, Gramanira (?) Tulsidass is continually singing the praises of the Brahmins. He was of course a Brahmin himself, and he is continually saying 'Reverence to the Brahmins the highest religion. There is nothing better than that. The Brahmins are god upon earth. This the essence of the Vedas. This is the teaching of the Vedas'. The Vedas don't say anything of that sort at all. But he continually appeals to the Vedas for his support of his aggrandisement of the Brahmin caste. There is nothing of that sort. Well there are certain verses where it says the Brahmin comes from the head or mouth of Brahma and so on, but those are just a few lines, there's nothing about worshipping the Brahmin being the supreme religion. No, nothing at all. But continually invokes the Vedas as supporting that position. So, if Hindus do this to there own scriptures, it's not surprising what they do to the Buddhist scriptures. It's a sort of loose way of thinking that they've got or even many people have got. There's this vague appeal to authority, without really knowing the source to which you are appealing.

Devapriya: That was more what I was meaning where I could say it was in the Digha-Nikaya - this section, or that section.

S: Well I think if it is a question of showing them the conditionality of existence including the human mind itself, and showing that the concept is of a stream of consciousness rather than a static unchanging entity, well, there are very few pages that don't in fact bear this out. One would need to be acquainted with the Buddhist scriptures only to a very minimal extent to realize the general drift. But in a recent letter I had from Lokamitra, he mentions how Hindus have the view that, being Hindus, they understand Buddhism automatically and don't need anyone to teach it to them. And this is indeed their view. Many Hindus [7] believe that just because they're born and brought up in India; they know about Buddhism and understand it thoroughly, without having to study it at all. They say that it is in their blood, (laughter) and they really believe this, as if they have an instinct and that whatever they happen to say about

Buddhism must be true, because they say it. It's extraordinary the sort of vague, loose, woolly, inveterately mistaken thinking that they indulge in. You have some woolly thinkers in England, but believe me, there are no woolly thinkers like those in India; which, is not to say that they haven't got some very good thinkers indeed. But perhaps this woolly thinking is due to the fact that there's a wide diffusion of religious culture and a sort of religious knowledge. A lot of people think they know because certain things are 'in the air.' It's rather like a lot of people in the West thinking that they've got some scientific knowledge, but they haven't, they've just heard a bit here and a bit there, so it's much the same in India with the respect to religious philosophy. Everyone's heard about the Atman being identical to the Brahma. Everyone's heard about the snake and the rope. Anyone can repeat it. Everyone thinks they understand the Vedanta Philosophy. That's he's virtually enlightened, even if he's only got a smattering of theoretical knowledge. There's so much in the air, these terms are so generally known, that people just toss them about, so easily. It doesn't occur to them that they don't really know; and of course they believe that their knowledge includes Buddhism. "The Buddha born in India of course so he was a Hindu. The Indians are born Hindus; of course they understand Buddhism. It comes to them automatically, they don't need to think". This is really their view, their opinion. But again, that is no to say that there are not quite a few learned pundits among Hindus who really know what they're talking about. Though even then, not when it comes to Buddhism. They know what they talking about with regard to Hindu teachings and philosophies. They're often very well versed indeed. And one would be most unwise to get entangled in an argument with them. But you're unlikely to meet them, as they're not Western educated, don't know English.

[8]

Vajraketu: You mention in the Thousand Petalled Lotus similar occasions; Hindus just automatically assuming that Buddhism is just a part of Hinduism. What logical argument do they use?

S: They don't think it requires logical argument - (laughter) They don't condescend to logic; they just assert. It's obvious (laughter). It doesn't require proving. "The Buddha was born in India, born as a Hindu, brought up as a Hindu, you know of course he was a Hindu; it's only these wicked modern Buddhists, you know, who want to make a separate sect out of Buddhism" - this is what they tell you. "Hindus are broad-minded; they want everything to be one; they want Buddhism and Hinduism to be united. In fact they are united. It's only the narrow-minded Buddhists; who insist on being separate and different, and the Buddha of course wasn't a Buddhist". (laughter). Yes, this is what one is told; I've been told more than once, many a time. "Buddhists are narrow-minded, they want to be different, they want to have a religion of their own, they don't want to be part of this broad, universal Hinduism." This is what one is told. "Buddhists aren't tolerant". You'll hear it all if you move in the right circles in India. But probably you won't; you'll probably be seeing more of our Buddhist friends. Of course they tend to go to the opposite extreme. "There's absolutely nothing in common between Buddhism and Hinduism at all." And they're quite uneasy, some of them, even about the teaching of rebirth; even as interpreted in Buddhism, because they know that Hindus believe in rebirth, so that makes them a bit suspicious about the whole idea of rebirth. And some are even a bit suspicious about meditation, because they know that the Hindus meditate and they're very wary about having anything to do, anything that resembles what Hindus do, or appear to do. Some of them look askance at Bodhisattvas, because, as depicted in Indian art, they look remarkably like Hindu Gods. So they're not too happy about Bodhisattvas. They want Buddhism, their

Buddhism, to be completely different. They don't want to have anything [9] in common with Hinduism at all. Well, that's almost the other extreme. That is, perhaps, a healthier one; at least for them, from a practical point of view. You have to be very careful amongst them about speaking a good word even a word about Hinduism at all. They just don't believe that there's anything good about Hinduism, the majority of them. They've suffered at its hands for hundreds of years, it's not surprising. Hinduism has never done them any good, so they find it very difficult to believe that there is any good in Hinduism.

Sthiramati: How do they feel about Order Members doing yoga?

S: They were not very happy about that at first. No. Lokamitra originally, I don't know whether he still does, used to do his yoga-asanas behind closed doors. Yes. They weren't especially happy about yoga, about western Buddhists doing yoga. But I think that they've probably sort of adjusted to that now. Though one doesn't make too much of a point about one's doing yoga. They might take much more kindly to Western-type exercise.

Subhuti: Lokamitra has his audiences during his yoga sessions. They all come and see him. (Laughter)

S: I'm sure not anybody. Because it could be taken down and used as evidence against him. Some people, who are not our well-wishers, made great play of the fact, the supposed fact, that in the FWBO we worshipped a Buddha with a sword. And this was supposed to indicate that we didn't believe in non-violence. The Buddha with the sword of course being Manjugosha. Someone had just happened to see a picture of Manjugosha at the centre, and spread this report subsequently trying to do us some harm. So, these sort of pictures are kept now in the Order Members' own rooms. They're not kept out in the open where obviously visitors or members of the public can see them. It could give rise to misunderstanding. Notwithstanding what I've said, there are of course some very good people amongst the Hindus who are genuinely sympathetic, who can be good friends. But the general [10] climate of thought, when it comes to religious matters, is generally so vague, so confused, so woolly that, unless one knows really what one is doing one is well advised to steer clear of that particular topic. Or just agree to differ. Also you mustn't be misled by the fact that many Hindus will cheerfully criticize Hinduism. It doesn't mean a thing, not a thing. I've sometimes said that they criticize Hinduism in much the same way as a man who is well and truly married criticizes marriage. It's just like that. They're just letting off a bit of steam. They may not even follow any particular Hindu philosophy, but their daily life will be governed by orthodox Hindu caste requirements on the whole. That's what really counts. When it comes to giving their son or their daughter in marriage, they'll take good care that it's within the same caste, or even the same sub-caste, etc. However much they may profess to disbelieve in Hinduism.

Dharmapriya: You often speak of 'cast Hindus', by that do you mean members of the top three castes or just...

S: Yes, that means members of the top three castes some non-Brahmin caste Hindus can be no less orthodox in their own ways than the Brahmins are on occasion.

Dharmapriya: So the Shudras are not caste Hindus?

S: No they're not cast Hindus.

Subhuti: What are the proportions of the different castes?

S: I'm not quite sure of my statistics now, because the population has nearly doubled since I've been back in England. But Brahmins were a relatively small percentage. They used to be, when I was there, about twenty million, not more than that. They were a relatively small group, or group of groups. Kshatriyas are hardly existent at all, for various historical reasons. There are masses and masses of Vaisyas and Shudras.

[11]

Q: What exactly are shudras?

S: Shudras are members of the fourth caste. Not exactly untouchable; although again, it differs from area to area. They've got what they call pure Shudras, from whom a caste Hindu can take water and food, but you've got a whole lot of people, including what are called the scheduled castes, who are tribes and occupational castes, of varying degrees of touchability and untouchability, mostly untouchability. You've got about eighty million of these people in India at present. All of them are potentially convertible; eighty millions.

Dharmapriya: It sounds like the border between the Shudras and Untouchables is a bit vague, more like a bunch of sub-castes.

S: Yes; and sometimes the position of a particular caste within the total system is a matter of dispute. There are even certain communities which are disputably brahmin, or disputably kshatriya - who are recognized by some brahmin communities as brahmins, not by others; or recognized by lower castes as brahmins but not by brahmins themselves, and so on. Usually there is a long history. The most celebrated case of disputed caste is that of Shivaji. Shivaji is the great Maratha or Maharashtrian hero. If you want to annoy a Maratha, just question whether Shivaji was a kshatriya. He's their great hero; but actually, as a matter of historical record, he was a shudra. But he gained political power; he was a great military commander - some say a sort of bandit chief. But anyway he gained power; he fought with the Muslims. This made him very popular with the orthodox Hindus. And in the end, after great trouble and great expenditure of money - some say just more bribery - he persuaded some brahmins to actually perform his well, the equivalent of a coronation ceremony. Now, according to orthodox Hindus, this sort of ceremony, with the aid of Vedic mantras, can be performed only for a genuine kshatriya. But he managed to persuade a small number of brahmins to perform this ceremony and they [ 12] professed to be satisfied that he was a genuine kshatriya. So, the Maharatas themselves regard him as a kshatriya and a duly-anointed king etc. But a lot of people particularly a majority amongst the Brahmins altogether deny this and say that those Brahmins who did the ceremony were suborned and Shivaji and his descendants are definitely Shudras. That's a very celebrated case, but it still is a matter of hot dispute in Maharashtra.

Q: How long ago did that happen?

S: It happened in the seventeenth century during the time of Aurangzeb. There's a well known novel on the career of Shivaji. I forget the author, but it's called Desert Rat. There's another book of that title on Rommel isn't there? I think this one is quite a few years earlier. It's quite an old book. This particular book is not popular with those orthodox Marathas in Maharashtra



who have read it. They don't regard it as giving a true picture of the Shivaji story. But it is interesting, it is the same Shavaji who built a number of forts, hilltop forts around Maharashtra, and it's in one of those, now ruined, that we often have retreats, way up on the mountain top, with quite spectacular scenery all around. That's where we've had our ordination retreats. There's also a great to do at present about returning Shivaji's sword. You haven't read about that in English newspapers sometime ago? Yes, earlier in the year there's an agitation going on in Maharashtra for Shivaji's sword to be returned. Because Shivaji's personal sword, beautifully jewelled and all that, passed to his descendants, generation by generation, and one of them, about 100 years ago, presented it to Queen Victoria, and her descendants have had it ever since. So, the suggestion now is that this should be returned from England to India, especially to Maharashtra. Now the reason for this is of course obvious. It all started off with the relics of Sariputta and Mogallana. So, the Hindus have cottoned on to this now. So they're trying to get things back so that they can have a big ceremony and a big celebration and all that sort of thing to emphasize their particular values, or [13] reinforce their particular values. So the fact that orthodox Hindus in Maharashtra and elsewhere want to get back Shivaji's sword, and have a big demonstration and procession and so on is to some extent intended to counteract the movement of Buddhist revival. Shivaji despite being a shudra was a strong supporter of orthodox Hinduism.

Dharmapriya: You've spoken of Shivaji as a Maratha. What sort of group are the Marathas?

S: The Marathas are the kshaitryas of Maharashtra. They're of course to be distinguished from the Mahars who were Untouchables. But the Marathas are the kshaitrya clans of Maharashtra, who of course fought the British in a series of Maratha wars at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. This brings me to another little tale which may be of some interest. When I touring in the interior of Maharashtra, many many years ago, I was taken to a village called Gorikal, and we completed the last stage of our journey by bus, and I got down from the bus on the outskirts of this village there was a party of people, that is to say ex-untouchable Buddhists, waiting to receive me. Now, I noticed that the bus had halted just by a little monument, a sort of little almost like village war memorial in England, surrounded by an iron railing. And as part of the sort of proceedings of welcoming me, this monument was garlanded. So I was naturally a bit interested and took a closer look and sure enough there were English inscriptions. And these commemorated a battle of Gorikal when the British fought, I forget the date, 1805 or something like that, and defeated the Marathas. So afterwards I said to my Buddhist friend, 'This is rather odd; you garlanding this shrine, this British victory'. So, they said, 'Yes that's true; but we were fighting with the British'. (Laughter). In those days the British East India Company or whatever; had raised regiments from amongst the Mahars. So, they were only too glad to fight with these caste Hindu people and they still maintain right down to the present, they were remembering and garlanding that shrine, that they were on the other side. So, there is quite a bit of sort of sentiment of that sort, as it were, underneath among these people. And this is one of the reasons it [14] is quite easy for English Buddhists to work among them. They like the British. They don't make any distinction between English and Scots. They may like the Scots even more, and of course they don't mind the Welsh either! But of course this would tend to make the Government of India rather suspicious if it did give any attention to the matter, which it may well be doing. They're very, very suspicious of the... some people in India among the ruling circles who are very suspicious of the British still and think that they haven't really given up their Imperial intentions at all and, in all sorts of crafty ways which the innocent Indian can't understand, are continuing to control things. They tend to believe that, or at least, to profess to believe it.

Anyway, that's just by way of an aside, illuminating to some extent the position in India. I was trying to find Gorikal on the map, but I found two or three Gorikals and I couldn't remember exactly where it was. But I'm hoping maybe in the course of my travels in this year and next year I'll come across, I'll stumble across the little village again and maybe take a photograph of the monument. I asked Lokamitra, but he didn't know; I hope they haven't knocked it down, or anything like that. Yes, by the time of these wars it wasn't exactly descendants of Shivaji that the British were fighting. By that time the hereditary Brahmin Prime Ministers had taken over. They were called the Peshwas; and they were ruling Maharashtra. So of course the scheduled caste peoples hated them all the more. They were very, very orthodox. But that's again quite celebrated story, how the Brahmin Prime Minister took over from the descendants of Shivaji and gradually took power. In Maharashtra there's a very strong antagonism between the Marathas and the Brahmins; so much so, that Brahmins literally sometimes now try to side with the Ex-Untouchables to make common cause against the Marathas. But the Marathas are very tough people, they're a fighting race.

Subhuti: Are they the largest caste in Maharashtra?

[15]

S: I couldn't say if they are the largest. I suspect that they are the largest single caste Hindu group. They're certainly bigger than the Brahmins.

Prajnananda: Was there actually any real dent made in the caste system while the British were ruling in Maharashtra? Or did they tend to stay out of that?

S: I think the British tended to stay out of that. But there couldn't be dent made dent made [?], if only through education. There was some dent, not a very serious one I would say.

Khemaloka: Did the British follow the rules of the caste system themselves?

S: No they didn't. And this certainly was one of the things that made a dent, because the British very often employed ex-untouchables or untouchables as house servants, which was unthinkable for a Hindu, for a caste-Hindu. They actually had them in the house, even handling food, even working as cooks, and bearers, and this helped to give the Untouchables the idea that they were human beings and many of them are still grateful that they were given those opportunities by the British. There was though an unfortunate move at the beginning of this century, for some reason or other, the British were persuaded, I imagine by caste Hindus in positions of influence, to stop recruiting soldiers from among the Mahas. This is something which upset the Mahas very much. In the Indian Army in India, there were many caste Hindus, a lot of Brahmins served as soldiers, and it seems there was a pressure on the British Government not recruit from the Mahas. They eventually gave in to that pressure, so the Mahas were quite upset about this and this is one of the black marks against the British, from their point of view. At the same time, they are grateful for the opportunities they were given, which they wouldn't have otherwise got. Anyway, were there any other questions?

[16]

Jon Rice: Yes, there was one question. You said in a question and answer session a few weeks ago that a woman couldn't be reborn as a Mara-devaputra. Can you say why? You said it was obvious, but...

S: The Buddhist texts don't actually mention - but I say 'obvious' because if a Mara is a reborn wicked human being, and if a woman can't be reborn as a Mara, it suggests that a woman can't be as wicked as that. Do you see what I mean? And actually you do find that men tend more easily to criminality than women. There are far more crimes committed by men than women. But on the other hand a woman can't become a brahma, a maha-brahma. It's as though, in a sense, she can't be as good as a man. So what does that suggest? It's as though the male of the species, the human species, is much more extreme. He can swing this way - an extreme of goodness - swing that way - an extreme of badness. And that is, in fact, perhaps what one finds.

End of Side One

Steve Francis: Do you feel that to be an absolute biological limitation, or more in terms of a human being having particular feminine or masculine aspects?

S: Well, here one is in the realm of generalizations. But I nevertheless do hold to the somewhat old-fashioned view that there are differences between men and women - on the whole. And that, therefore, one can make generalizations that 'men are a bit like this' or 'women are a bit like this', even though it may be possible to cite various exceptions to the generalization. I mean, someone might say: Well, do you think that men are more intellectual than women? And one might say yes. And then they cite the example of a woman they know who's quite intellectual - as though that refutes what you've said. Well, that is nonsense - because one is obviously generalizing, and there are hundreds of millions of women and of men in the world - so obviously there'll be many exceptions. But, nonetheless, it is possible, I think, to make such important generalizations. And one of those is, I think, that men seem to be inherently more inclined to criminality than women, more inclined to violence. Hence more likely to be born as a Mara. I mean, I don't exclude the extreme possibility that a woman, if she tried hard enough, could be reborn as a Mara Devaputra; I don't absolutely put it beyond them. But I think it's highly unlikely - and the Buddhist scriptures seem to rule it out altogether. (Pause) What about Subhuti: did your group have any queries?

Subhuti: You wanted to know about personal devils.

Rudiger Janson: Yeah... You refer to the 'Dhyana for Beginners' seminar, where there are mentioned three kinds of personal devils. You mention only one of them: where you experience fear and experience it as Mara - and you don't mention the other two personal devils.

[17]

S: I don't remember this section. Presumably it could be any intense unskilful emotion. If you experience fear, you say to yourself: 'Ah, that's Mara'. Or if you experience intense anger: 'Ah, that's Mara'. If you even experience greed or craving: 'Ah, that's Mara.' I imagine that that is what I was referring to. I can't remember the exact passage. One can imagine to oneself that if one gives in to that particular unskilful mental state that Mara is chuckling with glee and rubbing his sooty little hands. (Pause) Is that all?

Subhuti: I was just wondering what the consequences of the atma view would be? If somebody held that view, what would be the ethical consequences?

S: My own opinion, based on some experience of the Indian scene, is that those sort of beliefs tend to maintain the status quo, the social status quo. Because the brahmin, for instance, will say: 'Well, I recognize God in all. Yes, he's an Untouchable - but the Atman is in him too. I recognize that.' So this would make it appear that the brahmin is very lofty in his attitude, very broad in his outlook that he sees the divinity, he sees God, in the Untouchable too. Sometimes he'll make that point. There's several well-known Hindu verses which make this point, which everybody knows - about there being no difference between a learned brahmin and an Untouchable in essence. But, you see, the realm of social realities is kept quite separate. So they can sort of compensate, in a manner of speaking, for their social rigidity by their philosophical breadth and broad-mindedness.

It's rather interesting that they're going to celebrate the anniversary - I forget which anniversary; it might even be the fiftieth anniversary - of Dr Ambedkar's repudiation of the Manu-smriti. And they've had the impudence to invite Mrs Gandhi, the Prime Minister, to preside over the morning functions. I don't know whether she'll accept. And they've invited me to give a lecture in the evening. So I don't know what's going to happen or how that's going to go down. But Lokamitra tentatively accepted on my behalf. It is at the original place where this took place - at Manmad, where I have been before, in Maharashtra. Manu-smriti being the sort of charter of deprivation of rights as far as the Untouchables are concerned, because it lays down how the lower castes are to be treated by the higher castes. So Ambedkar publicly burned this and thereby became, overnight, the most unpopular, not to say hated, man in India practically. And there were threats against his life. The caste Hindus were utterly outraged ... utterly. They just couldn't understand why he'd done it. They just couldn't see any fault in it, or anything [18] wrong in the way they were treating Untouchables, or the lower castes in general. They were so convinced that the Manusmriti represented a sort of God-given authority. So it is as though, if people can only believe that what they are doing is the 'Will of God', they can do anything. Anything; with a good conscience, with a clear conscience. They can burn people at the stake, they can treat them as Untouchables; if they can believe that this is what God wants. It's such a useful way of shifting responsibility, not that you consciously do that, but that is what happens: 'That God has ordered it, it's the will of God that we're carrying out'. Well, as the Ayatollah Khomeini said in Iran.

Dharmapriya: Is this Vedantism, this belief in Atman?

S: Yes, Vedanta is when it is believed that the Atman is non-different from Brahma and that Brahman is the only Reality; this is Vedanta. Though there is a number of different interpretations. Yes, but there are quite a number of Brahmins, especially in the South, who don't accept Shankara's Advaita, they're followers of Dvaita-vada or dualism, and they're called smrita-brahmins because they follow the smritis or social scriptures very strictly. Strange to say, that there are many people who profess Shankara's non-dualism but at the same time maintain social distinctions very strictly, very rigidly.

Dharmapriya: So Atma is Brahma, or Brahman?

S: Well, Brahma is the term used in the Pali scriptures, but Brahman, the impersonal absolute, is the term used in the Upanishads. So Shankara's school maintains that non duality is the Reality, that Brahman is in fact the only Reality - that the world is an illusion. Ramanuja, who teaches Visistadvaita, a qualified non dualism, maintains that the universe is real, but only partially real - it's only an emanation of Brahman. Other schools maintain it's a creation of

Brahman, not an emanation - that's Madhva, the dualistic school. There were various others. So you've got: Advaita-Vedanta, non dualistic Vedanta; you've got Visistadvaita, qualified non dualism; you've got Dvaita-vada, which is dualistic Vedanta; then you've got Dvaitadvaita, which is dualism and non dualism combined, then you've got (??) which is the view of the Bengal Vaisnavas, which is inconceivable difference and non-difference.  
(Laughter)

[19]

So you've got all these different schools. Usually in the West when we say Vedanta, we think it means Shankaras Vedanta, well that's by no means the case. That is just one school, though it's become more prominent in the West through the Rama Krishna Mission, because they follow that particular school.

Subhuti: Do you think you could generalize and say that this tendency to posit an Ultimate Metaphysical Entity comes from a desire to fix things and to...

S: Yes, the more I think about it, the more I see that that fixing of an Ultimate Metaphysical Entity, under whatsoever name, is not only historically incompatible with Buddhism, but is incompatible with spiritual life itself. I think - though perhaps I've been a bit careless in the past myself - I think that in speaking of Buddhism, especially the Mahayana and say Zen, one should avoid speaking in such a way as to suggest that one is positing one of these Metaphysical absolutes. Buddhahood is not that, the Dharmakaya is not that, Nirvana is not that, Suchness is not that, Tathata is not that.

Dharmapriya: It sounds especially that if one should ever dare to use terms like the "absolute mind", one should be very precise...

S: I think if I was setting forth Buddhism, say as it ought to be presented now, leaving aside how it has been presented in the past, I don't think I'd use such terms. I think you're almost bound to be misunderstood. Suzuki has flung around quite a lot of absolutes, with gay abandon almost. I think that's been a source of much confusion. Then of course you get one of these fictitious Absolutes from Buddhism, allegedly, and then you try to compare it with God, or Godhead, and then you really do get into a mess, you really get confused, and in the end your poor little head is just spinning; except you may not know it and go and write a book.  
(Laughter)

[20]

(Pause)

Q: Is the caste system technically illegal?

S: Oh no. The practice of Untouchability is illegal, by Act of Parliament. But offences under those provisions are apparently never investigated or brought to court. So it is a dead letter really. I think I'm correct in saying there has never been a successful prosecution under that Act; though untouchability is still practised all over the place. But the Caste system as such is certainly not illegal.

Jinapriya: Was the token illegality of untouchability perhaps instituted by the English...

S: No. This is included in the Constitution of India. And it was Ambedkar himself who was Law Minister at the time, on Neru's invitation, although he didn't belong to the Congress Party. And he steered much of what came to be known as the Hindu Code through Parliament, but in a very truncated form, and in end he resigned in disgust, but he did manage to get this provision past. With Neru's support. But there was strong opposition. But it's never actually been enforced. It's a dead letter.

Subhuti: Are the advantages, social advantages, to the Vaishyas and Shudras in their caste status? In a way why should they put up with it?

S: On the whole people are very proud of their caste. Their life is so bound up with their caste. The caste - perhaps this isn't generally understood - each caste is almost a self-contained entity. Each caste has a governing body, which is called the caste panchayat. And it is this body which decides if someone should be outcasted, that is to say expelled from the caste and so on. And the caste or sub-caste is usually people's main group, the main group to which they belong. They don't think so much in terms of province or even of nationality. The caste is 'The group', so far as they are concerned. It's very often the sort of welfare [21] group. If you leave your wife and children destitute, it's your caste-fellows that you rely on to provide for them. It is they who will see to your cremation. Do you see what I mean? One of the most serious things that you can say to a Hindu, if you are rebuking him for something, a bad thing he has done, 'When you die, who is going to take up your body?' You see what I mean? You will have made yourself so unpopular that your caste fellows will not even wish to carry your body to the cremation ground. And of course nobody else is going to do it. No one from any other caste is going to do it. At best, you'll have to get the sweepers to do it, which would be a terrible disgrace. Do you see what I mean? So the caste or sub-caste is very much the social unit, and also, in addition to and worshipping the main Hindu gods, most caste have got their own gods and goddesses. So the caste is also the religious unit, like a sub-sect of a church, and they've got old traditions. Different castes are mentioned in scriptures. And people are very proud of their castes, and it's interesting that even very low caste people are proud of their caste. You even hear barbers, who are very low caste, boasting that they're indispensable to Hindu society because without them you can't even get married. Because before marriage the bride groom has to have a hair-cut and shave etc., so barbers are essential to society. There can't even be marriages without them. So they're proud of being barbers, even though higher castes for instance will not take food from their hand and so on. Every caste reinforces its pride by treating the castes, or caste below it, in a condescending way, or in a way that excludes them, or discriminates against them. So it's very difficult to come to the actual bottom because there isn't general agreement as to who is exactly at the bottom. It's very difficult to find a caste however low that doesn't look down on a caste even lower... so everybody's pride is reinforced by the caste system. Do you see what I mean? Everybody's proud of his caste. It's with the help of your caste-fellows that you get married. When you celebrate a wedding you invite your caste-fellows. There's a very strong sense of caste-solidarity. And the caste as a whole is always trying to inch itself up in the caste scale. Sometimes it succeeds, sometimes it doesn't; sometimes the caste sinks. And as I said before, often there are disputes as to exactly which position a caste occupies [22] in the internal structure, because there are about 2,000 recognized castes. Kyists in Bengal and Biha would describe themselves as Kshatryas; that is not generally recognized, they are generally recognized as Shudras. The famous Swami Vivekananda was a Kya and he was taunted with this in the West. Someone said he was of Shudra origin. He denied it. He maintained he was a Kshatrya and descended from Rama but in India people would laugh at that claim on behalf

of Kyist. The Kyas are a writing caste, a group of clerks in Government service of Shudra origin. They sort of rose to prominence under the Mogul emperors and then were taken over by the British as writers.

Khemaloka: Are there other religions which practice a form of caste; such as the Sikhs?

S: The Sikhs unfortunately do practise it. Even though in theory they've given it up. But in practice... there are Sikh Untouchables. This is one of the reasons why Ambedkar, after considering converting to Sikhism, decided against it. There are certainly... the Jains observe the caste system. Jains are generally regarded as being all Vaishas and they inter-marry with Hindu Vaishas, and there is a caste system among Christians in South India. I don't know what it is like now, but when I was there, certainly converts, ex-caste Hindu converts were worshipping in separate churches from ex-scheduled caste converts. They wouldn't mix even after conversion to Christianity. There's a story here, which I'll tell in a moment to conclude, because it illustrates the use of the word "dharma" in Hindu Society. When I was in South India I was told this story by a Christian actually, a Christian friend of mine. He said there was an old woman, of a caste Hindu family who was converted to Christianity. And then Christmas came along, and apparently there was some question of attending a feast or celebration where all the Christians would gather. And of course, some had been of caste Hindu origins and some of untouchable origin. So the old woman objected, she said, 'How can I go along with those people?' So the Christian missionary who was a European said, 'Well, look, you're a Christian now. You have converted to Christianity, they've converted to Christianity'. So, the old woman said, 'Yes, I know I'm a Christian, but that mean that I should [23] give up my dharma?' "Dharma" meaning the caste-duties, the caste distinctions. This is what "Dharma" usually means for the ordinary person in India. So this is why for our ex-untouchable Buddhist Friends Dharma is a dirty word. I mean in England we like to say Dharma instead of religion. They don't like to say Dharma. They would like to get rid of the word Dharma. They regret that it is found in Buddhist scriptures. They're much happier with the English word religion. It doesn't have the same associations for them.

Sthiramati: How do they get around that one then?

S: Well they can't. They just have to accept that, well, the Buddhist Dharma is different. But they're not happy with the word at all. It's got such disgusting connotations for them. Just as 'religion' has for many people in the West. If anything the word 'dharma' has for them even more negative connotations, than 'religion' has for many people in the West. So you see their position? They're not even happy with their own language sometimes, because it is so impregnated with Hinduism.

Subhuti: You do hear that some Sangha-Nikayas in Ceylon practise caste.

S: This is true - one... The Nikaya which practises this is the Shyamanikaya, which is the biggest and wealthiest. The ordination, succession of ordination was introduced from Thailand, from Shyama, that was the Shyama-nikaya, it was introduced about two hundred years ago. What happened was this. Originally the Shyama Nikaya, which was the only Nikaya at that time, accepted people from all the different castes. There was a sort of rudimentary caste system in Ceylon. So one day, what happened was, that the King happened to meet a bhikkhu, even kings did in those days. He saluted the bhikkhu very politely, but

afterwards he was told that the bhikkhu was from a low caste. So he became offended that he, a high-caste man, had saluted a man of low-caste origin. So he sent instructions to the Sangha that in the future they were to ordain people only from the Gigoiga community, not from the lower castes. And the Sangha unfortunately obeyed that directive, perhaps they had no [24] alternative But they continued even under the British rule, when they need not have continued, and even after independence, they continued. But in the mean time two other Nikayas had been introduced, the Armripur Nikaya and the Ramaniya Nikaya, both from Burma, and they did not make that distinction. So you have a position in which in Ceylon today, only the Armipor-Nikaya would take Europeans. I mean most people didn't realize this but the Shamina-Nikaya would not accept Europeans. All Europeans, who had been ordained, except until very recently, were ordained into the Armripur-Nikaya, and even someone like Bhikkhu Narada who is very famous, is sometimes reproached in Ceylon as a low-caste bhikkhu. There's still some caste feeling you see. I mean, he told me this himself, when we were talking once in Calcutta. But recently, very recently, there has been a move to amalgamate the three Nikayas and I have heard that there have been one or two ordinations with bhikkhus of the different Nikayas sitting together and ordaining together. If that is so, that is a positive development.

Devapriya: So that's like a sort of ecclesiastical lineage?

S: Yes, well after I was ordained, I was told which Nikaya I belonged to; it was considered quite important. But these are just lines of transmission. There were no Nikayas in the Buddha's day, they're of relatively late origin. A Nikaya means a subdivision of the Sangha and people belonging to different Nikayas normally don't perform what are called Sangha-Karmas, official acts of the Sangha, together. They don't observe the Patimokkha ceremony together. They don't hold ordinations together. They don't observe the (??) ceremony together and so on. But lay people are not attached to any particular Nikaya; they support all Nikayas impartially.

Q: What is the (??)

S: That's the sort of confession ceremony with the robe offerings at the end of the Rainy season retreat. For instance when Anagarika Dharmapala was ordained in Sarnath, Shyama Nikaya bhikkhus came from Ceylon to perform the ceremony. But there was one bhikkhu at Sarnath who I afterwards came to know who told me [25] this story himself who was not a member of the Shyama-Nikaya, and he had to go into Benares for the day, you know while Anagarika Dharmapala was being ordained, so as not to introduce any confusion into the question of Sena, which is another very complex ecclesiastical matter. Sena being a sort of ordination boundary as it's sometimes called although that isn't really correct - because it's more than that.

So these differences are still regarded as important. But their importance is decreasing. There's no doubt about that. Some bhikkhus are quite impatient of these distinctions, and I must say that now, from within my experience, Sinhalese bhikkhus in India did not observe these distinctions. There are so few of them, they would have had difficulty in doing so anyway. But anyway they don't observe them.

Anyway that's all for now.



End of Tape 29 T. 81

Tuscany Preordination Course 1981

Questions and Answers Session 23

Sangharakshita: What questions have emerged?

Subhuti: We had quite a lengthy discussion about single-sex communities - the whys and wherefores. We didn't get any total agreement. I can only really think of one question to come out of it, which was: Can you develop your feminine side in a relationship with a woman?

S: It isn't impossible to develop your feminine side in any situation. It seems to me as though some people have a sort of hunger for absolutes. Do you see what I mean? As if they expect a rule to be laid down: you can never under any circumstances do this, or you can never under any circumstances do that. Or such-and-such a situation will always be such-and-such, or will always have such-and-such an effect. One simply can't generalize to that extent. Do you see what I am getting at? So I don't really feel called upon to pronounce in such a highly generalized way. It would be a very rash person who said that you couldn't develop any aspect of your personality in a certain situation. On the other hand, it might not usually be the best situation in which to develop your so-called feminine side. But it might develop, even under those relatively unpropitious circumstances, one cannot altogether deny. So one would have thought that if one asks for a highly generalized assertion, one way or the other, in that sort of way, one hasn't really given the subject very serious consideration. Grass can grow even in a busy street, if you see what I mean. The resources of the human spirit, one might say, are infinite, and can on occasion rise triumphant over any circumstances. One should never lose that faith.

Subhuti: I'm trying to extract a question from quite a lengthy discussion.

S: Yes, I realize it isn't your question, that you probably would never have thought of asking such a thing. (Laughter)

Subhuti: I don't think any of us actually thought of asking that particular question. It just seemed to be a way of trying to get you to discuss the likelihoods and possibilities and ...

S: I think even the degree of likelihood is very difficult to ascertain because it depends on so many personal, highly individual factors. So I would not like to rule out the possibility of some development of one's feminine side even under those circumstances. But experience does seem to indicate that that is not perhaps the best kind of situation in which to develop that particular side of your personality. [2] That of course begs the whole question of whether one can really speak of a 'feminine' side, and, if so, how literally, or to what extent, and in what that consists, and so on. I usually feel that if someone individually asks a question which seems to demand a very sweeping, highly generalized reply, there's something behind it. It's as though someone is asking for a sort of justification or ready-made rationalization. Whereas it should be so obvious that you cannot generalize about such situations to that extent.

So was that the only mouse that the mountain produced this morning?

Subhuti: No. That was one mouse that was produced, but ... I can't think quite how to get you going! (Laughter)

S: Well, I'm quite willing to be got going but not to repeat myself for the umpteenth time.

Clive Pomfret: People seem to have quite varied ideas about what femininity is. Some people think of it more in terms of female activities, you know, like ... (Laughter) When I say female activities, I mean activities that women are normally associated with through the conditioning of our culture, like washing-up and serving, things like that. Some people seem to associate it more with qualities like receptivity, in terms of understanding.

S: In other words, there is a lot of confusion of thought. Because one doesn't necessarily develop one's feminine side begging that whole question for the moment - simply by engaging in activities which in a particular culture are normally performed by women. In some cultures women do all the cooking; in others men tend to do it. So one cannot say that cooking represents a feminine activity in the more psychological sense, and that one would not necessarily develop one's feminine side more by getting into that particular kind of activity. Do you see what I mean? Again, in some cultures men wear skirts and women wear trousers; in others, men wear the trousers and women wear the skirts. So you can't say that either wearing skirts or wearing trousers is essentially feminine or essentially masculine. It's a question of a particular cultural convention. So that sort of pseudo-feminine or pseudo-masculine type of activity has to be distinguished from that which is perhaps more genuinely masculine or more genuinely feminine. Do you see what I mean?

Gerald Burns: Do you think there is a relevance even at that cultural level? I mean, given that one lives in a society where one understands that women do certain things...

S: If one was to engage in activities that conventionally women normally engage in, or vice versa, that would certainly help free one from a certain type of social conditioning. But [3] it would not necessarily develop either your feminine or your masculine qualities specifically.

While Clive was talking I was recalling a rather amusing example in this sort of area. I happened to be dipping last night into a book which I borrowed from Sthiramati on 'Byron in Italy'. Byron was spending his time in Italy in rather a different manner from what we are. (Laughter) At one stage he became a 'cavalliera cevante'. I don't know if anyone has ever heard of 'cavalliera cevante'. It's an Italian term - I'm not even sure if I've pronounced it correctly. But it means, literally translated, a 'knight in attendance', a knight in attendance on a lady; sometimes he's her lover, sometimes not. But it's his duty to attend her to the opera and to the ball and to fetch and carry for her.

So poor Byron was inveigled into some such relationship for a while, and he was attending the lady in question to balls and to the theatre and the opera, and he was writing letters about his servitude back to his close friends in London. He made a remark at one point that he was just about learning to fold her shawl properly; sometimes he hadn't been able to fold it properly and sometimes he got it mixed up with the shawls of other ladies, which occasioned consternation among other 'cavalliera cevants'! (Laughter) But that was all getting sorted out and he was learning. But he was apparently already beginning to tire of it. So did that represent the development of Byron's feminine side? Getting into tagging along behind this particular lady and learning how to fold her shawl correctly and bring it when it was called for

and hand her into her carriage, etc., etc. Did it really help?

Well, I'm only asking the question. I'm citing the example just because we have to be very careful that when we speak in terms of developing one's feminine side - in respect of a man or developing one's masculine side - in respect of a woman we are talking about something which is real, something which is not just social and cultural but which is psychological and spiritual. And that you're really developing an important and hitherto dormant aspect of yourself - really developing it, which isn't an easy matter. I mentioned the other day that change is not easy, and this is part of change: that you develop an aspect of yourself hitherto not developed. And you're certainly not going to develop yourself, your feminine side, just by playing around with ladies' fans or shawls or doing a bit of cooking. Again, I'm saying this for the umpteenth time. It's a more radical, a more important, thing than that.

Bob Jones: To refer to Subhuti's question, you said that your experience tends to suggest that relationships ...

S: Well, when I say 'my experience', I mean observation of other people's experiences within the Friends. (Laughter) Not only observations but their experiences as reported to me by themselves.

[4]

Bob Jones: Yes, yes, I accept that point. But you also said the other day that, on the basis of your experience of the men's communities in London, you hadn't seen much femininity developed there either.

S: That's true. Well, they've only been set up for a short while. Some people have only been in them a very short while. This is not a question of staying in a men's community for a few months or even a year or two and - hey presto! - your feminine side is prominently developed. It's a much bigger thing than that. And also, by staying in a men's community, you only give yourself the opportunity, you only give yourself the space. It doesn't follow that automatically those qualities will develop - the qualities of the more feminine. You have to make an actual effort to develop them, take certain steps. I mentioned in this connection doing, for instance, the Tara sadhana intensively. The Tara sadhana doesn't have just a psychological significance but it certainly does have that significance on its lower levels, as it were.

No situation, however favourable, will do the job for you, so to speak, in any connection. You are just given the opportunity, at least given the situation, where circumstances are favourable rather than otherwise. After that, it's up to you.

Was that the only question then?

Dave Rice: There is one related to that. It's right at the end of the Omnibus in the article we were reading where it mentions that one of the factors that we need to be aware of and to avoid is that when you've given something up and it's been a craving - perhaps a woman, for example, or a drug like marijuana - there is a tendency to develop a cynical and exploitative attitude towards the object you've given up. Why do you think this occurs and is it healthy?

S: Well, it's quite obvious why it occurs: it's self-defensive and self-protective. You can't afford to let that object get too close. You tend to keep it at a distance, and in order to do that

you tend to, as it were, undervalue it. This is a sort of defence mechanism, one might say. And people will almost invariably do this to begin with for a while with regards to anything that they have given up as, so to speak, a matter of discipline. If you give up, for example, alcohol - you may still rather like alcohol but you've given it up as a discipline. So you're not going to sing the praises of alcohol; you can't afford to do that. If anything, you're going to do the opposite; you're going to dwell upon the more negative aspects of alcohol. You're not going to be very objective about it for a while. You can't afford to be - that's very understandable.

Dave Rice: So one needs a little bit of space, as it were, [5] between when you give it up and when you become a bit more objective. Perhaps you even put it down just to make yourself feel a little stronger about having given it up.

S: Yes, you may. Obviously you are not being objective; but then you cannot afford to be objective. But, hopefully, as you become stronger, then you will be able to afford to be more objective and, in a sense, more fair.

Let me just say one thing more, give another example. It's like in India with the caste system. There are certain things which one could say in favour of the caste system, but in India you just can't afford to say those things, because you're being pressed in upon by the caste system in a very unpleasant and unhealthy way all the time. So if you were to admit that there was anything positive about the caste system at all you'd be opening the gates to the enemy - and they would come in. So maybe when the social situation in India is very much improved in this respect and caste is no longer as rigid and oppressive as it was, then maybe it would be possible to admit publicly that - yes - there may be certain positive features about the caste system. But until then you, collectively, cannot really afford to do that.

Rudiger Jansen: I would like to go back to the question we had before, about femininity and masculinity. We usually have quite a lot of difficulties, it seems, to understand what feminine qualities really are. I'm not so sure we really know what masculine qualities in a positive sense are.

S: Well, I suggest if we get too confused by the whole discussion, we just drop those terms altogether. Think in purely Buddhistic traditional terms, in terms of developing dana, sila, ksanti, virya, samadhi and prajna. And instead of thinking in terms of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', you can think in terms of virya and ksanti, and ask yourself whether you have yet developed those qualities adequately. And forget all about masculinity and femininity. It's probably simpler and easier and more straightforward to consider the whole business in traditional terms, spiritual terms. There are certain qualities that you need to develop; whether they are psychologically more associated with men or more associated with women, you don't need to know perhaps. Just look at yourself and ask yourself: 'Have I got all those qualities which are requisite for the spiritual life? Do I exhibit sufficient virya? Do I exhibit sufficient ksanti?' And see where you are deficient and try to develop that. There is a lot of literature in circulation at present where the whole question of masculinity and femininity and the androgyny and so on is discussed at length, almost ad nauseam. But judging by the discussion which people have on these matters in the Friends, it doesn't really seem very helpful to consider the spiritual life, and the qualities requisite to be developed in the spiritual life, from that sort of point of view.

[6]

Clive Pomfret: It seems that talking in those terms starts off, just by association, a whole list of distractions, distractive terms, connected with other subjects.

S: Yes. And I think that most people will find it relatively easy to determine whether they are deficient in virya or not, deficient in ksanti or not, just as with regards to those other qualities, those other Paramitas.

Vessantara: Returning to Dave's point about your defence mechanisms after you've given something up: presumably one has to be aware, mindful, that that's taking place.

S: Oh yes, indeed.

Vessantara: I've sometimes been aware of somebody who's just given something up then attacking it quite vigorously and in a way unfairly and I've thought, if it's an Order Member in a position of responsibility, there could be complications ...

S: Well, as an example I gave you poor old alcohol - which isn't in a position to stand up for itself. So you have to be careful!

Dave Rice: I think - to close in a little more on that one some of the conversation we had was to do with the element of cynicism towards women in the single-sex communities, which seems to be quite apparent. It seems to me that if one's also trying to develop the four Brahmaviharas, and especially equanimity, and to have this cynical attitude towards women, just because you've given women up and moved into a single-sex community, is a very unhealthy mental state.

S: I would go further than that, I would say more than that and again, this is something I have said in the past - that I think cynicism generally is a thoroughly unhealthy mental state. And, whether it's in connection with women or whether it's in connection with anything else, it's a state what people shouldn't allow themselves to indulge in.

But what is cynicism? Perhaps that needs to be better understood. What does one mean by cynicism? Are people even clear about that? (Pause)

Pete Shan: Something to do with repressed feeling?

S: What about the literal meaning of the word? Does that help at all?

Dave Rice: An assumed superior negative put-down.

S: Well, that's a description rather than a definition.

Ciaran Saunders: An undervaluation.

[7]

S: It's an undervaluation - but it's probably more than that. It's not an undervaluation just due to a lack of information. It's a deliberate undervaluation which expresses a negative mental attitude, a negative emotional attitude. I don't know that superiority is necessarily involved

here. I've noticed this within communities. I can't say that I've noticed it especially with regards to women - I mean in men's communities - but with regards to a lot of things: life itself, in a way; other people generally. It's a sort of attitude of persistent denigration or running down. It's something quite black, so to speak. There seems to be, very likely, a strong element of resentment in it, an inability to appreciate anything positive; a questioning of motives - always attributing undesirable motives to people. Questioning people's idealism.

It's a pseudo-Freudian approach very often: at the bottom of any idealistic behaviour, at the bottom of any apparently disinterested behaviour, there's some nasty little Freudian motive lurking - that's the real motivation. That is cynicism. That people are not really capable of nobility, they're not really capable of altruistic behaviour; they are motivated entirely by quite low motives. And therefore you get, with cynicism, the attitude of the 'man of the world': the pseudo-man-of-the-world who has known it all, seen it all, isn't taken in, is disillusioned, cynical; doesn't believe in anything any more.

So it also goes with an attitude, in a way, of - yes assumed superiority, in that you've 'seen through it', you know better, you're not taken in, you're not naive, you've 'been around a bit'. Do you see what I mean? And therefore there's this persistent running down. And you not only see things in that way, you want to see things in that way. You even insist on seeing things in that way. That is the sort of attitude that amounts in the long run to cynicism. I remember quite a lot of this in one or two communities. I used to get quite heartily sick of it. It's really very, very negative indeed.

Jon Rice: It's not solely expressed in humour.

S: Oh, it can be a sort of pseudo-humour. I wouldn't regard it as humour. It's a sort of - well, you could say cynical humour, but it's a contradiction in terms. A cynical pseudo-humour, I would say; a sort of pseudo-cleverness, also. Well, you probably all know what I mean even if we can't define it very accurately or very logically. One has unfortunately heard this sort of cynical conversation, cynical remarks.

David Luce: I think it often comes from a very low self-opinion as well.

[8]

S: Possibly. Well, it may come from genuine disillusionment, genuine frustration, genuine disappointment, and that sort of experience might have been over-generalized and applied to life as a whole.

Clive Pomfret: It probably starts off originally as genuine, but cynicism itself takes over.

S: Yes. Because it is true that some people's motives are not what they profess to be, and one might see that quite clearly. One might even give expression to that with some regret. The cynic would tend to take delight in that and enjoy being able to point out the way in which people are motivated by factors other than those they profess, and take delight in it, revel in it even. That's what he wants to see. But one can't exclude the possibility of yes - some people do see through people's pretensions, but they don't feel happy with what they see. They regret that things are like that.

Malcolm Webb: Doesn't it suggest it's a case of rationalizing, justifying making fun of things

just as an excuse not to do anything about it?

S: Yes, indeed. That one finds too. You then don't have to make any effort, any exertion. You don't have to work for anything or fight for anything. And at the same time you can indulge in a sense of - well, as I said - having seen it all before, seen through it all.

Ciaran Saunders: What's the difference between, say, cynicism and the reaction that somebody gets against something that they've given up - for example, drink? People will be quite cynical about drinking and ascribe all sorts of motives to people who are drinking, whereas in fact it's just something that they themselves fear.

S: Yes, I think cynicism is not quite the right word to apply to that sort of defence mechanism. I'm not quite sure whether we have a distinctive word. But 'cynicism' doesn't quite fit.

Michael Scherk: In terms of cynicism - when I was a teenage idealist, I used to describe myself as a cynic quite proudly; and what seemed to be happening in myself and a lot of my friends was that this was our reaction to the hypocrisy we saw in the so-called 'realists' around us, and in many older so-called 'idealists'. It was like our idealism in clash with the real world, especially the hypocrisy, and it was especially there was no path that we could see to break out.

S: Well, one should always be very careful that one's idealism doesn't degenerate into simple cynicism and nothing more.

[9]

Dave Rice: It would seem then that one really needs something positive to get oneself involved in: an ideal - like the Three Jewels, for instance - so that one can just leave that whole area of putting what one doesn't like in the old society down, and be absorbed in something that can be positive.

S: Well, certainly one sees enough things wrong with the old society. But it isn't enough simply to dwell on those and regret them and, well, bitch over them, as it were; you've got to get on with something positive. Otherwise you just become a very disgruntled, unpleasant person who is in fact doing nothing to help anybody or anything, including himself.

Dave Rice: A little earlier you mentioned a Freudian factor that could be at the bottom of this cynicism. What did you mean by that?

S: I meant the Freudian - or pseudo-Freudian - reductionism that 'all is sex', that at the bottom, motivation is just that; that's what you've got to get down to, that's the real explanation. That isn't quite what Freud said, but sometimes his name is taken in this particular way. I think I've quoted before a French poet who said of rhetoric: 'Take rhetoric and wring its neck.' So in the same way one must say: 'Take cynicism and wring its neck.' There should not be a quarter given to cynicism. One doesn't even like to talk about it too much because even to mention it or to think about it is unpleasant. (Laughter)

Ciaran Saunders: When somebody has given up something and is reacting against it and not being objective, when is it a good idea to try and get them to see the objective situation?

S: Well, sooner or later. But don't try too soon; be a bit tactful. That person might have just given up that very thing. He can't afford, for the time being, to see any good side that it might have. So don't insist that he sees that good side too soon, prematurely, before he's really able to take it. With your well-meaning objectivity you may just create more trouble.

Vessantara: Isn't the problem very often that you attribute to the object a lower value, whereas actually the problem is in your relationship with the object?

S: Yes. Another point also is that you might be trying to counteract someone's undervaluation of something because you overvalue it, and you feel perhaps made vaguely uneasy by the fact that he seems to attribute so little value, so little worth, to something that you prize quite highly. So there is that factor to be taken into consideration too.

[10]

Ciaran Saunders: It's just that I was thinking that, in a way, you've got to - rather than excuse him and say: 'Oh well, that's just his thing; you know, he's reacting - you've always got to strive to get the objective truth behind things. I mean, I find myself too - somebody makes a statement and I'll make excuses for him instead of actually tackling him on it. And I'm just not sure whether that's actually a good thing to do or not?

S: Well, again it depends on timing very often, depends on the right psychological moment. For instance, when someone has, say, just lost a close relation and they're really upset, that is not the time to say: 'Well, death is common to all, etc., etc.' (Laughter) You must at that moment sympathize unreservedly. Later on, when that person has got over the bereavement a bit, then you can bring in your philosophical reflections. If you bring them in prematurely, that is simply unfeelingness. If someone loses his mother, and then you say, just five minutes after she's dead: 'Oh well, I don't suppose you really expected that she's live forever!' - again that's just unfeelingness.

Give people time to get over things. Allow the reaction if it's just a normal, as it were, relatively speaking, healthy reaction - just time to exhaust itself a bit and then chip in with your philosophical reflections or drawing attention to the good side or positive qualities of the situation or the object. Make allowances for people's reactions, even though you can't go along with them completely. (Pause) If someone moves into a men's community from, say, a family situation, don't expect him to be all bright and chirpy straight away.

He may still be feeling effects of leaving that previous situation. So be a bit sympathetic for a while until he settles down. Then perhaps you can point out to him, in a positive way, that there's not much point in remaining attached to the past, etc., etc. (Pause) It's a question of tact and selecting the right psychological moment; which also means empathizing with the other person, feeling with the other person, being aware of how he is actually feeling, how he is experiencing things.

Anyway, did Vessantara's group have anything?

Vessantara: No.

Subhuti: We've got another one!

S: Oh, all right then.



Alan Angel: There was quite a technical point at the end of our discussion. We talked about levels of craving, and we had in earlier sessions talked about the difference between avidya and moha as different levels of ignorance, as it were. I wondered if there was such a difference between trsna and moha in a similar sort of way; degrees, levels, traditions?

[11]

S: Well, it's like trying to determine different degrees of darkness. It's very difficult; they're all pretty horrible. (Laughter) Moha is, one might say, in a way a more multivalent, also a more emotional term, than avidya. Avidya is ignorance, it is not-knowing: the absence of knowledge, absence of awareness, absence of higher spiritual understanding. Trsna, of course, is craving: intense craving, neurotic craving. But moha is much more difficult to define. I've mentioned before that it's like confusion, bewilderment, obsession, infatuation - it's all of these things. It's a sort of mixture of the intellectual and the emotional; it's the root of, well, lobha and dvesa. Or you could say craving and ignorance. Do you see what I mean? I think one can't differentiate these terms too much. They shade off into one another. They're not different things; they're all different ways of looking at that basic primordial gravitational pull of the Conditioned. This is what one is really concerned with.

Dave Rice: Alan mentioned craving. In connection with this: I got the impression from the Four Noble Truths - and the Second Noble Truth - that there is in fact a primordial sort of craving, something that has virtually controlled our lives through lifetime after lifetime, and that it is that kind of craving, a deep-seated craving, that we have to free ourselves from.

S: Well, in the context of the Noble Eightfold Path, tradition speaks of craving in the context of the nidana chain. It speaks, among other things, of avidya. These are different aspects of the same thing. One can't say it's craving which is primordial and fundamental and not ignorance. Nor can one say it is ignorance which is primordial and fundamental. There is a sort of primordial root which can be looked at in all these different ways. The ultimate root of all these things perhaps doesn't have any name; but it manifests as all these different things: craving, ignorance, confusion, and so on - the gravitational pull of the Conditioned, as I've called it. (Pause)

So what ground was covered today?

Vessantara: It was more a discussion based on experience.

S: Yours was the same?

Subhuti: Craving for experience was all that we covered.

Vessantara: One small point arising out of that. In our discussion it seemed that one can only really experience something or enjoy something when you're always relaxed in relation to it. Relaxation isn't something which is ever stressed or made much of within the Friends. Is there a reason for that? We never seem to do much in terms of, sort of, like, relaxation is something which one ...

[12]

S: Well, meditation induces relaxation; that is to say, meditative experience induces relaxation. There doesn't seem any need to mention it as a separate quality or separate

experience. Relaxation is always present in dhyanic experience.

Vessantara: But, for instance, would it be a good preparation for meditation to be mindful of the body and try to be relaxed? Would that be useful?

S: Well, this comes back to the question we discussed the other morning: the particular state in which you are, or in which someone attending a class is, before taking up the practice of meditation. If you're in a strained, hurried sort of state, all right, just sit quietly and relax. Certain exercises may help you. But if, for instance, one is living in a community, one is practising meditation regularly, engaging in puja regularly, it shouldn't be necessary to speak specifically in terms of relaxation. Relaxation occurs in relation to, or in connection with, those activities in which one is engaged. One might even go a little further than that and ask: What is relaxation anyway? And what is the opposite of relaxation?

Voice: Tension.

S: Yes, tension is probably the nearest opposite. But what is tension?

Pete Shan: The opposite of 'stillness, simplicity and contentment'.

S: Ah, well, but that's a definition of opposites. But we're trying to arrive at an idea or an understanding of tension as the opposite of relaxation. So it won't help to refer back to relaxation.

Dave Rice: Could it be the outcome of willed effort?

S: Willed effort is certainly connected with it.

Malcolm Webb: Insecurity?

S: Yes, no doubt that is connected with it.

Rudiger Jansen: Blocked energy? Tension is blocked energy and relaxation is free-floating energy?

S: Could be.

Simon McIntyre: Relaxation seems to be integration.

S: Yes.

[13]

Sthiramati: Tension seems to be suggestive of conflicting forces: one can go in one way, something else can go in another.

S: Yes, that's true. But I think the need for relaxation is something that is more likely to be experienced by somebody coming, as it were, straight off the street to a meditation class and just needing time to relax before taking up the meditation practice.

Vessantara: It's also my experience that quite a lot of people who are working within the Friends are working in quite a tense way.

S: Well, the word 'tension' can be used in a positive sense too.

Vessantara: But I'm not using it in the positive sense.

S: The strings of a violin need to be tense before they can be played on. But I think that when you're working hard you do sort of gather your energies together. You aren't tense in the ordinary sense, but you are 'tensed'. Do you see what I mean? And when you stop working, and therefore stop being tensed, you usually need a little time to adjust to another kind of situation in which that kind of effort isn't required. You simply need to give yourself that time, that space, so to speak. (Pause)

I think also it might be that in the past, in the FWBO, work was so new and people did tend to be, in many cases, so dull and torpid and slothful, that the emphasis was for quite a long time on work rather than relaxation. It was as though people, in many cases, were having enough of relaxation though it might not have been relaxation in the best sense. They needed to get their energies going. They needed to work, if anything, rather than to relax, in most cases. And that might be one of the reasons why we haven't placed all that much emphasis on relaxation.

Vessantara: It seems partly the reason why people couldn't enjoy work was because they were tense; they didn't have a concept of being able to work in a relaxed way.

S: Well, that might not have been true of everybody. I mean, this is what Johnnie was describing the other evening. No doubt that's true of some people, but I wouldn't say it was true in the case of all. And there are also some jobs ...

End of Side One

S: Anyway, any further points arising out of all that?

Well, there is quite a bit of time left, so maybe people had better utilize it writing up their notes - just buzzing quietly to themselves.

End of Session

Tuscany Tape 20, Day 20

Question and Answer session 3 October 1981

S: All right who's going to start?

Subhuti: We actually haven't got many questions. The first one was ... we were talking about the Mindfulness of Breathing and the Metta Bhavana mainly, and we got on to the topic of preparation for meditation, and I remembered a few things that you used to teach. For instance you used to suggest, before we started doing the Metta Bhavana, you took 2 or 3 deep breaths. And you also sometimes used to get people to relax, go through the body, relax.

I couldn't remember anything else that you used to say. But we wondered whether there was anything more perhaps on the preparation for meditation, getting oneself ready for it. Anything you'd like to say.

S: I do recall saying those sort of things, especially I think in the Pundarika days when I was taking classes there.

Subhuti: Sakura

S: Even Sakura. Er because one does remember that people used to come along to these classes in the evenings very often straight from work. And very often after a journey, by bus or tube or both, and then walking through a very crowded street to get to the Centre. So more often than not people did arrive in a rather crumpled sort of state. And it was because of that fact that more than once I've felt that one couldn't really ask people or expect people to get straight into meditation. Sometimes they would arrive for the meditation class just a minute or two before it started. I think this was especially the case in the Sakura days. And sometimes they'd arrive just a few minutes late, obviously a bit puffed having hurried or having missed a bus or something like that. So it did seem that people needed some thing just sort of intermediate between their present state and the actual state of meditation. So I used to suggest from time to time, not as a regular practice but only when I felt there were sufficient people present who needed it that they should just relax ... That they should give themselves time to get into the meditation practice, whether the Mindfulness of Breathing or Metta Bhavana or whatever. And I did sometimes use to ask them [2] just to sit there and take a few deep breaths, to deliberately breathe in very deeply and then breathe out and experience themselves in... as doing that. And yes in connection with the Metta Bhavana I think I used to feel that er people weren't very much in touch with themselves, weren't very much in touch with their emotions, and it would help in getting in touch with their emotions if first of all they, they just got in touch with their bodies. So I used to ask them just to, I won't say concentrate but just to be say aware of their bodies, starting from say the tips of their toes, then I used to lead them up, you know, just feel your toes, feel your feet, feel your ankles, experience them, experience the blood in your legs, experience your knees, yes? Er, experience your thighs, trunk, arms. I used to take people in this way through and experience a feeling of the whole body, from literally the tip of the toes to the crown of the head. And people did find this, er did find that this did put them in touch with their bodies and therefore to some extent at least with their feelings. And then we used to do the Metta Bhavana. I have heard quite recently, that is to say in the course of the last two or three months, that some people leading meditation classes I think at the LBC were actually sometimes using these methods before a class. I don't have any very definite information about that though. But I certainly would regard these sort of simple relaxation techniques or exercises as being part of an Order Member's repertoire, to be deployed before classes in accordance with a need. Not to be made so much a regular point, you know, of the class but if one just senses that people are a bit disturbed or they're a bit rushed or they've come straight to the class, this is probably likely to be the case with the beginners' class, straight from work. Well give them time to relax, and even give them simple exercises of this sort. I can't off-hand think of anything else.

Subhuti: It does seem from our discussion that people do say, sometimes find it quite hard to concentrate during the Metta Bhavana, that is. And we've been discussing, we were saying that it's probably quite good just to concentrate for a bit before you start the practice. And I've actually found that, just breathing deeply a few times, does help to do that. [3] I must say I

still am somewhat surprised that people, that so many people seem to find the Metta Bhavana so difficult. I think that another thing that one might do is to put oneself into touch with one's feelings, by whatsoever means. Even by way of a sort of daydream or fantasy in the sense that, you can recall a certain situation in which your feelings are very very much alive very much awake you know very much stirred. Your emotional feelings so to speak, you should avoid thinking of sexual situation because that's quite a different sort of thing. But think of a situation in which your real human feelings have been very much stirred and as it were dwell on that, dwell on that feeling and try to develop it and put yourself really in touch with it again. And this will certainly sort of feed through into or flow through into the practice of the Metta Bhavana. I mean as a sort of half way step between say the mundane and the spiritual, those who've got children could even think of their feelings with regard to their children because certainly there's strong feeling there, but there isn't any sexual element despite what Freudians may say. If there is deep down well never mind, ignore that you know concentrate on the actual conscious feeling. But you know just as it were dwell upon those aspects of your life where there is a very strong positive emotion and put yourself in touch with that, sort of recapture that, revive that, experience that. And as I've said that will feed through into, into your practice of the Metta Bhavana. You must have some feeling somewhere. I remember a friend of mine who was a sort of spiritual teacher in India with whom I had a certain amount of contact, he used to for instance be urging his disciples to develop devotion, he stressed devotion to know you know very very strongly, I of course didn't altogether agree with that. But he used to find that many of his disciples couldn't muster up any devotional feelings towards God. I had my own theories about that but (laughter) I kept them to myself. (laughter) But he used to put the point and here he was quite correct, that if they found it difficult to feel love and devotion towards God they should ask themselves where their feelings actually were. Because he refused to accept that they didn't have any feelings, eh? that they were just dried up, just withered, just emotionally withered And yes, that there must be some feeling somewhere.

[4]

Ratnaguna: What about nostalgia? When I first came along there'd be these feelings, I'd be getting , were to do with the past.

S: Well I think one has to be a bit careful about nostalgia in the ordinary sense. But if one can positively and happily recall and recapture positive experiences of the past in such a way that a positive feeling is created in the present, you know, that is quite in order. But nostalgia consists in dwelling upon the pleasures of the past in such a way that you feel sadness in the present the Sadness that those pleasures are no longer available, that they're past. But this is a different kind of a thing, it's using the recollection of past positive experiences to kindle a positive feeling in the present itself. And usually nostalgia is tinged with sadness because there are feelings of regret that that pleasure or that happiness is past. It's irrevocably flown.

Ratnaguna: So if you have that feeling tinged with sadness you would say don't think of it.

S: Yes, yes unless you can dissolve the sadness. (long pause)

Was there anything else arising out of that point?

Subhuti: No.

S: Maybe I should make an additional point. I've mentioned that if one is leading a beginners' you know meditation class, especially, you know beginners' meditation class, one can deploy these little techniques as may appear to be necessary, but this suggests that you as leader of the class are very aware of the situation. You should really take note of people as they come in, in what sort of state they seem to be. Sometimes you can tell from the sort of way in which they're sitting. You can see they're sort of dead beat at the end of the days work, but still you know they've come to try to meditate. Give them time to relax help them to relax. So be very aware of all the people in the group. Don't just mechanically so to speak lead off with a session of this that or the other, without paying attention to the state in which the people present are. Sometimes it may be necessary just to give a sort of short talk. I mean your talk is not just to convey information but also to give them a chance maybe to rest. Maybe to help brighten them up a bit, cheer them up a bit if they seem to need that. So, clearly, [5] that suggests that you yourself must be in a very positive state you know full of life and energy. Not be exhausted yourself. I think you have to be very careful to watch that a situation does not arise in which you are feeding off the class instead of giving to the class of your energy. I mean it has been known for Order Members to come on retreat, to lead a retreat, hoping to sort of coast along on the energy generated by other people on the retreat. But this is not at all a desirable state of affairs. The leader of the class, the leader of the retreat should be able to inject energy into the situation, contribute energy to the situation, not draw energy from the situation in order to lead it.

Dharmapriya: How far should this flexibility which you really implied here, go? The situation I had in mind, at one stage at the LBC in the early days, early Regulars class was not very successful, it was before Subhuti took it over and I remember going there one day and it was part of a regular programme, it was double meditation and then something else going on and it seemed to me so obvious that most of the people were incapable of doing a double meditation in the state they arrived or whether it was produced or something. And if this was a long term situation some solution was obvious but say even in terms of one specific evening if a person's leading a class, say something like that, that after the first sit, even when you've announced a double meditation, maybe it's obvious that you shouldn't do so. Should one then just...

S: Well you have to be quite careful because you might find that there are some people who've definitely come along for a double meditation, that having been announced and would be disappointed if there is no double meditation. Do you see what I mean, you have to bear that in mind too. But perhaps we should ask Subhuti what he did when he took over that class, if he remembers.

Subhuti: Well we just changed the nature of the class. Before I think it had been you know a set format. We just changed ... in fact we had talks, meditation talks, that seemed to be what people needed.

S: One just has to be very careful that one doesn't get into a set routine and just continues that unintelligently without reference to peoples actual needs. You should be in contact with the members of your class all the time and know [6] what they're feeling, know what they're thinking, know what they are experiencing. There should be sufficient rapport between you and your class for you to be able to say "well look it doesn't seem as though you're in the mood for double meditation, is that so?" And if everybody says "well yes we do feel a bit jaded" say "OK what do you feel we should do? Would you like me to give a talk, would you

like to do communication exercises?" Possibly you can do that. Do you see what I mean? I mean don't make too much a thing of doing something different every time; some people go to that extreme. But be sufficiently aware of the situation, and the people in it so that you can ring the changes as necessary. Not for the sake of ringing changes but just for the sake of, you know, introducing what is actually suitable and helpful. (Pause)

All right, well what followed on from there?

Subhuti: The only other question we've got was (a few unclear words) we'd like you at some point to do, to give an introduction to both the Metta and the Mindfulness so we can hear the original.

S: If I remember uh? (laughter) I can't guarantee that it would be exactly what I used to say yeh? For obvious reasons, also it's a different situation. So it would be a bit artificial if I was to sort of do it as though pretending everybody hadn't heard these things before. But anyway yes all right I will sometime do an introduction.

Subhuti: Perhaps a bit like you did for the communication exercises, you could do an introduction with a commentary on the introduction. (Pause) That's all we had.

Vessantara: Our group also thought it would be a very good idea if there was some sort of class or session on leading beginners' classes.

S: Well there are quite a few sort of points that can be made of a general nature. First of all punctuality, starting the class on time. Your actual appearance. Be careful that your appearance is not such as to put people off. And I'm not saying either whether it should be very formal or extremely informal, it depends on the nature of the situation. It could be either, you know, depending on the people in the class and where you are holding it and so on. But be careful with regards [7] not only to beginning the class, but ending it. I mentioned the other day that when people come on beginners' classes very often they have buses or trains to catch afterwards and much as they'd like to stay they're just not able to, so have a definite ending. So that those who want to leave, or have to leave, you know, can leave without feeling that they're disrupting, you know, the programme. And make it clear that those who want to stay on possibly to chat with you afterwards are quite free to do so. Do you see what I mean? I used to find, especially after lectures, I used to have to be very careful that my lecture didn't go on too long because I knew that there were certain people, much as they wanted to hear it through to the end, just had to catch a train, you know from Victoria or wherever it was you know, back to the suburbs or the Home Counties. So bear that in mind. and if something is announced as say 'from 7 'til 8.30 let it be definitely from 7 'til 8.30 so that people know where they are in that regard. (Pause) And be quite sort of decisive in everything that you do. Don't for instance sort of wander into the class and "well er you know I think it's Metta Bhavana tonight does anyone remember?" (laughter) Be quite clear what is happening. Or you know "what did we do last week?" as if you know you'd forgotten. It's all right to ask to check what they remember but certainly don't give the impression that you've forgotten, you know, what happened last week. And be bright, be fresh, be well rested, be really on the ball when you take the class. Because people will pick up even unconsciously you know very quickly, whether you are tired or dull or a bit fed up. So make sure that you have space so to speak before the class. Try to the best of your ability to avoid a situation in which you yourself just arrive and have immediately to take the class. You know if the class is held say

on community premises well you can just stay upstairs quietly in your room either relaxing or just thinking over what you're going to do in the class and then maybe 5 or 10 minutes before time just go downstairs so as just to say hello to people. But plan your day if necessary and you know if you're working as part of a Centre team then other people in the team should make sure that events and responsibilities are planned and distributed in such a way that the person leading a class has time to relax beforehand. He isn't expected to work say in the co-op right up until the time that he has to start taking his class. And try not [8] to have a big meal directly before your class. And don't also try to take it on a completely empty stomach, that may not be very good. Just be sensible. And of course if there is someone assisting or supporting you, obviously get together with him beforehand and just compare notes. Usually the person supporting is the person who should be responsible for seeing that the room or the shrine or whatever where the class is to be held is clean and tidy, that everything that you need is there. Checks that there's tea and milk and sugar for the tea or coffee or whatever afterwards. That should be the responsibility of the person assisting or supporting so that the person leading can give his mind wholly to the class. I think these things are generally understood aren't they? At least in theory. But here it might be apposite to say a few words about supporting? (noises of agreement) I don't know whether this particular question has arisen yet during the course, the question of supporting. Ideally every class should have a leader, an Order Member leading the class, and another Order Member supporting and fulfilling the practical functions that I've just mentioned. But it is very important that the Order Member who is supporting sees his role in a very positive sort of way. So he doesn't feel that he's playing second fiddle for the Order Member who is leading class. In other words doesn't feel any resentment, even unconsciously that he's you know sort of taking second place. And he's should really do everything he can to yes support the person who is leading both emotionally, spiritually, practically in every way. And he certainly shouldn't consider supporting a sort of inferior function. Good support of the person leading the class is as essential to the success of the class as the class leader himself is. You may not have such a prominent role, you may not be quite so out front but your role is as important as that of the person who is actually leading. So don't let your you know your feelings of false masculine pride or competitiveness, or what not, you know get in the way. Don't expect you know that well the job of, or don't think that the job of supporting could be left to some unknown Mitra. No, it's an Order Member's function and responsibility, if there is an Order Member to spare so to speak. And give your wholehearted support to the person that you are supporting. I think supportiveness in the spiritual life, or the importance of supportiveness is very much underrated, [9] because competitiveness creeps in so easily and almost unconsciously one will be sort of trying to undermine the other person or the leading person in a given situation rather than supporting them. And one must watch this all the time. And one shouldn't necessarily expect the women to do all the supporting all the time and the men to do all the leading. It's necessary for men also to be able to support, you could say it will help you develop your feminine side. But maybe it's not very helpful to introduce those sort of terms, just think in terms of supporting, positively. And of supportiveness as being a very positive quality, a spiritual quality. Because it, you know, goes directly against all feelings of egotism and self-assertiveness, competitiveness and so on; it's the essence of co-operativeness. It suggests self-abnegation, modesty, the capacity to keep oneself a little in the background.

Devapriya: Would you say that at a large centre such as the LBC it was important that the team which consists of many more than two people meet before the class?

S: If a class is being taken by a number of people you know co-operating then I think it would



certainly be a good thing, certainly desirable if all the people involved in the taking of the class should meet beforehand, yes. But I shouldn't think that normally there'd be more than two or three people actually responsible for taking a class? Unless it's a more complex situation in which you split up for different activities during the course of the evening. But certainly yes it's good for all the people who are going to be involved in the course of the evening to get together beforehand, certainly. I consider that highly desirable.

Sudhana: Do you not think it's good to delegate the job of supporting to a Mitra?

S: I'm not saying that it isn't good that a mitra you know should fulfil that function but an Order Member should be able to fulfil that function. And if one wants an optimum type class probably it would be better if two more experienced people i.e. two Order Members were taking it. But one certainly might consider it part of the training and experience of a mitra, say a senior Mitra, to support an Order Member taking a class, especially in a smaller Centre where Order Members were in short supply.

Yashodeva: How do you define the role of supporter in the actual class? I mean one doesn't sort of say this person's supporting today.

[10]

S: No it doesn't mean ... the people attending the class need not be able to identify him as the supporter though, they may come to know that because they notice that he's the person who just checks things beforehand, and he's always around as well as the person actually leading. He's the one who you know maybe serves the tea afterwards or just makes sure all that sort of thing is in order. But for instance a supportive person can help during question time, yes? Supposing after the class you have a question and answer period. Well it may be the leader of the class isn't able to answer a question fully satisfactorily so the supporting Order Member sees that, but he doesn't cut in and say 'Well you didn't answer that very well. OK, I'll just explain it now.' He doesn't do that. He very unobtrusively, he adds something, you know, to what has already been said, supplementing it, filling it out. Do you see what I mean? Because perhaps he, sitting more silently, can see what is going on or can see the need behind that person's question, perhaps more clearly than the person leading the occasion. And also the person leading can feel say during the meditation period, well there's at least one other person really meditating, say if it was a beginners' class, beside himself. (Pause)

Vessantara: I've got one or two questions about Mindfulness and Metta. One quite practical one, seemed to be that people in doing the Mindfulness in the first two, three stages actually seem to be concentrating in different places. Some people were sort of concentrating on the actual feeling in their lungs, some people in their stomach, some are in what Zen call your hara. Is it important?

S: Ah the practice is definitely that you concentrate in the fourth stage on that sensation produced within the nostrils by the coming and going of the in and out breath. That is definitely the practice. Some people have found that difficult, a very few people have found that difficulty so I have in the past suggested that alternatively they could watch the rise and fall of the abdomen, though that does actually give you a grosser object. The sensation of touch within the nostrils is much finer and therefore you get a better concentration there, a better one pointedness. But if for any reason you find that absolutely impossible you can concentrate instead on the rise and fall, the actual motion of the abdomen, as you breathe in

and out. But not to concentrate on other parts of the body, that would [11] be definitely sort of mixing different practices which I think is not to be encouraged. And certainly when you teach the Mindfulness of Breathing it should be simply teaching, in the fourth stage, concentrating on that, or not the in and out breath itself, but on the sensation that is produced, that slightly fluctuating sensation within the nostrils produced by the breath as it goes in and comes out.

Vessantara: And what of the earlier stages? It seems some people are more concentrating there, people are more...

S: Well, during the third stage you concentrate on the breath coming in and going breath out. And you experience according to the text, the whole breath body, you experience, so to speak, the whole volume of breath. You're only peripherally aware of the actual body, you can't of course exclude it entirely from the you know focus of attention, but your concentration is definitely on the breath, you feel the whole body of the breath coming up out of the lungs, of course it doesn't come out of the stomach, coming up out of the lungs and going out through the nostrils, and then coming back and filling the lungs, and it's that sort of feeling and sensation of in, out, in, out, that you concentrate on.

Vessantara: And what about the first two stages?

S: And as you get absorbed in that there is even at that stage, the third stage, quite a deep concentration and a sort of deeply established rhythm which can fluctuate not only as sort of in and out but even up and down or to and fro. And you can get quite deeply into that. And of course the first two stages, the first is counting up 1 to 10 at the end of each out breath and in the second is counting in the same way at the beginning. I think there's no confusion about those two first stages at least, or first two stages.

Vessantara: Would you be experiencing your breathing in the same sort of area as you do in the third stage?

S: You wouldn't be experiencing quite in the same way. There's a fullness in the third stage, an experience of the totality of the breath that you don't get in the first two stages. They are as it were more shallow. Though of course if you get rapidly a very good concentration that may cease to be the case. But then as you get more deeply into one stage there is a natural tendency to go into [12] the third stage, that is why when you get deeply into the Mindfulness of Breathing you don't need to be timed or to set aside so many minutes for each stage, one naturally passes over into the next, when it has reached a certain depth. But in as much as the beginner may delude himself you insist upon ten minutes for this stage, ten minutes for that, and ring a little bell at the end and so on. But when you're on solitary retreat you should be able to do the Mindfulness of Breathing as it were naturally just starting with stage one and passing to stage two and then to stage three and so on by way of a natural transition, as the concentration deepens.

Vessantara: Just to make sure that it's clear - in the first two stages your awareness of your breath, and you have to have an awareness of your breath to know that you breathe and where to count, your awareness of your breath would be concentrated on your lungs.

S: Yes, you're not actually concentrating on where the breath is, you're not paying too much

attention to that, but certainly yes when you think of in-breath and out-breath your attention is higher up rather than lower down whereas in the third stage it tends to be both higher up and lower down. And of course in the fourth stage it's only right higher up within the nostrils. You're not concentrating then on the breath at all, though there may be a sort of peripheral awareness of it, but on that sensation within the nostrils, or wherever the sensation is. It's said if you've got a very snub nose it comes on to the top of the lip.

Vessantara: There was another question, if I can formulate it, which had to do with - in your System of Meditation and in the Mitrata Omnibus, in the lecture we were studying, it's quite clear that you start as it were with Mindfulness: that's your basic, the first thing you have to do is become to some degree integrated and concentrated.

S: That is also as a matter of experience the meditation, to use that term, which seems most accessible for the greatest number of people, the greatest number of beginners, that is to say because it seems sort of psychological and there's a definite technique which you can do, which you can learn, so it's quite concrete. So it does seem advisable to start with this in any case as a general rule. And [13] as you say, yes Mindfulness has this integrating quality, this integrating effect.

Vessantara: The point which seemed to arise was that it seems that quite a lot of people may not necessarily, in any real sense, you know, concentrate on Mindfulness first. They may come, at first, as we alternate Mindfulness then Metta, Mindfulness then Metta, they may start with Metta, but also if they feel that they find Metta easier which is probably the case in a minority of cases, but it does happen, is it better to advise them to carry on with the Metta and not to worry too much or should you establish the fact that it's good to establish your Mindfulness practice first?

S: Beginners will be coming along initially and meditating just once or twice a week when they actually attend the class and then of course after a while one suggests that they can continue the practice at home, trying to sit and meditate at least once a day by themselves. By that time they will have become acquainted hopefully with both methods. So you suggest that in most cases people find the Mindfulness of Breathing the better one to start with so you suggest that they do that at home, but also make the point that if by any chance anybody in the class has found that they take to the Metta Bhavana in a pronounced sort of way and are definitely getting on with that better than with the Mindfulness of Breathing they should feel free to do that every day instead. One needs just to make things clear in that way.

Vessantara: So the fact that - in the way in which things is laid out - in the System of Meditation Mindfulness first, isn't to be taken as a particularly sort of hard and fast rule.

S: No. Because it is not that Metta Bhavana, if you're able to do it, excludes Mindfulness - the element of Mindfulness is there and therefore the element of integration will be there. It's simply that you've just got into things a bit more quickly. You've not only been able to integrate yourself but also experience very strong positive emotion, which itself has a very integrating effect. So you certainly don't want to hold people back so to speak and insist that they do a lot of Mindfulness, and while they're not allowed to do any Metta Bhavana some people may be compelled, so to speak, to stay with the Mindfulness for some time because they just can't generate any Metta, then they're unfortunate. But if someone does [14] take to the Metta Bhavana and finds it easy they should certainly be allowed to pursue that. I'm not

suggesting they need not do the Mindfulness of Breathing at all. But probably if they do the Metta Bhavana intensively they do get a sufficient experience of Mindfulness in that connection. Perhaps one just has to check and see that they are being mindful you know in the course of everyday life.

Bob Jones: Did I understand you to say Bhante that if you, one was taking a class of complete beginners and teaching them a meditation practice you wouldn't urge or suggest them to practise it every day as it were (a few words unclear).

S: I don't think I used to do that. But I mean that's probably because of the sort of people we had coming along then. One may have a different sort of person coming along now. If you feel that people would like to start practising every day straight away, well fair enough, suggest this to them. But I think in the old days I was quite slow and cautious in my approach. Because supposing you know people just come for the first time and they just take to the meditation and then at once they start trying to practise every day but are not able to, I mean they may lose confidence with or lose faith with the meditation. So it might be better usually to suggest they do it regularly every day only after they've been coming along for a few weeks, and have practised it a number of times. But this is to be left ultimately to the judgement of the person taking the class. It is difficult to lay down any hard and fast rules.

Dharmaloka: I'd like to go on to one question, it's on Mindfulness of Breathing. I find the first two stages are quite difficult, maybe because of misunderstanding. I think with the natural breathing there is a kind of break between the out-breath and the next in-breath and I tried to very much count right in this way and this sometimes confused me in the way that I breathe, I tried not to think of the counting while I was breathing but just to count in the break, it doesn't seem to be really necessary or is it?

S: I think the normal tendency is to count so to speak 'in the break' as you've expressed it, where the in-going breath turns into an out-going breath and vice versa.

Voices: (unclear)

[15]

S: I shouldn't worry about it. I mean if the counting is around there well never mind, the main thing is to count the breath, it's not so much at exactly which point you count them, though I would imagine that most people would find it more convenient to make the count just at that turning point, but it can be a little after or a little before.

Vessantara: One more point, a basic question. In the introduction to the Metta you usually stress that in choosing a subject in say the second stage you choose somebody of roughly the same age. Could you outline exactly why that is?

S: Ah well the traditional explanation is this: that metta is friendliness, it suggests the feeling of warmth and goodwill between equals. The traditional understanding is that if you think of someone very much older than yourself the feeling of metta will be changed to something like reverence or regard or respect which is not what you're actually trying to develop. Or if you think of someone very much younger the metta may become sort of more protective even paternal or maternal, which again is not quite what you're trying to develop. But on the other hand this is only a rough and ready guide. If there is an older or younger person with whom

you do have a sort of equal friendship and into which the question of age doesn't enter by all means make that person the object in your second stage of Metta Bhavana.

Ratnaguna: So you would say it's quite important for the friendship to be quite equal in the first - second stage.

S: Well it's because you're trying to develop metta, and metta by definition is that sort of you know flow of positive feeling by people who are approximately equal.

Ratnaguna: So choosing a kalyana mitra for instance maybe that wouldn't be a very good idea.

S: Possibly not. But it just depends on the exact kind of relationship you have with your kalyana mitra. I mean if it's a very reverential one as it might be in some cases or whether it's a very happy-go-lucky friendly sort of relationship as it might be in other cases.

Vessantara: I think I may have confused the issue a bit by mentioning that [16] Buddhagosa, talking about metta, suggests that you, at the end of the first stage going into the second stage you should actually introduce the thought of your kalyana mitra, your teacher just make a break.

S: Well one could say Buddhagosa is writing at a time, in a tradition where the purely spiritual element seems to have been rather lost. And where the teacher, with whom you may yes have a genuine friendship, is an older monk who is just perhaps more versed in the scriptures and knows the Pali grammar better than you do. You see it's not really quite what we have in mind. (pause)

Vessantara: More, more basics. In our same introduction to the Metta there's also the question of... you should choose for your metta someone of the same sex than you as you. And it seems that although that was how you used to describe it we, we've now gone on more to the principle of choosing someone you don't find sexually attractive, who sort of...

S: I think you have to watch yourself here and I think not assume too lightly that you can disregard that provision and that there is say someone of the opposite sex towards whom you have an, a genuinely friendly feeling and the sexual element doesn't enter into it. I think one should be very careful you know before jumping to that sort of conclusion.

Ratnaguna: I brought the question up actually because, you know, there are quite a lot of homosexuals...

S: Well this question arose even in the very early days. And then I used to say well you just have in that case to select a person, of whichever sex, or no sex, or both sexes, (laughter) towards whom you just have a friendly feeling with no admixture of sex. If you're sort of bisexual and ambidex...(laughter) you're going to have a difficult time. You just have to be quite honest with yourself and just look around and just hope that there is somebody in the environment somewhere (laughter) towards whom you do have natural positive friendly feelings without any, I won't, I shouldn't say taint, but let me say tincture of sexuality.

Vessantara: So would it be advisable in introducing Metta to talk in those terms of sort of choosing somebody to whom you have, to whom you feel friendly but to whom you have no

sexual feelings, rather than...

[17]

S: No I think that would allow too big a sort of escape route for those who were inclined to rationalize. I think one should definitely speak in terms of selecting someone of the same sex not of the opposite sex and if later on you get the question "Well what is someone who is homosexual to do?" Well then you just say what I suggested eh. I think it's better to keep to the standard traditional pattern in this respect.

Vessantara: Right. And then there was a question about metta and the visualization practice.

Khemaloka: Ah yes it was a question on how far do you think that it's advisable, that before, say, mitras take on a regular practice of say visualization, stupa visualization, or something like prostrations, that they have a firm grounding, a certain amount of success with say a regular practice of metta-bhavana.

S: I think that the general principle that one should be concerned with here is to get people to practise a bit by way of the path of regular steps. People are always it seems, or very often it seems, in a hurry to get on to the next stage. In a greedy, grabbing sort of way. Considering themselves as it were more advanced than they really are. So I think one should concentrate on encouraging beginners to lay a very strong positive foundation in mindfulness and metta and not encourage what may seem to be a rather grasping attitude to what they probably see as higher and more advanced practices for which they happen to consider themselves now ready. I know that there's a constant pressure and I feel, and I feel it personally, coming from people, coming from mitras and others to get on to something higher, something more advanced. And I know that they're not practising even the mindfulness and the metta regularly and properly. I think this really must be resisted, otherwise in two or three years time we'll find beginners practically, you know, insisting on doing all the visualization practices, which is, well certainly would not be the best thing.

Khemaloka: Do you think that could be a rather good sort of key or test of one's readiness for another practice to sort of ask oneself or look into how, how well so to speak, how much or how rewarding one finds those basic practices.

S: Yes indeed, not, I mean for instance, not that one feels dissatisfied with mindfulness of breathing and metta-bhavana, isn't getting on with them very well and [18] thinks that well it's because you're on a more advanced level and you need a more advanced practice. You're just feeling uncomfortable in the kindergarten, some people interpret it in that sort of way. But it's very unlikely to be that. You could say if you're into the metta-bhavana, really thoroughly, well visualizations of Bodhisattvas will appear to you spontaneously, without your being instructed by an Order Member.

Ratnaguna: Could you say a bit about the relationship between the feeling of metta and the visualization. Would it be possible to do an effective visualization without having developed quite a lot of metta in the first place.

S: In as much as metta or the brahma viharas generally represent a high degree of positive, even spiritualised emotion, and in as much as that emotion, in the form of devotion, is an inseparable part, or an inseparable element, or essential element of the visualization practice,

which is not just a visualization practice, to that extent you really need a considerable experience of, well the brahma-viharas even, not just the metta bhavana, before really embarking on a visualization practice. It isn't just an exercise, it isn't just a concentration exercise. I do find in some of the Pali texts there is a sort of linkage of the experience of subha, the beautiful, with the brahma-viharas. And that would seem to be you know quite appropriate as a sort of intermediate stage in between the Brahma-viharas and the visualization. Because one could say that if you see everything in terms of metta, everything will seem more and more beautiful to you. I mean, you know quite well if you like somebody they look attractive. Or if they look attractive, you like them.

It can be worked the other way around. I'm speaking of attractive in a positive emotional even spiritual sense now. And if you're in a very good mood, if you're full of metta, well the whole world looks more beautiful. So the more you're into the brahma viharas the more beautiful everything seems. So you can as it were dwell upon this element of beauty. Subha, which is pure beauty you could say. A sort of ideal beauty. And then of course you could 'imagine' in inverted commas, this ideal beauty as being condensed into an actual form. And then of course you get your link with a bodhisattva figure. The bodhisattva figure being of course extremely beautiful to begin with, and it's that which sort of holds and fascinates you, initially, or it's a very large part of the [19] holding and the fascinating. And then you can start developing a definite feeling towards that, that figure. But it isn't a question of just producing almost coldly, by virtue of sheer concentration, an eidetic image of a bodhisattva. That is not the visualization practice. So yes you do need a very strong foundation of metta bhavana, of the Brahma-viharas generally, in order to be able to practise the visualization properly.

Vessantara: Suppose that somebody were ordained, and in the private ordination they received a mantra of a deity, they get a visualization practice, but by some mischance they don't feel that they've really developed their metta very adequately. What are they to do? Is it better for them to leave aside the visualization practice altogether and just concentrate on metta or should they...?

S: Well only in a very extreme case. I would say, if you found the visualization difficult because of lack of positive emotional attitude, work on both, do the metta bhavana and then do the visualization. Build up the one from the other gradually. So one really needs to make sure that mitras generally, especially those approaching ordination, really have quite a strong foundation of metta-bhavana. And of course eventually, the six element practice. (Pause.) It's as though the, so to speak, abbreviated method of meditation would be:- mindfulness of breathing, metta-bhavana, six element practice and visualization. You could say mindfulness for the complete beginner, mindfulness and the metta-bhavana for the mitra, the real mitra, and mindfulness, metta-bhavana and six element practice for the mitra approaching ordination, and then upon ordination of course yes you get your visualization practice.

Dave L: I've never done the six element practice (Voices). It's just never been taught at our centre.

S: Ah well we shall be doing it in the course of this course, before doing any visualizations. It is quite important and most people find it a very effective and, I was going to say, "powerful" practice, but please put that word within inverted commas.

A Voice: What about these brahma-viharas ... are we going to be going through those as

well... on this retreat?

S: We could do, in a sense you don't need to, because the raw material of each of [20] the succeeding three is the Metta-bhavana. It's not that you leave metta behind and you're doing something different, it is the same metta but confronted by a different object. But we'd have to talk about that, or think about that, in the Order meeting, and it may be that we do actually do those other Brahma-viharas. (Pause.)

Also another point while we're on leading or taking meditation classes. Just in case there's any misunderstanding, when you actually are taking a meditation class you must do the practice also yourself. I mean I hope no one is under the impression that you just explain it and start people off and you just sit there ringing the bell. No, you must do the practice too. This is helpful, apart from being good for you anyway. It certainly does contribute to the atmosphere. It certainly does have an effect, a supportive effect on the people, on the beginners. So whatever they are doing you must also do it, even though you have to keep an eye on your watch and on the bell, you shouldn't skip the practice, get as deeply into it as your duties as leader of the class permit.

Sthiramati: Does that apply to leading meditations on a retreat?

S: Oh yes, I don't see why not, oh yes. This was certainly always my own practice, always to do with people, with the class, with the session, whatever they are doing or whatever you are asking them to do. Don't use that period, as you know, time for running over the minutes of the next council meeting or whatever.

Dave L: Even doing one's own practice?

S: Only with one exception. I have said that in the fourth stage of the mindfulness of breathing an Order member could if he wished do his own visualization practice, but only with that exception.

Voice: In the fourth stage? You mean he's got to do the first three stages?

S: Yes, and then when you get, when others are doing the fourth stage he could do his own visualization and mantra recitation practice. And in the case of the Metta-bhavana, an Order member, if he wished during the fifth stage could do an Order Metta-bhavana. That is to say directing metta only to other members of the Order throughout the world, rather than towards all living beings. There is that small possible variation, or not so small. But otherwise you do what your class is doing, you do it with them. It's not just a question of telling them what to do and sitting [21] back and letting them do it.

Dharmapriya: Does this also apply in, say the Order member leading community meditation in the mornings, for a week. I know it seems to be quite common that the Order member will be ringing bells for one practice and you hear at breakfast, quite regularly, he's doing his practice or something.

S: Um, no I think within a community there should be some understanding about this, either that people are all doing the practice of their own choice or that they are definitely doing one particular practice and are being led in that by the person who is leading the meditation and



puja, do you see what I mean? If you all agreed in a community that during the morning or during the evening meditation you're each one going to do the practice of his choice fair enough, but or probably if there are both mitras and Order members in a community it's better if they all do either the mindfulness or metta together, and Order members do their visualization practice either before or after, or some other time during the day.

Vessantara: I have sometimes been in a situation with beginners where I knew that this community meditation I was leading was the only chance in the day when I could do my visualization practice, where I also felt that if they were left to their own devices with a bell just five minutes before the end they'd be a bit distracted so I haven't actually just done my visualization, and done something else.

S: Well I think Order members are to be very careful you know that their day isn't so organized that they you know have difficulty in accommodating more than a very limited amount of or you know meditation. Well I know there will be difficulties at times but you know one must really bear that in mind. (Pause.)

Any further question? (Pause)

I think I'll say a few more words, you know touching upon that last point. One of the things I noticed in connection with the Vipassana meditation classes that used to be held at Hampstead, by some of the Thai bhikkhus, they never meditated with the people that they were teaching meditation. They simply instructed them and let them get on with it. And I noticed that this did conduce to a somewhat alienated attitude on the part of the person teaching the meditation or leading the class. So I think we should make a point of always doing, with the beginners or others, [22] the practice that we have asked them to do, not use that occasion for some other activity of our own. Even if it is just sitting there quietly and keeping an eye on your watch and being ready to ring the bell. You should you know become involved in the practice yourself also. (Pause.)

I mean that among other things does help create a feeling of empathy that you are with them in the fullest sense, they are with you. Because if word does get around, as word inevitably will, well while they were doing the mindfulness of breathing you were doing something else it doesn't really help them. They may well feel a sort of lack of support from you. A lack of togetherness even. And that is quite important in the early stages for the beginner. (Long pause.)

Sthiramati: On the same point it's essential to be practising those meditations yourself if you're trying to teach them.

S: Oh yes, mm, I mean you may not be practising all of them each day but you should certainly be well into them and able to practise them effectively when called upon to do so, when for instance you're taking the class. It may be that this week you're concentrating on Metta-bhavana but when you do say take a class in mindfulness of breathing you're not only able to explain the practice but actually to do the practice with them completely effectively. (long pause.)

All right let's leave it there then for today.

(end of tape.)

Tuscany Preordination Course 1981

Question and Answer Session Nineteen

On the puja and chanting

Transcriber's note: Not being skilled in the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet - which in any case most readers would be unable to decipher - it has proved very difficult to render Bhante's precise nuances of pronunciation. Readers are advised that this transcript can only be taken as a general guide to what was said. In case of any uncertainty, the original recording should be referred to. [ascii readers underscored words immediately followed by [u] ]

Sangharakshita: ... wrong, even in prose. So he proposed to Boswell a simple test. He asked him to repeat the - I think it's the seventh commandment. I might have got the number wrong - either the fifth or the seventh. So Boswell repeated: 'Thou shalt [u] not commit adultery.' So Johnson said: 'Wrong! It isn't "Thou shalt [u] not commit adultery", it is "Thou shalt not [u] commit adultery [u]." ' Which is quite different. Do you see the distinction? Has everybody noticed the distinction?

So when you take a passage of the Sevenfold Puja, there is a right and a wrong way of placing the accent according to the meaning. This is distinct from any emotional emphasis you may choose to give. For instance, you should not say: 'As many atoms as [u] there are.' You don't need an emphasis on the 'as'. But sometimes you find people emphasizing words the meaning of which is of very minor importance. So you should say: 'As many atoms as there are,' not 'As many atoms as [u] there are.' The emphasis is quite out of keeping with the meaning in that case.

And when you say: 'in the thousand million worlds,' those last three words should have a fairly equal emphasis. It need not be absolutely equal, but you shouldn't say: 'in the thousand [u] million worlds'; that's not in accordance with the meaning. So, to begin with, emphasis should follow meaning - apart from where you want to give a particular emotional emphasis because of the way you feel about a certain idea or a certain sentiment.

For instance, at the beginning of the Going for Refuge section, you shouldn't say: 'This very [u] day,' because the emphasis doesn't fall there; It's 'This [u] very day.' The emphasis is on the 'this' rather than on the 'very day'. Though, nonetheless, 'very day' are also emphasized to some degree. 'This [u] very day.'

In the next line you wouldn't say: 'I go for my [u] refuge.' The emphasis is not on the 'my' in quite that sort of self-conscious, almost egoistic, sense. It's more: 'I go [u] for my refuge.'

[2]

In the same way you wouldn't say: 'to the powerful protectors'; you'd say: 'to the powerful [u] protectors'. Again the emphasis must be in accordance with the meaning, which means you've got to be aware of the meaning.

So a good leader will respect all these nuances and those who are following his lead should

also respect them and do as he does. If he chooses to give a particular emotional emphasis and maybe you don't quite feel that - well, do it if you can; but if not at least don't give a contrary emphasis of your own. Don't mar the harmony of the whole.

Some people - to give another example - feel inspired sometimes to prolong the vowels at the end of Pali words beyond what anybody else does or beyond what the leader does. So you hear their voices trailing on after everybody else has finished. Well, they may feel moved to do that, but it does break the harmony of the whole; they should refrain from that.

Peter Shann: Can you give an example of an emotional accent?

S: Well, you were mentioning yourself about not feeling somebody's emphasis. What did you mean by that?

Peter Shan: I meant what you were putting over.

S: But in this respect there is a sort of objective criterion of where the emphasis falls according to the meaning. Usually there is not much room for difference of opinion. There might be room for some, but not very much. You might conceivably want to emphasize: 'I go for my refuge' on a certain occasion, even though that is not really so much where the emphasis falls.

But anyway the general principle is: follow the leader. Because if everybody does that there will be an effect of harmony and consonance. Don't insist on doing it in some other way because that's the way you did things at your Centre. Otherwise, if you get a lot of people on retreat all insisting on doing things the way that things were done at their Centre, the result is disharmony rather than harmony. So that means everybody present should listen quite carefully to what the leader is actually saying: how he is leading the puja, how he is pronouncing the words, and so on. This is especially relevant to new people just coming along and should perhaps be made clear to them. Listen carefully. Notice how words are pronounced, especially Pali and Sanskrit words. Notice where emphasis is placed. That's not the occasion for doing your own thing or doing things in your own way, any more than if you were a member of an orchestra.

[3]

Dave Rice: Bhante, I'm not quite clear on this. It seemed to me that right from the outset the way in which you chanted the puja, the emotional emphasis that you put on the verses, was quite different from the way in which we all responded. There seems to be almost a set way in which people chant the puja in response to a leader. I noticed at first that we didn't respond at all, but as the days went on more and more people began to copy exactly the emotion that you were expressing. So there tended to be a bit of disharmony there.

S: Well, any disharmony is resolved if everybody follows the leader, whoever he is.

Dave Rice: It's just that the way in which you chant the puja is so distinctively different from the way in which it seems to be standard everywhere else. Did anybody else notice this?

S: Well, they've probably got away from my way of doing it; because it was I who started it off to begin with.

Clive Pomfret: It definitely isn't standard throughout the various Centres and communities. It's quite different.

S: What I do notice is that if I am not around for a while people do tend to get into a way of doing things of their own in this respect. This is why periodically I have a little sort of check-up. This was especially noticeable, I remember, on one of the early study retreats at 'Nash'. I noticed, for instance, that the chanting of the Pali and Sanskrit words had become very, very harsh for no particular reason. So this is why one needs to constantly refer to a standard and to make sure that one is conforming to or following that standard.

Mike Scherk: But when it comes to pronunciation there seem to be some variations in the Movement, especially in the Ti Ratana Vandana. I'm just trying to remember the line in the concluding section - I think it's paccuppanna ca ye ...

S: Yes, I think people have a bit of difficulty with a few words, but it is actually straightforward; there are no ambiguities in the Pali.

Mike Scherk: Especially that one. It seems to be: 'Paccuppanna chai ye ... '

S: Someone mentioned this the other day. 'Paccuppanna ca ye Buddha.' 'ch' - 'yea'. There should be an accent over the final 'a' of Buddha because it is in the plural. 'Paccuppanna' - long 'a' - then 'ch yea Buddha.'

[4]

Subhuti: There's a bit of a passion for 'chai yea'.

S: Well, that's completely incorrect.

Mike Scherk: The other one is: 'chay yea'.

S: So it's 'Paccuppanna ch' yea Buddha'.

Pete Shan: The word 'bhagavan' seems to be made into one extra syllable: 'bahagavan'.

S: I think this is because of the difficulty people have in aspirating the consonant. It's not 'baha', it's 'bha'. So sometimes people try to include the 'h' by putting a vowel in between and saying 'bahagavato', but no, it is 'bhagavato'. This is just a difficulty of pronunciation because we don't normally have these sort of aspirated consonants in this sort of way in English.

Vessantara: If somebody found it very difficult to aspirate that, would it be better just to pronounce it more like a straight 'b'?

S: Yes. If you have difficulty, or you just can't get your tongue round it, it is better to say 'bagavato' rather than 'bahagavato'. think 'bahagavato' is even worse. And also, by introducing an extra syllable, you upset the rhythm.

Pete Shan: That seems to be the most common thing.

Andy Friends: I think it happens here because it copies the rhythm of 'Supatipanno'.

'Bahagavato'. It seems to copy the rhythm of the previous word; whereas elsewhere it is more of a single consonant.

Simon MacIntyre: In the concluding mantras, in the Avalokiteshvara and the Shakyamuni mantras, we have the 'om', then 'mani'; people seem to put an 'a' in between those two words.

S: 'Om mani padme hum'; how can they get an 'a' in there?

Simon MacIntyre: It seems to be sort of: 'Om-a-mani ...'

S: Oh, a sort of mumble. Yes, it is difficult because you have to separate the two consonants. It is: 'Om : Mani', not 'Om-a-mani'. It isn't easy but one just needs to pay some attention to these things.

Mike Scherk: Does this apply to the Manjusri mantra, which is often just run together in a whole string of syllables. Should there be a [5] distinction there?

S: With the 'A RA PA CHA NA', yes, one can run together; that is quite traditional.

Mike Scherk: Should it be 'OM-A-RA-PA-CHA-NA' - which is how it usually comes out - or 'OM : A-RA-PA-CHA-NA'?

S: It is 'OM, A-RA-PA-CHA-NA'. Because the 'A RA PA CHA NA' are separate letters; they are meant to stand separately as regards meaning. But tradition does run them together as a word, so as to make a sort of pseudo-word or pseudo-name. For instance, the Manjughosa figure with the sword is called 'Arapachana Manjughosa' or 'Manjusri'. So 'Arapachana' has become a name though, strictly speaking, it isn't. It is what we would regard as a 'meaningless' - inverted commas collocation of syllables, which is a quite different approach. They don't add up to a meaning.

Dave Rice: Bhante, this 'OM' - to me it is, in the East it's 'AUM'. And there is another spelling, which is A, U, M, which can be 'AOOM'.

S: No, no, there is a misunderstanding. According to the rules of Sanskrit grammar, 'a' plus 'u' equals 'oh'. Sometimes it is spelled, transliterated, A, U, M, sometimes it is spelled O, M, but pronunciation is always 'om'.

Dave Rice: I have never, ever, come across it except in the FWBO.

S: I'd say that, then, that is incorrect - because this follows the law of Sanskrit grammar. Because in Sanskrit grammar there were laws governing the pronunciation of conjoint vowels. For instance, if you have an 'a' followed by an 'i', this is 'i'; it is not 'ai' as it would be in English. And in the same way the 'a' [accent] followed by 'u' [accent] is 'oh'. So that makes it 'OM'. Sometimes they pronounce each vowel separately: chanting 'AA-OO-MM'. You get that, but you never get 'AOOM'. You would find it almost impossible to chant.

Dave Rice: Well, most of the people in New Zealand that I have chanted it with have pronounced it 'OMM MANI PADME HUM'.

S: I think this may be due to the fact that if you get an 'O-M' in English, in an English word like 'omelette' - except that is really French - you would pronounce it as 'omm' rather than 'ome'. But the Sanskrit mantra is definitely 'om'. Tibetans also pronounce it as 'ome'.

[6]

Simon MacIntyre: Something else - about the Vajrapani mantra. We sometimes seem to have a different sound in the first 'OM'. Some people seem to go 'OME' high ; some people go 'OME' low.

S: I think if you start off with a vowel you need to sort of get up steam, to draw a breath. It's 'OME' short and low; like that. It is very difficult to start off with a clear, continuous and fairly short 'OME' sound; usually it is 'OOOME' long and low . So maybe little variations like that are permissible.

Simon MacIntyre: I think the actual note is different: high instead of low.

S: It should be deep rather than high.

Pete Shan: There seem to be different tunes. Some are monotonous; some go up; some go down.

S: You are speaking of mantras generally, or the chanting generally?

Peter Shan: No, the Vajrapani mantra.

Vessantara: Different stresses. Some people stress the 'OM', some people stress the 'VAJRA', and so on.

S: Well, in English there is always the tendency to put the accent in a certain place in a word. But Pali and Sanskrit are not like that. There are no accents. Because they are quantitative languages. That is to say, you have a difference of long vowels and short vowels, but you do not have accents as in English. So sometimes we mistake a long vowel for an accent, for an accented syllable. It is, for instance: 'VAJRAPAANI'. There is no accent on the 'a' here; it is simply a prolonged vowel sound, a double 'a' sound, a double 'ah' sound. There should be no particular emphasis. But we would tend, instead of saying 'VAJRAPAANI', to say 'VAJRAPAA[uu]NI', to give an emphasis as though there was an accent there, rather than to simply lengthen the vowel. So I think since we are accustomed to speaking English where there is always an accent somewhere or other in the word we tend to put accents, and probably we can't altogether get over that.

Clive Pomfret: At the end of some of the mantras there's H, U, M. In the puja book aren't the two dots above the M missing; shouldn't that be 'HUNG'?

S: It should be 'HUNG'. All the diacritics are missing from the Puja Book. 'There is a new edition which has been prepared with all the proper diacritical marks in, but not yet printed. So it's not 'HOOM', it's 'HOONG'.

[7]

Andy Friends: In the final mantras how long should you draw them out? Sometimes they

seem to be drawn out excessively long.

S: Well, it depends upon the feeling of the leader of the puja. It depends upon the feel of the whole puja as, so to speak, registered or interpreted by him. It is difficult to lay down hard and fast rules.

Pete Shan: Should they get progressively quieter?

S: Not necessarily. Again it depends upon the feeling of the occasion. One must be sensitive to that.

Pete Shan: It does seem that sometimes it is better to be quiet and sometimes loud ...

S: A good leader is sensitive to all those factors. Because sometimes, yes, the feeling of the puja, especially when it has been preceded by a meditation, is quieter; sometimes it is, as it were, louder and more enthusiastic. This may be due partly to the way in which the leader does lead the whole thing; it may be partly due to just the general feeling of everybody present, the sort of mood they are in, especially when, for instance, it is a celebration or an important occasion.

Subhuti: Something connected with that: you often get ... People know that Vajrapani is a wrathful deity, so they use a sort of Stanislavski technique and make it WRATHFUL. Or, Tara is feminine, so they do it in a slightly sentimental way. I mean, there is a difference, but it shouldn't be artificial or sentimental.

S: Yes. Well, here it is the sort of psychological caricature of what is essentially a spiritual quality. I suppose people are trying to sense that spiritual quality but they can only approach it to begin with through the psychological counterpart, and even that may not always be completely genuine.

Vessantara: Can we sort out the pronunciation of the Padmasambhava mantra? A lot of people seem to go: 'OM AH HUM VAJRA GURU PADMAA[uu] SIDDHI HUM'.

S: Here there's that tendency to put an accent. It is not 'PADMUH', it's 'PAD-MAA'.

Vessantara: Is that second 'a' a long 'a' or a short 'a'?

S: No, it's a short one. But if you are chanting, it's quite difficult to observe strictly the distinction of long vowel and short vowel, though approximately speaking the long vowel is twice as long as the short vowel.

[8]

Subhuti: Perhaps you could just go through them all. That would be quite useful.

S: Well, I go through them often enough; people don't seem to listen. I'll go through them as it were reading-wise.

So it's 'Ome Mani Padmay Hung'. You notice that the 'n' in 'Mani' is slightly nasal. It is 'Mani', not 'Mani'. But you may find that difficult to reproduce. It is not a heavy nasalization like that

at the end of a mantra - as in 'Hung' - but it is 'gN' not 'n'. So get it if you can. It doesn't matter all that much.

Andy Friends: Has it got a mark over it?

S: It is usually, the diacritic is a dot underneath the 'n'.

And then 'Ome Ah-Rah-Pah-Chah-Nah Dhih'. It can be 'Dhih' or 'Dhihi'. According to a sadhana text I have, different pandits have different views. But we have 'Dhih'. One has to adopt one or the other. It is a long 'i', that is to say an 'ee'. And while we are on the question of 'C-H', you often find that Pali and Sanskrit words are transliterated and you have simply a 'C' by itself. That must always be pronounced as 'C-H' in English: 'CH'. It is never 'K'.

And then 'Ome Vajra-paani Hung'. Again it is that 'ng', the 'n' with the dot underneath it: 'Hung'. I should have mentioned in connection with 'Om Mani Padme Hum' that it is a long 'u' sound and a nasalization of the 'm'. It is 'uung', 'Huong'; not 'hoom' and certainly not 'hung'. (Laughter) Sometimes people can be misled. There was a famous occasion at the Caxton Hall when a lady from the Buddhist Society, Carla Robbins, she read the Heart Sutra, and at the end when she came to the mantra, she read 'Gate, gate, para-gate'. (Laughter) Well, you cannot blame the poor lady; she pronounced it as she would have pronounced it had it been English: 'cow and gate' or whatever. No one had coached her. So one has to watch things like that. Dr Conze was present, I gather, and was appalled. (Laughter) So it's 'Ome Vajra-paani Hung'.

And then 'Ome Ta-ray Tu-ta-ray Tu-ray Swa-ha'.

Gerald Burns: 'Tutare' rather than 'Too-tare'?

S: Yes. Then 'Ome Amideva Hrih'.

Clive Pomfret: Can you say 'ah': 'Amidevah'?

S: It is short 'a' but if you are chanting and prolonging all your vowels, it is difficult, as I said, to maintain a strict distinction of long vowel and short vowel. I should also mention here that, strictly speaking, the Sanskrit word should be 'Amitabhaya': 'Om Amitabhaya Hrih'. The Tibetans have changed the pronunciation to 'Amideva', which they clearly found easier. So it isn't 'deva', the Sanskrit word 'deva', here; [9] it is the Tibetan corruption of 'tabhaya', which is more difficult to pronounce. So Tibetans regularly say, not 'Om Amitabhaya Hrih', they say: 'Om Amideva Hrih'. So it was transmitted to me as 'Amideva' so I thought it better not to correct it, because it's easier for us to pronounce this. But you mustn't think it's the Sanskrit word 'deva'.

And then there's 'Ome Mooni' - again that nasal 'n' - 'Mooni Mooni Maha' - long 'a' - 'Mooni Shaakya-Mooni Swaha'. The 'sh' here is neither 's' nor 'sh'; it is intermediate. If you can't manage it, 'sh' will do. It isn't perhaps all that important. But 's' is strictly correct.

Subhuti: You often get 'Shack-yamoonie'.

S: Yes because sometimes in transliteration some scholars do transliterate it as 's, a, k', others



as 's, h, a, k'. Others put 's' with a little stroke above the 'S', which indicates that it is 'sh'. That is in Sanskrit; in Pali there is no intermediate 'sh' sound. There is only s and 'sh'.

Vessantara: Is that first 'a' a long 'a'?

S: It is a long 'a'. The 'Mahamuni' should really be one word: 'Mahaamooni'.

And then: 'Ome Aah Hung Vajra Guru Padmah Siddhi Hung'. That is quite simple.

And then: 'Ga-te Ga-te Paara-ga-te Paara-sangate Bodhi Swaha'. The 'm' in 'samgate' is nasalized; it is not 'samm-gate", but 'sang-gate". Strictly speaking, you should make it very clear: 'sang-gate" not 'sangate' - if you can.

And then the last one. The spelling is wrong here. It has been corrected; I did correct it for this edition of the Puja Book but it wasn't observed. It's: 'Ome Shantih, Shantih, Shantih'. It shouldn't be 't - h - i'; it should be 't - i - h'. It's not a very easy sound for us to get our tongues round: an 'h' after a vowel, an 'h' actually sounded. The South Indians often spell it like this but it isn't correct.

Clive Pomfret: With regard to the other Padmasambhava mantra which we say after the Transference of Merit: is it the same?

S: Yes, it is the same. 'Jetsun' simply means, it is a Tibetan word meaning 'Venerable'. It doesn't mean 'vajra'. Why the Tibetans have changed that for certain purposes, especially singing, I don't know, but that is the custom.

Malcolm Webb: That mantra is usually sung 'Ome A Ah Huung'.

[10]

S: No, it shouldn't be. And it certainly shouldn't be 'Ome A Ha Huung'. I hope we have banished that one by now.

Clive Pomfret: What's the difference between 'Om A Hum' and 'Om A Ah Hum'?

S: No, it's all the same. It's 'Om Ah Hum'.

Clive Pomfret: I'm talking about the other 'Jetsun' mantra. It's 'Om A Ah Hum'.

S: No, it should be the same. 'Om Ah Hum Jetsun Guru Padma Siddhi Hum'.

Subhuti: But there's a change of note in the middle of 'Ah'.

S: Ah, it does go up, yes; it slides up. Well, that is simply the change of note; it is not a change of pronunciation.

Pete Shan: You don't say 'Ah' twice, you just..

S: Yes, you just make a little jump in the musical scale. It's the same vowel but continuing on to a higher note.

Pete Shan: I wasn't sure how you pronounced 'Shantih'.

S: 'Shanti-h' (= aspirated 'h'). It is difficult for us to say, isn't it?

Pete Shan: Normally that's 'hee': 'Shant-hee'.

S: No, the 'h' must come after the vowel. It's wrongly spelt here.

Pete Hill: Is the 'n' at the end of 'Jetsun', is that at all slightly nasal?

S: No, that is just a straight 'n'. That is a Tibetan word: 'Jetsun'.

Pete Shan: There's been some disagreement, I seem to remember, about the use of the Vajrasattva mantra as a regular sort of insert. Would you like to comment on that?

[11]

S: Well, I'm a bit reluctant to follow the path of irregular steps to too great a degree or to too great extent. We follow it to some extent in having the mantras at the end of the Puja as we do. But anyway, let's take that as all right. But I would prefer to keep certain things as it were not always to be recited, or nearly always to be recited on all occasions or by anybody - in order to just put some emphasis on the fact that there is a path of regular steps. Vajrasattva is especially and even exclusively associated with the Vajrayana. Whereas in the case of Shakyamuni, well yes, he is associated with the Hinayana, the Mahayana too. And Avalokiteshvara, Manjusri, they are associated with the Mahayana. You could say that Padmasambhava is associated with the Vajrayana, that is true, but he is a human and historical figure at the same time. But Vajrasattva falls into a completely different category. So I would prefer if the Vajrasattva Mantra wasn't used so frequently. I think probably the only occasion on which it could really be used with some justification is in connection with or after death ceremony, because Vajrasattva is connected with death in the sense that he is one of his titles is, one of his functions is the "Rescuer from Hell".

Andy: So what about having after the fourth section - the confession of faults?

S: Yes, I mean certainly within the Order, I think that would be very good. I don't know whether this is ever done, I don't remember if we ever did do it, but yes, Vajrasattva obviously is connected with purification of faults and at an Order Meeting, especially a monthly Order Meeting, it would be appropriate to recite.

Clive: There seems to be quite a lot of difference in the way that people actually say it.

Vessantara: Could we go through it?

S: This is also partly due to the, I don't think it is actually in here, it is also partly due to the way in which the Tibetan pronounce it. Tibetans of course very often from a scholarly point of view mispronounce Sanskrit mantras as with the Amideva instead of Amitabhaya and this is quite in evidence in the case of the Vajrasattva Mantra. So there are certain words which are pronounced by us as pronounced by the Tibetans. Scholarly Tibetans maintain that this is the way in which those words were pronounced when the mantra was introduced into Tibet, though they are quite aware, the scholarly monks were quite aware, that that is not the

standard Sanskrit pronunciation. I'll point those words out when we come to them.

[can't produce the emphasis in the following paragraph in ascii, see original print and tape recording]

So it is 'Ome Vajrasattve sumaye, manupaalaiye, Vajrasattve Tvenopatishta' that is just difficult to get one's tongue around because you have got so many consonants together, so, 'Dridho' here there should be a dot under the r ( when spelling) 'me bhva, Sutosye me bhva, Suposye me bhva, Anurakto me bhva, Sarrva siddhing' with a nasalization, 'me preche, Sarrva Karmma soocha me, Chittung sreyah (short "up" ending) kurru huung, Ha, ha, ha, ha, hoh,' with the h actually sounded at the end, 'bhagavan sarrva tathargata, Vajraama me mooncha, Vajri bhva, Maahasamayassattva, Ah Huung Pehat. The ph is not strictly speaking an f, it is a 'peh', not a 'feh' sound.

[12]

Clive: There is a quite strong tendency to say 'Maahaasamyaa satvaa' (lilting rhythm in voice on the a sounds)

S: No, there is no emphasis on that 'a', it isn't a long 'a' - 'Maahasamaye'.

Pete: I think the usual faults are the long 'a' on the bhava 'bhvaa' , and then the vajra is not usually pronounced as 'vajra' but as 'vajraama.

Clive: Doesn't the tune go "Vajrama me munca"

S: With regards to tunes for the mantras these are traditional from various sources, mainly Tibetan. If we do in time develop our own tunes, well I think there is no objection to that, but they must be quite beautiful, melodious, appropriate and generally acceptable.

Vessantara: Would you mind chanting it through?

S: Well the standard - this is, as it were, Indo-Tibetan way - would go like this: ( Bhante chants the Vajrasattva Mantra) Of course, when you get into it and there is a lot of momentum behind it, it sounds a bit different from that, obviously, but that is the as it were, tune. And as with Pali you notice that there is just going up and down the scale with I think only on about three notes. This is the traditional Pali method of chanting which is said to be based on Vedic Chanting, as we go, "Namo Tassa, Bhagavato Arahato Samasambuddhasa" (chanting it) It is just a very limited range of notes. And according to strict Theravadin tradition, the bhikkhus should not sing but they are permitted to chant. If you extend to a wider range of notes it becomes singing, which is against the Vinaya according to the Theravada. So they keep on that very limited range of notes as I believe is the case with the Gregorian Chant in the West, and hence the slightly monotonous but, at the same time, quite pleasant sort of effect that the chanting produces. There are many many different ways of chanting which the Sinhalese monks especially are very skilled in. Some are very difficult and a great strain on the throat, because there is a sort of prolonged warble and it doesn't sound very pleasant to Western ears. They go like " Namooooooooooooo Taaaaaaaaa Saaaaaaa" (chanting it). (laughter) They do it in a much more pronounced way than that and they chant a whole sutra in this way. They chant in that way especially when they chant at night. And there are some bhikkhus who do this very very well, but doesn't sound very pleasant to our ears. It

is a quite popular way of chanting, the lay people love to listen to this. And it also enables them to give the exact pronunciation, the exact correct sound of each vowel and consonant. You couldn't possibly mix them up chanting at that speed. It might be one of the reasons why they originally started doing it. If ever any of you are in Sravasti and meet the Ven. Sangharatna, an old friend of mine, ask him to give you a demonstration of Sinhalese Chanting. He is especially good at it, and has an especially good voice. But sometimes chanting in that way, monks start spitting blood, they strain their throats to such an extent. But Sinhalese bhikkhus are very fond of as it were demonstrating their capacity to chant in so many different ways, one sutra at least six different ways. But not all of them are very musical by our reckoning.

In Thailand there is some musical chanting, but it is confined to the Sramaneras, the bhikkhus do not engage in it, but the Sramaneras do it in unison, and the lay people often quite enjoy this to them doing this in that particular way, that is to say using a wider range of notes. And I think in some Buddhist [13] countries, I think the Anagarikas, that is to say the devoted ladies who are not bhikkhunis, who one must not call bhikkhunis, also chant or sing rather using a larger number of notes.

Pete: Where does the Last Vandana come into it?

S: The Last Vandana is peculiar to the Indian Buddhists. The tune comes, that is going back a little bit, that Dr Ambedkar even before the mass conversion produced a couple of records. I have been trying very hard to get hold of copies of them, but they are not being printed any longer it seems. Though they were brought out originally by HMV, I even have the numbers of them, but I am hoping to be able either track down some in India, or to get the actual chanting taped. But what Dr Ambedkar did was to get a well known Marathi, not ex-untouchable, musician to sort of set various Pali verses from the Dhammapada and the Vandana to various tunes with a view to popularizing those verses among his followers and many of these tunes now have gained sort of general acceptance including this Last Vandana. But there are other passages on this record which are much more beautiful even, but they are definitely sung and though it is in accordance with Indian music, they are quite immediately appreciable by Westerners. The tunes are really very beautiful, they are not exactly tunes, it is difficult to describe them, but they are certainly much more appealing emotionally than the Sinhalese chanting. There is no doubt about that. I did get Padmavajra to learn some of these including the Last Vandana and I was hoping he would teach them to lots of people and spread them around the Movement, but this doesn't seem to have happened for one reason or another.

End of Side A.

S: ... The Gujeratis have got their own tunes to which they chant for instance the Mangala Sutta. Perhaps I should explain that in Pali and Sanskrit there are different metres for verse. You understand what I mean? And of course, Pali and Sanskrit verse is entirely quantitative verse, it is not accented verse as English verse is. So there... each verse form has a certain set number of syllables and a set division of long and short syllables. For instance, in the Dhammapada, " Sabbapapassa akaranam, kusalassa upasampada, sacitta pariyodapanam, etam Buddhana sasanam." That is one particular metre. If you take the Bhagavadgita, ( Bhante chants verses) this is another metre you can recognize something of it, there is a different rhythm. So there are certain traditional tunes which, traditionally go with certain

metres, so that any verse any poem in that particular metre can be chanted to that particular tune. So there is quite a lot of standard tunes to go with standard metres. So in India, Hindus constantly use these standard tunes to chant sacred texts, fitting the metre to the tune. And the Buddhists have started doing something of this sort. They don't like to borrow the Hindus' tunes but in some cases they have made up tunes themselves to go with particular metres. The Gujeratis seem to have done something like this, they have got a tune, I don't where they have got it from, maybe someone composed it, which goes together with the Mangala Sutta, its metre. "Babu deva manusacca" that is the metre. Well they fit a particular tune to that. It is rather like say in the West, you get various hymn tunes which you can fit different hymns provided the verse structure of the hymn is the same. I don't know whether you remember [14] this sort of thing from your hymn singing days. But there is that sort of parallel. But so far we have not developed this at all in the FWBO. We need to develop music, especially music in connection with Puja much more. Not having any particular gifts in this direction myself, I have tried to encourage others, but so far nothing much has happened. Rintrah was going to do something. One or two other people were going to do something but so far nothing has happened. So we are just continuing with the chants which are derived from Sinhalese and Indo-Tibetan sources but there is no reason why we should be confined to these.

Subhuti: This does raise the question of innovations in the Puja. You sometimes do find that an innovation has taken over perhaps without being properly considered. To what extent can one vary from the standard formula?

S: Well, with regard say to the Refuges and Precepts, the Sevenfold Puja we should certainly keep to the standard way of doing it. It is rather that I would like sort of extra possibilities, not to replace what we are doing, but to broaden out and elaborate, especially for special occasions.

Subhuti: I seem to remember you saying at one time that any innovation should be taken on quite carefully and that they should be tried out with ...

S: Yes, indeed. Yes at least within the Order and if an innovation or an addition is considered worthwhile well it should be known to the Order as a whole, and introduced as appropriate as we did with the Short Puja.

Gerald: You said that you didn't think the Vajrasattva Mantra was suitable for an elaboration. It seems that at the moment this has been limited to extra readings and things of that sort. Is there anything else you might suggest for elaboration on special occasions?

S: Quite a few years , although this dropped out later, some people used to accompany the Padmasambhava Mantra chanting with little cymbals which is quite good, but you must do it properly, it mustn't be someone just 'clink, clink, clink' at odd intervals according to their whim. There is a proper way of combining those little cymbals with the chanting. And there is more elaborate offerings. Decorating the shrine in a special way. When I went down to the Women's' Retreat recently, I found that on different days they had three different shrines of different colours, according to, I believe, the theme of the day, or whatever. It was I think red one day, next day it was blue, and by the time I got there it was yellow. And they had alternative sets of shrine cloths, they seemed quite well provided with all these things, it had all been planned out carefully beforehand.

But anyway just to get away from chanting, that reminds me of something, because I mentioned the word, planning. That is to say thinking out the Puja beforehand. That is to say, if you are the leader, the first thing is that you don't rush along at the last minute, and also as a matter of courtesy almost, you don't ask someone to lead a puja at the last minute. You give him plenty of warning, give him plenty of time, so that if necessary he can calm down a bit, before the puja, or else enthuse himself. And if it is a retreat, it is the duty usually of say the organizer just to check that everything is in order. Though sometimes I believe the person leading has that responsibility. But at least it must be clear where the responsibility lies. And if you ask someone to do [15] a reading, give them enough time. Don't give them a difficult reading with lots of Sanskrit and Tibetan words in just a minute before the Puja is due to begin. I know this has happened sometimes. Some readings, if one is to do justice to them, need to be gone through several times.

Yes, this brings us to another point, not just chanting but reading. Some people cannot read the English language properly. It is amazing. I think this doesn't only have educational significance. I think it has psychological significance. Even spiritual significance. I think reading aloud is very important. I think in the Middle Ages in Europe in the monasteries, the Christian monasteries, reading aloud was regarded as a spiritual exercise. I think it was called *Lectio*, if I remember rightly, or *lexion* (?) as we would say; reading aloud. Because first of all you require mindfulness, you require concentration and attention. Some people you notice don't read every word on the page because they don't notice that it is there. They just sort of slip it over or slur it over. Sometimes people actually read things that are not there. So there is something psychological going on obviously. So it is very important that you train yourself to read aloud properly. Especially within the context of Puja.

So if you are given a reading, or if you select a reading, go through it a couple of times beforehand, that is to say, reading it aloud, if necessary get somebody to listen to you, and give you a bit of feedback, because you may be placing your emphases wrongly, you may be pronouncing words wrongly, your articulation may not be clear. When you are reading, make sure you are reading sufficiently loudly, so that everybody can hear without having to strain. Articulate the words properly. All these are quite important points. And it really does sometimes spoil a puja if someone is reading an extract from the Sutras say or some other text and the reading is so bad, stumbling and making so many mistakes, you cannot even appreciate it properly. It really almost spoils the whole puja. I am sure some of you must have experience this. So if you ask someone to do a reading, it is our responsibility to make sure that that person can do justice to the reading. If there is nobody else to hear that person go through reading beforehand, well you should do it, and give him a bit of feedback.

Subhuti: I think sometimes people ask people to do readings or to lead mantras on the basis of it is good for the person rather on considering whether they are going to be able to do it properly.

S: Well it is good for them to do it properly. But it is not very good for them or the puja or everybody else, if they do it badly. So obviously one isn't able, going to be able to produce a good reading or do a do good reading in the context of the puja if you cannot read anyway. So it wouldn't be a bad idea perhaps if there was more cultivation of reading aloud especially poetry perhaps. I believe there is a society in England devoted to the reading aloud of English Poetry. It organizes from the point of view of cultivating the spoken word. Do you see the importance of this?

Because it is deplorable when people don't even speak or pronounce their language correctly. I don't want to go too much into the standards of correctness. For instance a regional accent is generally accepted now as not necessarily an incorrect accent. It used to be thought that only an Oxford or Cambridge accent was correct. But people don't believe that any longer, mainly due to the influence of radio and television. Though according to a programme I heard recently, there are certain regional accents [16] that are acceptable so to speak outside the actual region where they prevail, and others which are not. For instance a Scottish accent was universally acceptable provided it was an Edinburgh or Highland accent. A Glaswegian accent came right down at the bottom of the list together with Cockney (laughter). A pronounced London accent apparently is also quite unacceptable. But anyway I think the sort of criterion is that the accent should not be, if it is a regional accent, so obtrusive as to divert attention from what is actually being read. And of course it must not be unintelligible to the majority of people. But if there is just a slight burr or twang, it doesn't really matter. Perhaps it adds a little sort of picturesqueness. But maybe there is a case for people just having for instance poetry readings from time to time with a view to cultivating their capacity to read English aloud. I mean this is important from the point of view of public speaking. If you have clear and correct articulation, you pronounce your words clearly, and if you project your voice properly, use your voice properly, this enhances the value of your talk. If you have got a harsh croaking voice or if you have a nasal whine this spoils the effect of the talk. And it may be that your harsh croaking voice or your nasal whine is of sort of psychological origin. These things are not unconnected. If you are swallowing your words all the time and muttering that has psychological significance. If you tend to shout that has psychological significance. If you tend to whisper, that again has I think psychological significance. So in your own interests you should cultivate the Art, The ART, of public Speaking.

I think we don't give nearly enough attention to things of this sort. They are as it were not just psychological, they are also as it were aesthetic things. Also another thing with regard to pujas and readings, is timing. Don't let there be any unnecessarily long gaps, or don't do certain things too quickly. Again the leader will have to go very much by his feel of the whole situation. And maybe vary the emotional tone. You shouldn't for instance let's say lead a puja in connection with Wesak say in quite the same way that you would lead a puja in connection with somebody's death, or a name giving ceremony. You should be sensitive to the difference of the occasion, sensitive to what is appropriate and inappropriate. So you have a wide range, you should be able to conduct a funeral in the appropriate, I don't mean in a sad and solemn way, but in the appropriate way, and you should be equally capable of, say, blessing a wedding in the appropriate way, if called upon to do so. You might choose not to be called on. Clearly if you are blessing someone's wedding you do not do it in a sad and solemn way either. (laughter) Well what your personal feelings may be, you sacrifice those for the occasion.

Malcolm Webb: May I ask about the Short Puja, would you prefer when possible the Sevenfold Puja rather than the Short Puja?

S: Perhaps I should explain how the Short Puja was introduced. We were having, some our friends, Order Members in Helsinki, were having difficulties with beginners, and with the Sevenfold Puja, and some of the Finnish beginners weren't at all happy with the Sevenfold Puja and in fact refused to recite or join in the recitation on the grounds that, for instance, they professed to be offering jewelled cups and golden flowers but were actually not doing so, and therefore they considered it a breach of the fourth precept. In other [17] words they were

a bit literalistic and unimaginative, and they thought if you said that you offered mandarava flowers, well you actually had to have mandarava flowers handy and actually offer them quite literally. So this, and for some other reasons the Helsinki Order Members asked me if I could not devise something more acceptable to beginners, to new people. So I thought and so I produced the Short Puja, as we call it. And we sort of ran through it I think in England first, it might have been at Padmaloka, or Sukhavati, we tried it out, so to speak, people seemed to like it, so it was sent off to Helsinki, was found quite acceptable there and gradually spread through out the Movement. So if it is a question of very new people who may find some of the ideas and maybe some of the imagery of the Sevenfold Puja unacceptable, by all means use the Short Puja, it is a question of just what is appropriate to any given situation, any given group of people.

Murray: There is one thing that has come up with the Short Puja, that is the line, "The Buddha was a man as we are men." There has been an objection on the grounds that it should be "human" because it is discriminating against women.

S: Well that means... People who make that point don't know their English language. Just look up the dictionary. What is the first meaning of word 'man'? The primary meaning is human being.

Vessantara: I don't think it is the word man that people object to, it is "as we are men."

S: Well again, 'men' is the plural of 'man', in that sense.

Murray: It is often hard to get across though.

S: Originally I was inclined to be a bit sort of sympathetic, and I suggested an alternative, "The Buddha was born as we were born". And I suggested that if there was any sort of objection on the grounds of men or man being exclusively masculine, all right you could substitute 'the Buddha was born as we are born', but later on I thought well in a way that is a bit of a compromise because you are giving way perhaps to people's wrong ideology, or even just through ignorance of their own language in a sense.

Murray: I have been in situations where Order Members have actually changed it.

S: Well, I have said that if people think it desirable, well yes they can change, but I have given one, as it were, standard alternative, that is to say, "The Buddha was born as we are born". Not that in different centres there should be different variations, there should be a standard. But on the other hand we shouldn't I feel go along with peoples' reactivity too much. All right if they are completely new people, fair enough, you cannot expect to sort them out all together straight away. But we have to be careful that we don't simply go along with current sort of fashionable modes of thought and adapt ourselves accordingly. A little bit all right, but not beyond a certain point

Malcolm: I tend to find that the Short Puja gets used when the evening has gone on longer than was expected. A talk perhaps has gone on longer than expected; "well, we'll just finish with the Short Puja". Do you Think it is better to do that?



S: Well again the person in charge of the evening or the leader of the Puja has to decide. One cannot lay down a general rule. It may be that people are very tired, all right, have a Short Puja, it may be that people are a bit lethargic, they need a bit of stimulating, all right, even though it is late, never mind, have the Sevenfold Puja. It is the man on the spot who has to make the decision. One cannot generalize in advance.

Bob: Would you say the same about doing pujas in unison? Have you any objection to people doing pujas in unison?

S: I am not sure about that. I think the general practice seems to be that if there is just a small number, a very small number of people, especially a very small number of Order Members, it seems a bit inappropriate to have one person leading and the others responding. So then it is done in unison. But I think on a larger occasion, I personally definitely prefer the Puja to be done in what has come to be called "call and response". Maybe some people call it, "challenge and response". I prefer it that way for one very good reason. It then lasts twice as long. Do you see what I mean? And also the fact that it is call and response seems to generate a certain energy and liveliness and variety. So I think on the whole it is preferable, though I certainly don't rule out people doing the Puja in unison, especially when there is just a handful of Order Members together, and when they really can do it in unison, and it isn't going to be ragged. One doesn't want a ragged Puja.

I think I would like to see a bit more inventiveness in connection with Pujas. By which I mean not departing from the standard procedures, but elaborating more, decorating more, filling more. Even if it is only a question of say more readings, or decorating the shrine in a different sort of way, or better sort of way, or elaborate sort of way. Ananda used to be very good in this way.

Mike: What about inserting things in addition such as the Tara Mantra chanting that, or the Shakyamuni mantra...

S: Well this can be certainly done. I think we're going to be doing this this evening. Yes, certainly variations of that kind according to the appropriateness of the occasion can be made.

Subhuti: There has been the question of readings which are non-Canonical, non-Buddhist, say poems that might be appropriate.

S: I think here one should exercise caution, because sometimes you might be personally inspired by a certain poem, but it may not sound very appropriate in the middle of the Puja, say a chunk of Allen Ginsberg, (laughter) or even a sonnet by Shakespeare, it might not quite fit, however beautiful the poem may be itself. So be careful in this respect, I would say, preferably almost invariably selections from Buddhist texts, as it were, canonical texts, either from the sutras or words, sayings, songs of recognized spiritual masters.

Mike: With the Seven fold Puja should one always do the concluding mantras, and always do the Padmasambhava Mantra and Avalokiteshvara Mantra?

S: I would say not invariably. I mean I myself normally when [19] there is a Sevenfold Puja before an Ordination Ceremony I miss out the concluding Mantras and the Padmasambhava Mantra. It seems inappropriate, it is as though that does mark the end whereas you haven't

reached the end, you are now going into the Ordination Ceremony. So it seems appropriate not to have those concluding Mantras. So I don't usually, in fact I very rarely have them.

Dave Rice: What about the chanting of the English rendering of the Vandana?

S: One would have to find out how to do it. I've no objection in principle, but don't forget the Pali words have a certain rhythm and there are verses in metre even. I have of course produced a poetical version of the Vandana. I don't know how suitable that is for chanting. But it must be a proper chant. Maybe a bit like the Heart Sutra, which is not bad. One can only experiment.

Dave: What about call and response then? Could that be included in the Puja? It has been done before, but I just wondered whether that is acceptable to add something like that?

S: You mean to incorporate the Vandana in the Sevenfold Puja?

Dave: Yes.

S: Well one could yes, one has sometimes done that. Because as I have pointed out, the Sevenfold Puja is a sort of framework, and you can fit into that or have preceding that or following that all sorts of other material depending on the appropriateness to the occasion. The Tibetans do this very very much, sometimes they go to the extreme, you lose sight of the basic structure. For instance under the heading of the Confession of Faults, you could have quite a big chunk of the Sutra of Golden Light. You can have if it is an Order occasion, you can have the chanting of the Vajrasattva Mantra, you could even have at that point people writing their confessions on a piece of paper and ceremonially burning them, all that can be incorporated at that point. So in this way the Sevenfold Puja becomes, not only complete in itself but a framework within which can be incorporated so many other things, according to the occasion. So yes, on that principle, one can also if one so wishes include the Tiratna Vandana, no objection, or several Suttas, it depends on the time you have available and the occasion.

Dave: I wasn't thinking so much of that, but incorporating a call and response, not so much a chant, because that could be difficult and would need to be worked out beforehand.

S: You mean a call and response with regard to the English Vandana. Well there is no reason why one shouldn't experiment and see.

Dave: Well it has been done quite often in New Zealand. I just wondered whether that was acceptable in England because quite often there is all sorts of things introduced in New Zealand.

S: Well, I think it would be desirable if anyone has any ideas, which they consider good ideas with regards say anything which seems a bit innovatory to refer it to the Order at large, maybe by writing to Shabda, which you probably know is the Order's unedited [20] magazine, which comes out every month, in which you get as an Order Member in due course. So one can always use that as a medium for trying out these sorts of ideas, or just asking other people to try them out. But it isn't a good idea for different centres and communities to just fly off at a tangent on their own, so that new people say arrive, Order Members, Mitras and Friends from

other centres and communities and discover that things are being done either in a different way, or that different things are being done.

Pete: Do I take it that on special occasions you can make innovations...

S: I'm not ... maybe innovations is the wrong word here, it is taking the Sevenfold Puja as a framework and filling it in more than is usually done. For instance you can have six readings if you like scattered through out.

Pete: What I am thinking is that you could put pieces in and so on maybe on special occasions but if you wanted to actually change something as a regular thing you would be better to bring it to...

S: Yes, indeed. Yes for instance if you wanted to stop using the Sevenfold Puja at your centre and only use the Short Puja, it would better to consult the whole Order about that. Maybe through the Chairman's Meeting or through Shabda. Or you might have found in some old Buddhist text a wonderful new Puja and you might want that everybody should use it on certain occasions. Well don't just start using it yourself, bring it to the attention of other Order Members and just see how everybody feels about it. Make a fresh contribution by all means, but don't do it in a sort of unilateral individualistic sort of way.

Anyway we have covered a fair amount of ground with regards to Pujas and Chanting, especially from the point of view of leading. I'm quite sure that there are other points which may arise in this connection, and no doubt there will be other opportunities to deal with them. But meanwhile, maybe just leave oneself with the idea, or with the feeling, that if it is your responsibility to lead a Puja or to take a Puja at all to any degree, it is your responsibility to do that to the best of your ability, so that the Puja is all that much more effective and meaningful for everyone. So if one follows that principle then the value of the Puja for everyone will be greatly enhanced.

Preordination Retreat. Tuscany 1981

Questions and Answers

Tape 15

Saddhaloka: Well, I mean, I have a question not strictly arising out of the discussion but more out of what's gone on over the past few days. In the course of quite a lot of the life stories we've heard about people's experiences with acid and so on, and I just had quite a strong feeling in myself that, I mean, whilst it may have been sort of quite informative quite strong experience for many of us, it's actually something that really needs to be left behind.

S: Yes.

Saddhaloka: ... and that if we sort of carry it with us, I mean, in the way of still experimenting occasionally or even in being just a bit too careless in the way we talk about it, that it can actually be something quite insidious, quite destructive of effort to create a spiritual community, to develop the Dharma. I mean, it's out of my own experience of the people who've taken a lot and who've actually sort of carried it with them and er, I know I'd certainly

be quite disturbed if sort of Order Members, certainly around the Centre, I was involved with, were tripping, and especially if they tried to give that a sort of spiritual significance and just whether I'm actually being a bit dogmatic, a bit inflexible sort of thinking and feeling this way. What would you feel is sort of..?

S: Well, I was under the impression that the general feeling, not [2] only within the Order but from the Movement that that was something which had in fact been left behind in some cases quite a long time ago. That was my general impression, but you would seem to suggest that that isn't in all cases so.

Saddhaloka: No.

S: Hm. Well, as regards Centres, well one thing has to be made clear, perhaps it hasn't been made clear, you know, explicitly recently because the necessity hasn't arisen but we have to make it clear. At one stage, which was at least, you know, looking at it from the most basic point of view, at least to protect our selves - no drugs were to be brought on FWBO premises whether public centres or communities and people who were under the influence of drugs would not be encouraged to attend the Centre. In fact there have been cases in the past - this is several years ago - when, you know, people have been asked to leave. So this is as it were, the 'official' position. Because obviously we don't want to get into unnecessary trouble with the authorities because certain things are still illegal and that would be just to deflect ourselves from our main purpose if we were to be involved with hassles of that sort hm? That is not, of course, pronouncing on the usefulness or otherwise of those particular substances, but we just wish to remain free to devote ourselves to our main purpose. As I said I do think that the majority of people, certainly within the Movement, who have experimented with drugs, do feel that this is a thing of the past and that they have now to consolidate any spiritual gains that they may have through meditation principally. But there is the temptation on the part of some people that if you're not getting on very well and you haven't had any particular [3] experience, over a long period and perhaps if especially you're meditation hasn't been going very well, there's a temptation, just to fall back on drugs as a means possibly of opening you up and all that, but I think that it is a temptation that should be resisted. I mean, those sort of experimentations really should be all over before you get at all deeply involved with the Movement, as part of your general shopping around, sampling drugs, encounter groups, spiritual groups of various kinds and you come to the conclusion that none of those in fact, are the way.

(Pause)

Murray: I can't help feeling that (mumble) in respect of LSD that perhaps the whole question is oversimplified. It seems to me that it's quite multi-faceted and complex. It depends not so much upon the drug as upon the person.

S: Well I think this is generally understood because whereas people have told their different life stories it's been quite obvious that the same drug has affected different people in so many different ways. There's no doubt about that - people have had different experiences. But nonetheless it is, one might say, a sort of forcing of the gate rather than opening or allowing it to open relatively naturally or allowing something to unfold. So, even though retrospectively one might acknowledge that quite a few people have been in a sense helped by the drug experiences - at least made aware of other dimensions of mind other dimensions of

consciousness of which they hadn't been formerly aware, well now they have a sort of royal road in meditation open before them - they don't really need to have [4] recourse to drugs any more, however useful they might have been in the past.

(Pause)

Bob Jones: So take, for example of... I've often in the past urged my little brother to take LSD because he's not going to get into meditation but I think it would sincerely broaden his horizons - you wouldn't consider that to automatically be an unskilful action? You don't know...

S: I think one must be very cautious about advising people to take LSD. I don't think I've ever personally advised anybody to take it because in order to give that sort of advice you really need to know the person to whom you're giving the advice, quite well, not even in the ordinary sense, you have almost to be able to foresee the sort of experiences that person is likely to have and be in a position to, if necessary, render help. I remember one of our friends, some years ago, told me that he had a very unfortunate experience that certain friends just happened to pass some LSD to him in a very casual sort of way and he had a very, very bad trip, he said - a very, very bad experience indeed, and they just went out and left him to it, and this really seriously affected his future course of development or course of life. So one has really to be very responsible about these things to not sort of throw acid around in a happy-go-lucky sort of way in the hope that it will do some good. I don't want in principle absolutely to rule anything out. I don't think that can be done, that would be too much of a generalization. Nonetheless I wouldn't, I think, personally be prepared to advise anybody to take LSD. If they had taken it, I wouldn't take them to task, but as I say, on the other hand, I wouldn't encourage anybody [5] to take it either, especially anyone to whom other avenues were open.

Murray: So, I tend to feel - well what I do feel is that given the right situation for myself, say in the countryside or mountains and I'm alone, and I'm in a good state, in touch with my meditation, I tend to feel that taking certain amounts of psychedelics and getting on say with meditation and puja, I find that actually quite stimulating and inspiring in terms of my spiritual life. I do not find that that is all, that at all has a bad effect.

S: Hm, I think I must say I'm quite distrustful of any combination of meditation and well presumably you mean psychedelic drugs. I'm definitely inclined to think the two should be kept separate and that if one is at all able to get into meditation one should get or aim to get more and more deeply into that rather than to give oneself, so to speak, a sort of boost with a drug.

Murray: On what basis do you...?

S: Hm.

Murray: On what basis do you say... ?

S: Well, I think that the principal basis is that the psychedelic drug is, as it were, a forcible sort of approach. For instance I have known quite a few people in the past who claim to have taken and probably have taken, several hundred trips, has all sorts of experiences, all sorts of

glimpses but they've come back [6] in the end, in the long run to the position that they were in to begin with. They haven't assimilated anything. Even assuming that the content of the experience was something to be assimilated. But after 300 or in one or two cases 500 trips they've said, 'Well... (laughter)... I've got to start all over again. I haven't really got very far.

Murray: It seems to me that it's not so much a matter that they, where they were when they started. I personally don't know anyone who's done that amount of LSD that hasn't been sort of, fundamentally and radically changed. I think that the problem arises in how to dwell in those states if you like or to dwell in higher states of consciousness continuously and I think the golden rule of psychedelics is that if you go up on acid you come down on acid. That's the problem that faces most acid users.

S: Well, I think we've seen quite a lot of people who've come down, and though in the old days we used to see them in quite a pitiful state, I have seen them on occasions strewn all over the floor of the Centre - not regular Friends or Members, so to speak, but people who've just come along and well, yes, I mean, this is something one has to consider, you know, in a broader context perhaps - that I don't know how many hundreds of thousands of people now have taken LSD over the last say twenty, twenty-five, perhaps 30 years. It could be several million but do we see the promised awakening? They seem to sort of fade back into ordinary life, settle down into conventional obscurity and quietly get ordinary jobs. It seems to have had no effect at all and when one considers there were people going around in the early days in the States, as you probably know, just [7] putting LSD into people's lemonade and in some areas tens of thousands of people were taking the stuff but it doesn't seem to have had any more effect than the Maharishi's, transcendental meditation. We hope we can do better.

Murray: Well, I'm actually questioning that. It seems to me that it has had an effect and that, in as much as that particular area did stimulate an interest in spiritual things. I don't question ...

S: I mentioned the point that if your interest in spiritual things has been stimulated by LSD, let now your interest be in the spiritual things directly, especially meditation. I mean also I recall my experience in India with Hindu sadhus. Well many Hindu sadhus, in fact the majority of Hindu sadhus, take drugs of one kind or another but one certainly doesn't find that it is helping them very much in the spiritual life. Those who take drugs and take drugs regularly are well-known in India to be among the lowest class of the sadhus in every respect and those who are at all well known for their spiritual life or their Insight or their understanding, (I'm speaking more now obviously of Hindus) are almost always people who don't have any connection with drugs. It's only the common or garden sort of semi-beggar-like sadhu who regularly resort to those and sometimes, I've met many such people, they don't really seem fully human even. So it's against that sort of background, that experience in India as well as what I've observed and what I've heard in the West, that I strike this note of caution. I mean, I'm not saying that no one should take drugs under any circumstances, and they're permanently precluded, I wouldn't like to be as sweeping as that, but nonetheless as a general rule [8] I think I'd like to see people who have experimented with drugs making the transition into spiritual life in the more traditional sense, and meditation rather than falling back upon these old aids.

Murray: How does that say fit in with something, when the Buddha's talking to Maha Prajapati Gotami and he says, 'You know that whatever conduces to your enlightenment,

whatever conduces to skilful states of mind, this is the teaching.'

S: Well what I'm saying is that broadly speaking and on the whole I don't consider that drugs can be included in that category and certainly not when one has discovered meditation.

Dave Rice: Perhaps Murray's being more specific in talking about exceptional cases not, you know...

S: Well, I've already, I've already acknowledged the possibility of exceptional cases in refusing to make a sweeping, all-inclusive generalization. So what more does one want? But if one considers that one is oneself an exception to any rule of general applicability in the spiritual life then one must be very, very sure that one really knows what one is doing. You might for instance, some teachers according to legend have done, you might consider that you're exempt from the, from the fulfilment of the first precept; that under certain circumstances, for you to kill would be a very skilful action. Well no one can stop you from coming to that conclusion. No one can stop you acting upon it, but you have to act upon it with a full sense of responsibility and awareness that you are constituting by your act, an exception to a general rule, a [9] rule which is usually regarded in fact, as universal. Do you see what I mean? You can't withdraw the individual's responsibility from him. That's why one can't say, 'Well, nobody should ever do such and such under any circumstances, such and such couldn't possibly lead to enlightenment under any circumstances'. You can't say that. But where the general experience of the Buddhist community has led it to regard certain things as unskilful - well one has to be very careful about regarding oneself as an exception in that respect. And, of course, if one looks at Buddhist tradition - yes, drugs are definitely out. Strictly speaking, alcohol is out. If we're very strict, I think I'd even say tea and coffee were out even though they're stimulants. Certainly undue dependence upon them is out. Even things like that. And traditionally, Buddhist monks do not take drugs ever. I don't think I've met a Buddhist bhikkhu anywhere who has taken drugs. That is the tradition. So presumably the tradition is based upon some sort of spiritual consensus among teachers and disciples as to what helps and what doesn't help. Hindus tend to believe that drugs can help but, as I've said it seems to be only the lowest category of Saddhus who actually avail themselves of drugs. You can see them very often. Well, I've described some of them in my memoirs - sitting outside the village in a little vihara, a little ashram, which is just a sort of ganga smoking den. It's not exactly a source of enlightenment or centre of spiritual practice. (Chuckling)

So really one has to follow what could be described as a middle way. I suppose, I mean, recognize the consensus of Buddhist opinion but at the same time not be so dogmatic that one absolutely refuses to accept any exception. But nonetheless if you regard yourself as an exception, be very careful, in this and other [10] respects.

Clive Pomfret: Do you know any cases, or have any experience of drugs, psychedelic drugs, actually being in detriment to a regular spiritual practice, actually having deleterious effects.

S: Well, one can only hypothesise because one doesn't know what that particular person might have done if he hadn't taken drugs. So in the same way, you can always say well the drugs have helped me. You don't know because, not absolutely, because you don't know how you would have got on had you not taken them.

Malcolm Webb: I feel it very strongly that it enforces delusions about what one's experienced.

I suppose I took 50 or somewhere between 40 and 50 trips now, I'm pretty sure that it deluded me and gave me such strength of mind to keep my delusions going on for two or three years longer than they should have done. There's so much energy that goes up into the psyche because of this drug that you don't know what's going on.

Subhuti: Do you think there's a sort of logical error in that a lot of people did become interested in spiritual matters out of that cultural milieu of the drug milieu. They think it's a necessary connection between the drugs and things spiritual which I don't think there necessarily, I don't think there is. I think it's more or less accidental that...

S: Yes, that would appear to be the case.

Subhuti: Yes.

[11]

S: One doesn't find that those who were most prominent in that movement have been especially prominent for their enlightenment. Look at Timothy Leary. Look what happened to him? Baba Ram Das was one of his associates but as far as I know he has definitely left drugs behind and in fact, not only will not recommend them but I think he warns against them.

(long pause)

It's the old logical fallacy of 'subsequent to, therefore because of'. I don't want to underestimate the part historically played by the drugs movement as perhaps one could call it. It definitely did open the eyes of some people to the fact that there was another world of experience possible and perhaps if that particular time that was a very valuable indication but I don't think for any longer we really need to rely upon that.

Dave Rice: It seems to me that what you express is very similar to what Baba Ram Das expresses even now during his workshops when people ask him about LSD; that you cannot rely and depend upon it to continue your spiritual life, that you do need to get on with the basic fundamentals of regular steps and that if you have been taking it - it's best to give it away at some stage.

S: Yes.

Dave Rice: Sooner or later, but he's quite tolerant in his overall views about it.

S: Well what does one mean by tolerant? Does he not criticize people for having taken it or does he encourage people who have [12] not taken it to take it?

Dave Rice: I think it's - he talks personally and generally to people. He doesn't necessarily advise people to try LSD in the way that you wouldn't, certainly if people do. I think he would point out the conditions, that he appreciates what is needed in order to experience LSD in order that the best outcome does happen - from his experience. In other words he would advise the person to do it in a given situation, the right setting, make sure that his friends who are going to be there at all are as supportive etc., etc., but I don't on the whole, generally speaking, know if he ( ? ? ? ) coming across as spiritual tradition ( ? ? ? ) involvement.



S: Well perhaps historically speaking the need for it has passed, because, well, there is a general awareness of spiritual traditions and mystical traditions amongst those are in fact likely to become interested in them because they were dissatisfied with their present lot.

Dave Rice: I remember Ram Dass's own guru wrote back on a slate, a blackboard, when he asked about LSD, and his guru wrote back that LSD is the Christ-like avatar awakening the people of America to the Kali-Yoga (laughter). This was ten years ago when he wrote that.

S: One doesn't have to accept even what Ram Dass' guru might have said. (laughter) Other gurus say other things. (laughter) Not to speak of the Buddha who is generally regarded by Buddhists at least, as the guru of all gurus. (laughter)

[13]

Dave Rice: I can see what he's getting at, because then he added that, he said that, the Americans needed their avatar - because America is a very materialistic country - therefore they needed their avatar in the form of a chemical. And they got LSD!

S: Well, one could regard it as a devastating criticism simply of American society and the American way of life.

Dave Rice: True.

S: I suppose if it's a question of an avatar in Italy it would take the form of a good bottle of Chianti. (Laughter) You don't necessarily have to make these concessions. (Pause)

Dave Rice: Just one more point on that. It's interesting because of what Murray was suggesting. Ram Dass did say - and this was up until three or four years ago; I don't know if it's the case now he said that once a year he took himself off into the mountains and ritualistically took some LSD. He had it in order to see if he'd missed something. I think it was more problem-solving, just getting in rather deeply and exploring, and looking - and then leaving it at that.

S: Well, if I ever meet Ram Dass - and he does want to meet me apparently - I'll ask him about it and see what he has to say.

Dave Rice: I think he might have changed his views since then. I hear he feels that he has transcended it. [14] But it's interesting that he did see, that he did connect from that. (some subdued laughter in background) that for lot of people it was a case of slowly ? ? immersing themselves more and more in spiritual growth and development or a tradition.

S: Well, was that a question that arose out of the discussion or is that a question that supervenes upon the discussion? Were there questions arising out of the discussions or study?

Subhuti: There weren't really.

Ratnaguna: Well, we had one, in fact. (laughter) We were just discussing the... to what extent does spiritual friendship need to be based on ordinary friendship? Is that clear?

S: Well, spiritual friendship seems to need a sort of toehold in ordinary friendship, it seems to

me, because spiritual friendship is, after all, a form of friendship. So, if you mean by spiritual friendship a rather intense, open, scope for communication, you are not very likely to be able to catapult yourself into that directly, having not known somebody at all. But it could be if both persons are well developed spiritually and as soon as they meet they feel an affinity and a liking for each other and then become friends and spiritual friends immediately, I mean, that is possible, but it assumes that both parties are spiritually developed to begin with. But if you are not and you want to develop a spiritual friendship, well [15] it does seem that you have to start off with ordinary friendship which may be based to some extent on common interests, even common likes and dislikes, though obviously they shouldn't be too conditioned. It might just be a common interest in spiritual things, even though you haven't personally risen to a very high spiritual level, but therefore I think that for most people spiritual friendship will grow out of ordinary friendship. If you do happen to meet someone with whom you can be spiritual friends right off, well that's wonderful. I think it's comparatively rare though but perhaps it will become less and less rare as people do develop and you might, for instance, say meet an Order Member of ten years standing from some other part of the globe who, you've never seen before and because you've both got ten years of intensive spiritual life behind you, it may be that the instant that you meet a spark will be produced, a spiritual friendship will be born instantly, that is possible.

(Pause .)

Perhaps also it isn't advisable to think of spiritual friendship as, so to speak, opposed to ordinary friendship but recognize it as growing gradually out of the more positive element, in the ordinary friendship itself. Do you see what I mean? You don't want to make it such a high ideal that it becomes remote or even alienated. Or, for instance, adopt a sort of attitude, well, you know, we can't talk about ordinary things because we're trying to develop a spiritual friendship. Do you see what I mean? Was the subject of spiritual friendship discussed?

V: Yes.

Bob Jones: Part of the discussion revolved around whether any of us [16] would consider you personally as a spiritual friend, given that a lot of us don't find it that easy to relate to you on a one to one human level, whether you can actually be called a spiritual friend.

S: Well, again it depends on one's definition of spiritual friend because spiritual friend has got all sorts of shades of meaning. On one level the spiritual friend is somebody just on your own level, so to speak, your own spiritual level with whom you have a sort of equal relationship, an equal communication and but, kalyana mitra is used, especially in Vajrayana literature, to mean the Guru in the fullest sense. And of course, there are all sorts of intermediate stages or levels between those two. So it depends very much on which particular meaning of the term, which particular level of kalyana mitrata, you know, one has in mind.

Gerald Burns: Could one find say, different levels in different people?

S: Oh yes, indeed, obviously. Because with someone you might have a relationship of kalyana mitrata on a very ordinary human level. It might be simply that common spiritual interests, are predominating, but with another person you might have another kind of relationship of kalyana mitrata because you might find that person intensely inspiring. You might look up to him very much even though you don't actually regard him as a Guru, but still you look up to

him as for instance some people do say to senior Order Members or say junior Order Members look up to some senior Order Members and find them very inspiring. That too is kalyana mitrata. But was that the sort of thing you were getting at or was there something else, so to speak, behind [17] the question?

Bob Jones: I think it tells us that the discussion was very simply because we didn't have a clear definition of kalyana mitrata.

Vessantara: I'm not sure about that... I think the basic question was, like if you're relating to someone who's much more developed than you, you may find them inspiring, but in a way to what extent are you in a position to receive from them without much of a toe hold, or very small toe hold in just ordinary human friendship. Does the fact that perhaps say some Order Members may only be basically in contact with you say by letter in some way alter or diminish the amount of spiritual...

S: I think it depends on how receptive you are. I think it's incumbent upon you in the first place to be as receptive as you can rather than perhaps to insist on certain conditions of communication. For instance one might say, 'Well I've not seen my kalyana mitra for a year', well then one might ask you 'Well, have you written to him?' 'Well no I haven't actually written to him.' Well clearly you haven't been doing what you could do, because if you wrote to him you'd probably get a reply.

(Pause)

So which group was that? That was Vessantara's group. What about Subhuti's group? Have we had anything from you?

Subhuti: We haven't really got any questions. We spent quite a lot of time discussing the need for space.

(some laughter) [18] Quite a heated discussion about this. There seemed to be two views on it. Sometimes it seems that people say they need space and it seems to be quite an indulgent expression but other people are saying that there is a genuine, healthy need for space. It seemed to be to have time to yourself; that was basically it.

S: I think there's no doubt that you need time to yourself. But I think one must be very clear what one means by that. Time to yourself really meaning, as far as I can see, time in which to experience yourself as you are when you are not being affected by or influenced by or when you're not reaching to or responding to other people. Do you see what I mean? I think it, well, I'm convinced that it is important that there should be times, there should be occasions, when you can experience yourself being this way and not interacting with other people; as interacting, so to speak, only with yourself.

But this idea does not mean, of course, just being physically alone and indulging in distractions. This is where the indulgent element comes in and has to be guarded against. Do you see what I mean? If, for instance, you shut your door, retire into your room and you just spend time listening to your record player, this is not necessarily just experiencing yourself. You could be distracting yourself. Or when you just read a newspaper or when you just listen to the radio or when you do things of this sort, especially if the things you're hearing are

things which are really unskilful. That is not experiencing yourself, because you're, you're reaching to something external to yourself, even other people's worries, other peoples' ideas. Strictly speaking, even to, to be by yourself and reading, even though this may be good from another point of [19] view, is not an experience of yourself, because obviously you're experiencing what you're reading, which is other than yourself. So, yes, there is this need for one's own space but not for self-indulgence, especially not for indulgence in those things which you are perhaps ashamed to be seen indulging in by other people but to experience yourself as you are apart from your contact with and interaction with other people. Do you see what I mean? So one might say that there are various possibilities. There is simply the experience of yourself when you are, say, sitting in a room, without distractions, not doing anything, maybe not even thinking anything particularly but experiencing yourself. You certainly need space for that. Then there is being on your own and engaging in, I won't say indulging in but engaging in, skilful activities which are best pursued on your own, such as study perhaps, or meditation. And then, of course thirdly there is being on your own but using the opportunity to indulge in unskilful activities. I need not enumerate them. You can probably fill in the gaps anyway. So at that, I mean, there should not be, you should not allow yourself, space for that sort of thing.

Then of course, there is being with other people in a skilful way and also being with other people in an unskilful way. So one sees here various skilful possibilities and various unskilful possibilities and clearly the skilful possibilities are to be cultivated and the unskilful possibilities are not to be cultivated. Do you see what I mean? But certainly you need the opportunity first of all, or the space if you like to use that term, to be on your own from time to time without any activities either skilful or unskilful. You need space in which to be on your own, in order to engage in skilful activities. You also need space in which to be with other people, engaging naturally in [20] skilful and inspiring activities. You need all these three things. So there should be provision for all three in your own individual spiritual life.

Alan Angel: Would you include, say, a community's morning meditation, as being time to yourself and experiencing yourself.

S: I think strictly speaking not because you are certainly aware of people being around you. I mean, even if you're living in a community, sometimes you can be aware of the other people around you even if they are not actually in the same room. They may not even be making a noise. They even may be meditating in their rooms but if you're sensitive you can feel that they are there. So you may need from time to time even to leave your spiritual community, good as it is, and have a solitary retreat all on your own. So I will say therefore that meditation with other people, though a completely skilful activity is not, in fact, to be counted as an activity conducted on your own. I think you need separate opportunities of being on your own, you know, whether meditating or otherwise. I think this is quite important certainly for people in the West. I think it works out a little differently for people, say in India. But for people in the West I think provision needs to be made for all these things.

V: Why is it different for the people in India?

S: They seem on the whole to have a much more positive attitude to other people and to be much less troubled by having other people around them. In the West, it seems, if we always have people around us and we're never on our own, not only do we never [21] really experience ourselves but we're always vaguely irritated with other people, by other people and

in a sort of state of vague irritation all the time, as though our fur or our feathers have been rubbed up the wrong way or ruffled; do you know what I mean? You feel people are constantly impinging on you, and , interrupting you, asking you to do things and getting in your way, you're tripping over them or falling over them or they're falling over you. Well, in the end, your love of humanity starts wearing a bit thin. So even apart from the question of experiencing yourself, you need to free yourself from those interruptions and disturbances and little pin-pricks which other people, however much you may love them, do occasionally inflict upon you. But Indians seem to have much warmer feeling on the whole towards other people and to be less troubled by having them constantly around. I hope I'm not idealizing Indian people, perhaps when I go to India this time I shall have a closer look at them just to make sure.

Mike Scherk: Getting a bit closer to the source of acrimony . It's argument within our group - can you draw any relationship say between real or say the quantity of real space that one needs to oneself and the degree to which one is positively engaged in what one's doing. Say someone, somebody is involved in a co-op and really feels like being involved or has all sorts of doubts, how do you think this will actually affect, if at all the amount of real space that person will need?

[22]

S: I would say probably if you are able really to throw yourself into something, you will experience yourself, in a sense despite, although perhaps one could also say because of, you know, the very intensity of the situation and the fact that you've thrown yourself right into it. If you were really intensely experiencing yourself in that way you would not need so much to withdraw into solitude, so to speak, in order to experience yourself. We need more, I think, to withdraw into solitude to experience ourselves when we are being rather overwhelmed by outside forces and influences and people and so on. If you're a very strong person and can withstand all that and if you can experience yourself in a very genuine way despite the fact that there are other people around, and experience yourself in that way if you give yourself totally to some particular situation, then you have less need to withdraw into solitude in order to experience yourself. I think the person who needs more to withdraw into solitude and experience himself is the person who does tend to get a bit overwhelmed by people and things or, of course, the person who has the possibility of experiencing higher states of consciousness, that is to say experiencing himself in a deeper or higher way which is not possible when you are with other people even though you may be with them in a very positive way.

So almost paradoxically, the person who has really thrown himself into some project, some external situation is less likely to need to withdraw. Because if he's really thrown himself into it, he will be experiencing himself very intensely.

[23]

Alan Angel: A point came up there that possibly why some people want to withdraw and have space is because they're beginning to experience...

(end of side one)

S: ... solitude to avoid experiencing themselves rather than otherwise.

Alan Angel: Well, yes but not in solitude but coming up with the idea they need space.

S: I think there is this other possibility which I mentioned in one of the unskilful ones, that you withdraw into solitude, so to speak, you create space for yourself, you keep out other people, in order to engage in unskilful things or unskilful mental states. So yes, I think that does happen. You know, people are faced by the possibility, even the need for say commitment and they start resisting and they start perhaps talking of other people encroaching on them or taking away their space and they start demanding more space. What they really mean is an opportunity to indulge in unskilful mental states and activities. One does find this sort of thing I think.

Gerald Burns: So, a good test would be presumably to actually look closely at yourself and see what you do want out of the space.

S: Yes, if for instance, you are on your own, and actually do nothing at all, that's probably best. You're quite content to sit there and you're quite happy. You're not doing anything you don't feel like doing anything in a quite positive way. You're not thinking about anything, You're just enjoying your own state of being. [24] That is best. Or next best one might say, is when you take up a book which you feel is stimulating and inspiring. Or, when you just quietly, I won't say drift, but merge into say a meditative state and start turning something over in your mind., some question, some problem, trying to develop Insight into that. Or when you start say developing metta, you know just recalling people that you know quite spontaneously, and feeling good towards them. All these things are possible.

Of course, sometimes it might be that you retire in to solitude to sort of rest. Maybe you are genuinely tired. Maybe then you need a little stimulation, all right then, by all means listen to a record or something like that, knowing what you are doing - that you are using that particular means of just refreshing yourself and also know when to stop.

Mike Scherk: I'm just wondering about a practical corollary because it seems, well in my experience, that in most businesses it is, as it were, that the mitras go in and in the process of working in this business which they're really enthusiastic about say when it's first presented to them, they actually begin to learn more about themselves and to discover how much of them really isn't into the business and that seems to bring up a lot of this kind of problem.

S: Well, obviously they need plenty of contact with their Kalyana mitras. It's very difficult to generalize about what advice to give. It can only be given by the person on the spot who is in the situation and actually in contact with those people. Whether they should take it easy or throw themselves into things more wholeheartedly. One can't generalize. [25] So much depends upon the individual, and just where he is at that particular time.

(Pause)

So was that all?

(Pause)

Alan Angel: The points on space - needing space, seemed to arise out of, the first part of our discussion, on hospitality, on having time...

S: Yes, yes.

Alan Angel: ... the sort of non-specifically (???) We talked a bit about the guest-master idea. I wonder if you could say a bit more about that because we do in the movement have quite objective demands on the work side.

S: Well we all know that hospitality is one of the Buddhist virtues and it is stressed that if you're just say, so to speak, an ordinary Buddhist - at least you can be hospitable. You may not even be able to practise the five precepts or you may not be meditating (of course the question is whether you really are a Buddhist then, but anyway one lets that pass) but at least you can be hospitable, at least you can entertain people and make them welcome. So I think it is really important that all our communities and, of course, Centres in a somewhat different way, do practise this principle of hospitality, and welcome visitors and make them feel at home and if the community is a big one or if the Centre is a big one and a busy one, then I think probably it is necessary that there [26] should be a sort of guest master. That is to say, someone appointed whose job it definitely is to receive visitors and to look after guests. Not that it thereby becomes his responsibility and everybody can ignore visitors and guests not that. But that he is given time for that. It's recognized that such work requires time and energy so he is, so to speak, exempt from other things. That is considered his work, his contribution to the community. His contribution to the Centre whether whole-time or part time. But then again on the other hand tradition also stresses that the guest has responsibilities. A guest is not a thoughtless invader of the community or the centre. In the Far East we find that there are different traditions about host and guest and relations between host and guest. The Indian tends to stress the rights of the guest. The host is supposed to be completely at the service of the guest and to go along with whatever the guest does or wishes. The Chinese tradition on the other hand is that the guest enters the host's house with almost fear and trembling, and goes along with everything that the host says or wishes. Do you see what I mean? Probably we need to follow a sort of middle path. Well Buddhism does follow a middle path one might say. So certainly, yes, if you are in the position of host really do your best to make people welcome. Look after them make them feel comfortable and so on. But if you go anywhere as a guest be thoughtful. For instance, even the very time of your arrival. Because in the Buddha's day, well people couldn't send letters and telegrams announcing the day and the time of their arrival. We can do that. So don't just sort of turn up and expect to be made welcome, you may be arriving at a highly inconvenient time. So, at least, you know, [27] contact somebody first and say, 'Well, is it convenient for me,' and when you arrive, you know, don't be a disturbing factor. If it's one of our own communities enquire what the daily programme is, when the meditation is and when the puja is and make a point of joining in and don't just use the community as a base, so to speak, for your own operations. You know, you're staying in a community. You're the guest of a community, not a hotel. If you want to use, if you want a place as a sort of base of operations, all right go and stay in a hotel, don't stay in a community. And, you know, make sure that your presence is not a disturbing factor. Fit in smoothly. Don't make unnecessary demands on people's time and energy. Do you see what I mean?

V: Yes.

S: So there's not only a duty of being a good host, there's also a duty of being a good guest. You know, the two are reciprocal. So if the host is a good host and the guest is a good-guest there shouldn't be any problems. So we have to remember both of these things.

Malcolm Webb: Sometimes Bhante, because we work in co-ops and we get low in funds, you know, I mean between \$6 and \$8 a week pocket money, you might need to travel somewhere, you tend to go to a community, I think, or people do go and stay in communities because it's cheap. It won't cost anything.

S: Yes.

[28]

V: And...

S: Well, what do you mean, it won't cost anything?

(some laughter)

Malcolm Webb: Well, it hardly costs anything. I don't stay in others but I think, any experience of people coming in our community is that it's just a cheap evening and it's sort of - and you just put them up for the night. It's not a very - you know - they just put their sleeping bag down on the chair or what-have-you, or a mattress and just get up and go in the morning. It's sort of like that. There's a lot of that.

S: Well I think one should be very careful of making use of communities in that sort of way because if a community has too many such guests too often it can be very disruptive. If for any reason one just has, so to speak, to make use of a community just for one night, we'll be, as it were, very open about it. You know, beforehand say: 'Look would you mind? I've got some work in that particular town. Do you mind if I just stay at the community overnight? I won't be able to join in things, but can I just stay?' and then if they agree, then all right go along and create the minimum of fuss and bother. Do you see what I mean? But don't just sort of turn up, expect to be accommodated and while you're there have nothing to do with the community. That isn't very good.

Clive Pomfret: Do you think it's desirable to have this aspect to communities - this sort of boarding aspect which is treated as [29] such and understood as such?

S: What do you mean by 'boarding' aspect?

Clive Pomfret: Well let's say in a place like Sukhavati where there's definitely an understanding or agreement that there is boarding facilities for people who just want to do that - just want somewhere to stay in London - when they're down for whatever reason. They don't want to join in the community.

S: Well, I think if this becomes a need to any extent we'll just have to have a separate hostel. I don't think a community should be disturbed more than to a certain extent and this can be quite disturbing. However, you know, sympathetic you may be to those people. So all right, the community will just have to judge itself, each community for itself, how many people it can accommodate in that sort of way, over a particular period. But I feel that in the case of Sukhavati that probably sometimes at least, a thoughtless use has been made of its facilities and I think you probably should add just perhaps not too far away, a building which is just a hostel, for Order Members and friends who are just passing through on other business and who won't have time say to join in the activities of the community or have any contact with



community members. Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea to have a hostel in a broader sense for foreign students passing through London. It would be a good source of contact with people. I make this suggestion to the proper quarter. The more we can do along those lines the better.

(Pause)

[30]

S: And you know, if you do go along to a community as I say, really unless it's absolutely unavoidable, don't go along to stay there without prior intimation. Contact the housekeeper or the cook. Don't just expect that there will be food for you. Say that you are going to be there for such and such a meal. If you're expecting telephone messages, don't just go out without telling people where you are or that there may be messages for you otherwise I've known many instances where you know, people have gone to Sukhavati and they've been staying there - nobody knows where they are. Telephone calls come for them - and then people who are quite busy are having to look all over the place to find them. So you know, don't arrange or not arrange things in that sort of way. If you're expecting a telephone call and you're going out, just leave a note in the office - 'I'm expecting a phone call - please ask them to ring back at such and such time' Don't expect the person in the office to have to go round looking for you. All this is an aspect of awareness or mindfulness in action. It can save oneself and others a lot of unnecessary trouble. Perhaps people aren't sufficiently mindful in this sort of way. Or they don't perhaps think of the spiritual life itself in sufficiently concrete terms, or sufficiently down-to-earth terms.

(Pause)

Malcolm Webb: Things like telephone manners - one's supposed to be aware of?

S: Oh yes, well I've had some awful experiences myself. I remember I rang up Sukhavati once, this is a couple of years ago and [31] some idiot answered the 'phone and he said, 'This is the Happy Land'. So supposing some outside person had rung up and you know, has this sort of crazy statement. He thought it very funny, but you know, he didn't think it so funny when he realized it was me. (laughter)

And so often, I've rung up different Centres and, you know, let me have a word or two about this since you've fortunately reminded me of it. (laughter) And I ring up the centre and this voice says, 'Yes' in a sort of way. Well I mean, I've often had this sort of experience. It's very odd why people can't simply say, 'Well, this is Aryatara' or 'This is Sukhavati' or 'This is the LBC' or whatever. I mean, the LBC is quite all right now but the communities sometimes or even the centres still aren't very good in this respect at all and I sort of wonder what effect does it have on the person ringing up to make an enquiry? I mean, they don't even get a polite reply. So what sort of impression will they get of us, of Buddhism? This is very important.

Malcolm Webb: Sometimes you say the telephone number and people say it and then there's a short space and they say, 'Who's that?' and you have to explain who you are and what you're doing and you might be in the middle of something instead of actually people answering the phone and saying who they are and who they want to speak to...

[32]

S: Yes right.

Malcolm Webb: And so the whole things clearer right away. I mean if you're in a fun loving mood, then you can have a bit of a joke but sometimes you're working...

S: And also don't spend too much time on the phone, you know, you may be hogging it. There may be other calls waiting to come through especially if it's a busy centre - just as regards the call - and also if you're staying at a community, or passing through, just don't take it for granted that their phone is there for your use and you can use it for free. I mean, this is another point - pay for your phone calls.

V: Oh yes. (laughter)

S: That's quite important. It isn't on the house. (Pause).

I remember an instance - this was some time ago - I think it was at Padmaloka and that this point was made about phone calls having to be paid for and I used to sometimes notice that people would be on the phone for 15 or 20 minutes and then they'd leave 2p or something like that. This is really quite shameful. Shortage of pocket money is no excuse. And it would be a long distance call of course. So these are all aspects of thoughtfulness and care and mindfulness, concern for others, and concern for the situation that you're in or that you're temporarily in or passing through. I mean, Lokamitra got very peeved some years, 2 or more years ago, before he made his position clear, he said people passing [33] Poona, admittedly were friends and mitras and even Order Members and yes, he wanted to do what he could for them but they didn't always seem to realize that he really was very, very busy and they expected to be looked after and met, and taken around Poona, almost taken around India. They didn't seem to realize, he just wasn't in a position to do that. Some of them were quite thoughtless, he said, but eventually he made his position clear so I think probably people approach the Poona Centre with more caution than they approach any other Centre within the Movement.

(Pause)

Saddhaloka: A few days ago Bhante you spoke a bit about a micchaditthi of doing what you feel like. There's another that actually blends into that - "doing what you really want to do" which can be something positive but it can also be quite disruptive and indulgent. I wonder if there's anything you could say on, about that particular theme.

S: Well clearly there are different levels of wanting to do things. There are whims and fancies and there are genuine very deep seated needs and one has to be able to distinguish the one from the other and that, no doubt, will need quite a bit of self-awareness and self-knowledge, even. I think with many of our friends there's undue subjectivity, perhaps too much importance is attached to the way that one happens to feel at a particular moment. I mean, you can acknowledge that that is the way that you are feeling and be quite honest about it but that doesn't mean that you have to indulge in that feeling. I think sometimes people have confused these [34] two things. I mean, it's not saying that you shouldn't acknowledge the way that you genuinely feel but that is not to say that you should necessarily act upon it. It may be a very horrible, unskilful little feeling that you're experiencing which shouldn't be given any mercy at all. All right, acknowledge that you feel it, if that's the way you feel at that particular moment but you don't necessarily have to act upon it or indulge it or perpetuate it. But this is where work is so useful because one has to consider the needs of the objective situation.

Dave Luce: It's often seems to be not actually considered all that much. The important thing is "what I really want", "what I really need to do is just sort of go off and go to another centre" and it can be very disruptive in what is - people have tried to build up and suddenly it's all back to square one and building up again.

S: Well, one has seen that happening again and again in certain cases so one therefore must think quite carefully and quite honestly before giving yourself to or committing yourself to a particular situation. Others must be able to rely upon you. You must be able to rely on yourself which means you must be relatively integrated. It's very discouraging for other people if you say, 'Oh Yes, I'm committing myself for 3 years to this project' and after six months they find that you've changed your mind and they've got to find somebody else and maybe somebody else isn't available - either they've got to take on extra work or they've got to replace you by someone who isn't really suitable. [35] So enter into commitments with a certain amount of caution, but having entered into them do your utmost to fulfil them. If, as may occasionally happens, you've made a genuine mistake well you have to acknowledge that and withdraw from the situation with the least possible inconvenience to others. So, as a general principle be very careful about letting others down. Keep your word. Be faithful to your appointments. All these are not just practical things. They're ethical things. If you've given your word to someone that you will do something, you should make every effort to do it. If you don't want to be bound in that sort of way, all right don't make any promises. People then know where they stand with you, but don't make a promise and then just out of carelessness fail to keep it. And certainly don't make for your excuse the fact that you had to do something else at that time. But all this may sound as it were, a little bit moralistic, but this is really sort of coming down to earth and putting one's high ideals into ordinary everyday practice. This is really the path of regular steps with *sila* coming first, ethics coming first.

(Pause.)

And I had a friend once who was really strict in this respect and if anybody ever failed to keep any promise however slight, she never trusted them again. This was in India. She was a European. I used to think at first that this was a bit much but after more and more experience of Indians I came to think there was something in it. But certainly people didn't make her a promise lightly, or in the end, knowing what her attitude was, if they didn't keep it, she'd write them off completely. She wouldn't have anything to do with them again after that - never trust them, if once they'd let her down however slightly - that was that. You were finished. So eventually she got this sort of reputation so people were very careful how they treated her especially as she was a rather influential lady.

[36]

Malcolm Webb: Don't you feel you could run out of the friends pretty quick?

(Laughter.)

S: You might in a sense but you will not run out of people who respect you and if your friends, well your supposed friends can treat you in that sort of way, let you down, are they really your friends? And another of her sayings was, 'Respect must precede friendship.' We discussed this once I remember this lady and myself - because it was the theme of a book we both read at that particular time. It was a book, a novel by, by Ruma Goden. I can't remember whether it was about, I think it was 'King Fisher catch fire'. And the scene was laid in

Kashmir. And it was a well-meaning European lady who went out and did her best to make friends with the natives you see - be very friendly. But it all ended in disaster because she'd made this mistake. She hadn't assured herself of their respect before she sought their friendship. So there is this point also to be made, that friendship must be, real friendship is based on mutual respect. And that if you respect somebody you don't let them down. If you let them down, how can you regard yourself as a friend. How can you be friends?

So if that lady did lose anybody in that way she certainly didn't lose friends because they were people in the first place who didn't respect her. If they didn't respect her how could they be friends? So actually she didn't get along too badly she knew quite a lot of people, had contact with quite a lot of people.

So this means, in the name of friendship don't treat people lightly. Very often this term friendship is used as a sort of cover just for treating people carelessly or without [37] consideration - 'Oh, he won't mind, he's my friend, You know.' But there is a sense in which you can, so to speak, take advantage of a friend - a sense. But certainly not out of a lack of care, or lack of thoughtfulness. The fact that someone is your friend doesn't mean that you treat them less carefully or less considerately than you would treat other people. If you do think that, well, you've got a wrong understanding about friendship. If anything you treat them with more care, and more consideration. You don't take your friendship lightly. You don't take them lightly, saying that, well, they're your friend.

Now, I think there is a tendency, broadly speaking, among people - I was going to say, in the West, but perhaps that's too big a generalization - certainly in England and certainly among the Friends even, to take certain things too lightly, to take people too lightly, not with proper seriousness. And by seriousness I don't mean solemnity, or anything of that sort. This is all an aspect of mindfulness and human concern, an aspect of compassion. You must work out your metta and karuna in practice. But just because you call someone your friend it doesn't mean you can mess him around at your convenience. I mean that isn't friendship, but very often people seem to think that it is.

Anyway on that wholesome ethical note we can close.

Tuscany Preordination Course 1981

Questions and Answers Session 14

Subhuti: ... with the section 'The Meaning of the Spiritual Community' and one thing we thought it would be good if you could go into would be the question of the semi-monastic community. First of all, we talked a bit about the term 'semi-monastic community' - just trying to find a better term. I don't know whether you've got anything to say about that.

And then: just what makes a semi-monastic community? It isn't just a lot of men living together, and meditating together; some of us thought it was more than that. We went into it a bit, and we wondered if you could go into it a bit more. Those two things, first of all.

S: Well, as regards the term 'semi-monastic': obviously it isn't very satisfactory, but it was the nearest term that came to hand some years ago. By saying that it's monastic we suggest that there is a definitely disciplined way of life. This is what one is mainly concerned with in

using the term 'monastic' at all. But, in speaking in terms of semi-monastic', we don't mean that it is half-monastic, or that its 'monasticism' - in inverted commas - represents a compromise: it is monastic without being formally monastic. You understand what I mean by 'formally monastic'? (Pause)

Well, that is to say, that it is not monastic in the sense that monasticism has become or developed in many parts of, say, the Theravada world, in which the monastic life consists in the purely formal - i.e. the purely external - observances of certain rules and regulations and restrictions without the spirit of them necessarily being observed. So one speaks of semi-monasticism in that sort of way. It is a regular, a disciplined, even a strict, way of life in community with other men; but which is genuinely strict, which is not merely apparently strict. (Pause)

What was the other point? Or the other part of the question?

Subhuti: I suppose: what really makes a semi-monastic community? Apart from the fact that it is single-sex and that it has got a disciplined way of life? It seems to have something extra ... you know, some extra feature. (Pause)

S: Well, what could that be? Because there are two things. First of all there are the people who belong to that community. All people who belong to communities of any kind are individuals or at least incipient, at least embryonic, individuals - and they are trying to relate to one another as individuals; hence they are members of a community, as we say. And it's a semi-monastic community in the sense that it is a community of men, and they are following a disciplined pattern of daily life, with such things as regular meditations and pujas and study and communication, together.

[2]

So one might ask what does one want above and beyond that? One might think that here the element of work comes in; that they need to be outwardly-turned, not merely inwardly-turned. They need to be living and working for, so to speak, something bigger than themselves, for something which is bigger than the particular community to which they belong. This may be that they are working for a Centre, or they may be working for a co-operative project, or they may be doing other things, but, in any case, their life and their interests and their work is not confined to the community to which they belong. The community as a whole, as a community, looks beyond itself. You could say it is concerned with some aspect of the movement at large, or even of the world at large. And its energies, its spiritual energies, are geared to that. It isn't an inwardly-turned community.

But this even applies to a community like Vajraloka, where one thinks doesn't think simply of immersing oneself there for individualistic reasons, but for developing oneself as an individual through a period of more intensive meditation, and life corresponding to that, so that one may develop more as an individual, not only for one's own benefit, but for the benefit of the other individuals with whom you come into contact. And you even think, perhaps, of the increased positivity and understanding that you gain in the course of that meditation retreat as feeding back eventually into your Centre, your Community, into whatever situation you come from and to which you return. (Pause)

But is there still a missing factor eluding definition?

Subhuti: Perhaps it's the ( ... unclear ...) It does seem that, of our residential communities, that they are more or less successful, and some of them in a way don't, at times, even seem to qualify as semi-monastic communities, although they may be following all the right ... they may be meditating together; they may even be quite strict: men only, women only. But there's a sort of missing spark, which is something else. We talked a bit about the development of more feminine qualities; that seems to be part of it.

S: Perhaps it is part of it; but if it is only part of it, what is the other part? Well, perhaps it just requires a more intense experience of everything, of every aspect of semi-monastic community life. It needs a greater degree of intensity. That is what the term 'spark' suggests.

Bob Jones: In the past, when things at Sukhavati have not been at their best, Bhante, different people have said: 'Well, perhaps the community is too big and it would be better if it was smaller.' And it has normally been quoted back that: 'Bhante has said that we easily ought to be able to handle a big community !'

S: Well, of course, 'big' is a relative term.

[3]

Bob Jones: Well, say, one gets the impression that you'd like to see a community of something like twenty-five, whereas we might think we'd want it smaller - might think in terms of a dozen, say - because it hadn't worked at eighteen.

S: Well, it has worked at more than twenty - and communities have not worked at five or six, or eight or ten. I would think probably it is difficult to have a genuine community, when it gets - as you say - too big: all right, let's say beyond twenty-five, though I'd say it isn't impossible and I would say it would depend entirely on how that community was organized, and how that organization was used. But I think the success or otherwise of a community is not necessarily directly related to its size, whether larger or smaller.

Alan Angel: What I see in London is that, being in London, being in a large city, one's activities are so outward-going so much of the time that the community seems to come right at the bottom of one's list of priorities.

S: Well, one has noticed that in connection with Order Days and Order Weekends. And perhaps this is the occasion to sound, as it were, a note of warning here for those of you that might be prospective Order Members. It has been noticed that when we have had the Order Days, Order Weekends, down in London - as we nearly always have had them - London itself is a tremendous distraction especially for people coming from elsewhere. So they are not so much thinking in terms of taking Part in the Order activities for that day or that weekend, as in terms of going out to a concert or maybe just going out for a walk or going to an art gallery, all of which are quite good and worthy things in themselves, but it does suggest that people have lost their sense of priorities. They came down for an Order Day, an Order Weekend, but, instead of throwing themselves completely into that, they allowed themselves to be distracted by other attractions that London has to offer.

So a Place like London does have that sort of distracting effect. It has even been suggested that we have the men's Order Meetings - because, as you probably know, just recently we have introduced the practice of having every other Order Weekend as a single-sex Order

Weekend - it has been suggested that perhaps in future we have the men's Order Weekends at Padmaloka, away from London, so that one is completely with that situation. (Long Pause)

Alan Angel: Would you feel that a re-emphasis on communities general could counter the lack of priority given to them?

S: I wouldn't say a lack of priority is being given to communities; I think that is too much of a generalization. I think that some communities are quite successful, or reasonably successful. There seems to be a bit more of a difficulty at Sukhavati - though we don't want to talk about [4] their difficulties too much, because they have to sort those out for themselves - but there seems to be extra difficulty in the sense that Sukhavati and the LBC are centres of a number of different lines of influence and activity, which sometimes come into conflict. For instance, since there are now so many co-ops in London, around the Bethnal Green area, certain people in Sukhavati community may be in one co-op, others in another; and inasmuch as they work in different co-ops they may not have much contact - maybe not any contact - within the work situation. And if all the members of a community are working in the same co-operative project, it does reinforce their contact, their communication, as members of a community.

This is something that people have recently been feeling: that if the members of a community are split up among a number of different co-ops and their energies are going quite vigorously into their co-op activities - as they should well, quite clearly there is less energy for the community as such. Their involvement with the community to some extent comes into conflict with their involvement with their respective co-ops. But if all the members of a community are not only members of the same community, but also members of the same co-op, working together, then the one reinforces the other instead of, in a sense, working against the other. So Sukhavati is at the centre of those sorts of difficulties. It doesn't suggest necessarily any lack or deficiency in the people concerned, but they are in a more complex situation, and that creates its own problems.

Dave Rice: That would suggest then that such a community with large numbers - is very much more difficult, because, being large numbers, they have to work in different co-ops. So quantity does have a bearing as well as quality.

S: Well, not quantity as such, but only size of a community in relation to - from this point of view - the size of a co-op in which it could become involved. If there was a big co-op for a big community to get involved in, there is no problem, it would seem. The one would reinforce the other.

And of course one must always remember that no structure, however good and however suitable, can solve all your problems for you. It rests with the individual - the individual in community, so to speak - to solve any problems that may arise.

Steve Francis: How do you feel about the principle of beginners' communities - as a principle?

S: What do you mean by 'beginners' communities'?

Steve Francis: Well, what I mean by that is: say, one or two Order Members making a decision to set up a community entirely for people who have never lived in a community and

perhaps have only been involved with the Friends for a short time.

[5]

S: Well, it does seem to work quite well; it has worked quite well in several instances. Because the early - I mean the very early - communities, for instance Lokamitra's community in Balmore Street in the very early days, was essentially a beginners' community, and other beginners' communities that we have had in the East London area. But I think that there is an important proviso to be laid down here: that if Order Members set up a beginners' community, they must realize that those beginners are going to require a quite large proportion of their time and energy. They may have to spend - or they will have to spend - quite a lot of time with them, just because they are beginners and in a new situation, a more intensive situation than they are used to. It's no use two or three Order Members setting up a beginners' community, inviting beginners to live there, and then themselves being so fully involved in Centre and Co-op activities that they have hardly any time left to spend with those beginners in the community. But if they are able and prepared to spend time with them, then, yes, I think it is probably a very good arrangement.

Steve Francis: Yes. I think that you've got two possibilities: that you can involve beginners in that way, or else you've got a community in which you've got experienced Order Members, new Order Members, experienced Mitras, inexperienced Mitras - so that you've got more of a development, if you like, within the members of the community.

S: Well, obviously there is room for communities of many different types. But what I'm saying in this instance is that, if you set up a community of that sort, you must realize the obligations that it involves. Because for a beginner coming into a situation like that - leaving home, say, perhaps leaving his family, leaving his job perhaps (though that doesn't always happen) - but certainly being in a quite unfamiliar situation - meditating every day, living in a community, living communally - it will be a more intensive situation.

In a way, you are speeding up his development. But if you speed up someone's development in that way - or if he, by joining such a community, takes the decision to speed up his own development - things are going to happen. He's very likely to 'go through it', as people say. And if he is going through it, or if he is going to go through it, well, he'll need a lot of personal support. That is to say, the Order Members in that community will need to spend quite a bit of time with him, talking to him, helping him to resolve things. Do you see what I mean?

So it isn't fair really to invite beginners to join a community - that is to say, you, as an Order Member invite them - and then more or less leave them to their own devices, or just hope that the general structure will give them sufficient support. That isn't really fair; one shouldn't do that. I think it has tended to happen here and there, [6] once or twice in the past, but it shouldn't happen.

Steve Francis: Well, it was very much in that respect that I was contrasting those two situations, because it strikes me that the latter situation, where you've got a spread of experience, would provide contact with people with different levels of involvement, you know, who'd be able to give different perspectives - rather than having a set situation of: Order Members - Beginners - which can lead to, well, an authority; you have an authority structure, or you can build up the feeling of an authority structure.



S: I think that with some people the question of authority is going to arise anyway, because it is one that some people are especially sensitive to. If you have, say, eight beginners and two Order Members, well, yes, it could arise in that situation. But if you have a more gradient hierarchical structure, with experienced Order Members, less experienced Order Members, experienced Mitras, less experienced Mitras, well, some people are going to see that as a very definite hierarchy, see that too in authoritarian terms.

Steve Francis: It's just that there does seem to be quite a lot of wastage from communities. That's the point that sometimes I get quite worked up about, because there are people who have quite a lot of potential who react to a particular situation. And I can't help feeling that that is quite unnecessary, that if the situation was handled more skilfully, things could have been different. And it's in that consideration that.

S: Well, again, this is what I have in mind when I say that Order Members who start up a beginners' community must be prepared to give quite a lot of time and energy to those beginners, because reactions and problems of that sort are only really sorted out through personal contact, personal exchange and communication. But I don't think any structure, as such, is going to eliminate possible reactions, even quite violent ones. (Long Pause)

Is that all then that we had from your group?

Subhuti: I think it is ... A question did occur to us, something that we touched on was: asking people to leave communities. I think that could be briefly gone into. Under what conditions should people be asked to leave? Because sometimes people don't apparently fit in, but it is actually a question of the community broadening itself, rather than them being asked to leave.

S: Well, there is also the question that when someone is invited to join a community, or when someone asks if he can join a community, and his request is considered, then clearly the question of his suitability for the community and the community's suitability for him must be gone into thoroughly [7] and any possible difficulties foreseen and provided for. So I think if this principle is adhered to, it will become less of a possibility that people have to leave, whether of their own volition or whether because they're asked to do so.

I think it's very important that a community, before someone moves in, should make it clear to the person moving in exactly what the community expects of him. For instance, instances have been known of people moving into communities and only finding out afterwards that they were expected to meditate every day with the rest of the community. Do you see what I mean? Even simple things like that aren't always made clear.

So there should be a very clear understanding to begin with. There should be a clear understanding about, for instance, financial commitments: whether there is a common purse, or not a common purse. There should be a clear understanding about attendance at all community activities, whether meditation, or house-meetings, or whatever. Sometimes difficulties arise because these things have not been made clear from the beginning - and the responsibility is certainly with the community.

Also there is the point that one - it is not very easy to decide - but one has to make up one's mind sometimes, when someone is going through what one might call a difficult period, just how much rope, so to speak, to allow them. It depends really how much ultimate confidence

you have in that person; and that suggests, or that is connected with, how much real knowledge you have of them. You could feel that someone is really very worthwhile, and that they are just going through a temporary difficult period, and they should be allowed to do that, be given a fair amount of rope, and the community should quite happily accept that - positively accept that, not just put up with it in a negative spirit, with a lot of resentment. On the other hand, one should be able to see if someone is really not pulling his weight, and has no intention of doing so, and is not just going through a difficult patch, but just being difficult. But all these things again depend upon depth of personal contact.

And, even if someone is relatively new, or even if he's a beginner, if he raises any point which is not maybe quite in accordance with what the community has hitherto thought or felt, the community should be quite prepared to consider that on its own merits, and not dismiss it out of hand. If necessary, adjust community life accordingly. That also should not be overlooked.

Another point that perhaps should be gone into from the beginning, and which the person joining the community should ask himself, is not only: 'What do I expect of the community? What am I expecting that the community should give me?' Or: 'What has the community to offer me?' But: 'What have I to offer the community?' Not so long ago - last year, I think [8] someone was talking to me about looking around the different Centres in Britain and seeing what each of them had to offer him. And the one which seemed to offer most, he said, he thought he'd go and be associated with that. He seemed not to be thinking at all in terms of what he might be able to offer that Centre. He saw it as a very one-way kind of process. So that needs to be drawn to the new person's attention, if they ask to join the community. 'All right, this what the community can offer you; this is what the community life can offer. But what can you offer the community? Are you thinking in those terms also?' A community is not a sort of miniature Welfare State, providing everything that you require without obligation on your part. Some people have seen communities a bit like that; they've certainly seen the Centres like that in the past. In the case of very, very new people, very peripheral Friends, fair enough, but that sort of attitude is quite inappropriate in the case of the Mitra or the community member. Otherwise the Order Members concerned may be running a sort of kindergarten for bigger children. (Pause)

But let me just go back to this question of the 'spark', because this is an expression which is often used. I think the great danger is that people start looking for a spark coming from outside - either to get some more exciting person into the community, or some new arrangement within the community. They think in terms of a spark falling into the community from outside, like fire from heaven. But a spark can only arise from the intensity of your own effort your own right effort, of course.

Alan Angel: That seems to emphasize your last point about: 'What can I give?' It has got to have a channel. If you see that the situation offers you that channel, then it is going to be mutually beneficial.

S: Yes, indeed. (Pause) What were you going to say?

Subhuti: I was just trying to remember who else had questions. Did you?

Michael Scherk: Not specifically, but we did seem to touch on a point that we didn't resolve: about the importance of the names of the communities; to what extent one should really use

the name as a theme, as it were, or maybe even as an internal spark, as a source of inspiration.

S: Yes. This is true; a name can be so used. But that requires a certain amount of thought, because things may change from time to time. Names of communities have even been changed. When the women moved out of Amaravati, later on it was changed from Amaravati to Vajrasamaya. So, yes, a name can certainly help. A collective name can help, just as an individual name can help.

[9]

Michael Scherk: Should this go to the extent of, say, something like Aryatara - that one uses the theme of Tara, of Green Tara, as something that one deliberately - a sort of information at the lowest level - gives to people?

S: No, I think because a Centre - because Aryatara is not only a community but a Centre - needs to have a broader approach and a broader appeal. I mean, some people coming along might see Aryatara as a sort of mother goddess and be really put off. One doesn't want that sort of thing to happen.

I have therefore suggested that Centres should be simply, say, the 'London Buddhist Centre' or the 'West London Buddhist Centre' or the 'Norwich Buddhist Centre'; that the Centre should not have what might seem to the general public an exotic sort of name, and especially not a name suggesting a degree of spiritual specialization.

I've sometimes wondered, in the case of Aryatara - I am thinking aloud here - whether it is a good thing - if you've got so many young men around in the community, which you didn't have when Aryatara was actually named - whether it is a good thing to have a female bodhisattva figure as your leading idea or theme, as it were. Because you cannot but, perhaps, take it just psychologically in your early days. Maybe you need something more heroic as an ideal. Anyway, that is just a passing thought, not a serious suggestion. But perhaps it should be reflected on. (Long Pause)

It was also perhaps significant when the name of Beulah was changed. The name of the women's' community changed from Beulah to Vajracchedika. This certainly indicated a greater degree of determination and spiritual commitment on the part of the members of that new women's' community, the women who replaced the women who were formerly there. 'Beulah' literally means 'the married state', which can be understood either literally or metaphorically. So the women who, as it were, took over weren't particularly happy with that name, so they changed it to 'Vajracchedika', which means 'that which cuts like a diamond,' or even 'that which cuts the diamond' - the name of a well-known sutra. So that was expressive of their additional determination to cut through, to break through. So the change of name in that case had a real significance.

(Long Pause)

Well, any questions from Vessantara's group then?

Vessantara: (Unclear)

S: So the ground covered was, so to speak, plain sailing? Readily intelligible? No room for

discussion?

Vessantara: We had quite a lot of discussion ...

S: But you got it all sorted out?

[10]

Bob Jones: Bhante, can I ask you a question left over from some time ago? It's possibly a small point. When the Buddha sent out his sixty - was it? - disciples, he sent them out in robes, not to set up Centres, but to wander around from village to village. And I wondered - since there is, particularly now, an emphasis in the FWBO on kalyana mitrata not so much within the spiritual community as within the Sangha - what sort of kalyana mitrata would the villagers get if the monk delivers a discourse after he's had his meal and then goes on to the next village?

S: Well, they aren't getting very much. If a villager wants more, he must follow in the footsteps of that wandering monk. Scholars, by the way, differ as to whether the monks were sent forth singly or in pairs. The consensus now seems to be that the expression used means that they were sent forth in pairs, that they were wandering in twos. Some would still dissent from that, but that seems to be the consensus now.

But, yes, they wandered from place to place, they wandered from village to village; they talked to people when they could, and there were some places through which they, and even the Buddha, passed regularly, and where they came to be known, where they paid even perhaps annual visits. But of course if they wanted any further and deeper contact, well, they just had to go forth themselves. That was the existing structure; if they wanted more kalyana mitrata they had to follow after the monks, especially as in those days they were wandering. Of course, there was the rainy season retreat, as we call it, after it was instituted: when the Buddha's disciples, that is to say the bhikkhu disciples, stayed in one place for three to four months. And that was often considered an occasion when the lay people, the lay devotees, the upasakas, technically speaking, could have more contact with them. And this is still a pattern that prevails in some parts of the Buddhist world. You know that the monks are going to be there for three to four months and you can go and see them every day if you wish, and that way get more kalyana mitrata than you normally do, or than you normally can.

Steve Francis: That brings a question to my mind. It sometimes seems like we make the Dharma almost too available, that, in some ways, if we could somehow make it more precious ... I was thinking of things like in Japan, where in order to enter the monastery you sat outside the gate for a week in the snow.

S: But, then again, when people were doing that sort of thing and I doubt if they do it any longer; they probably haven't done it for hundreds of years - the surrounding culture and spiritual tradition was such that they already had great faith. But that is not the condition now. It is not that people who come knocking on your door, or who come along to the Centre, have got a tremendous conviction that there is some real spiritual treasure for them, or which could be for them. They don't have that sort of conviction to begin with, so how are you to get them involved? You have to encourage rather than discourage, even though, yes, [11] that has all sorts of difficulties and drawbacks attendant upon it too.

David Luce: What would seem to happen would be that we really see the Dharma as something precious, but we then sort of water it down or we go all apologetic in the way that we present it.

S: Yes. Buddhists in England - if one could call them Buddhists at that stage - used to be very, very apologetic about Buddhism, and about being Buddhists at all, especially in discussion with Christians - as though, well, they couldn't help it, and they weren't really Buddhists, so one shouldn't take it too seriously. And, of course, they had nothing against Christianity; Christianity was perfectly all right, was perfectly true. It was just that they were interested in Buddhism - not that they really called themselves 'Buddhist', they'd sometimes say. They had this very apologetic attitude. So certainly one shouldn't have that; one should really feel the value of the Dharma. And others will feel that one does feel oneself that one has attained something of great value, something which is in fact priceless. Others should certainly pick that up from you. You cannot expect others to value the Dharma - who haven't really had any contact with it - if you yourself don't value it after having had contact with it.

So one must be very careful of situations as when I have sometimes overheard people talking about going on retreat and someone says: 'Oh, I don't really want to go; I suppose I ought to - I am expected to go and I have got such-and-such a job to do on the retreat.' Well, if new people, beginners, overhear that sort of conversation - as has occasionally happened - they are not going to be very encouraged or very inspired.

So we have to make the Dharma accessible, but we mustn't make it cheap. I think this is what some of the Tibetan lamas and others do: they don't merely make the Dharma available, they make it cheap.

Vessantara: A Mitra in Manchester looked around and visited a couple of Buddhist groups before he got in contact with the Friends. The first one was an old-style 'Buddhist Society' group, where the man who was leading it would each week just talk about 'Edwardian discipline' - this was his great theme. But then after that, he went to a Tibetan group. And there was meditation, with instruction, which he sat through. And then, after that, he was trying to talk to people and they were all ignoring him; in fact, when he first knocked on the door, he had to almost push his way in and explain why he wanted to be there. And he was really off put, understandably. And I think he went back again and the same thing happened: people just ignored him. He would go up to talk to somebody and they would walk off; so finally he gave them up. And when he finally found the Friends, he was very impressed with the fact that Suvajra actually welcomed him in and gave him a cup of tea and talked to him. But he later discovered that this was a policy in this Tibetan group, that they were doing something a bit equivalent [12] to the Zen group. To test out whether somebody was really serious, they just ignored them for the first two or three times they came along. (Laughter)

S: Well, it sound all right in principle, but it doesn't work in practice actually.

Vessantara: Well, he just thought they were really unfriendly.

S: Yes. And, also, it isn't in accordance with Buddhist tradition. Because if you read the Pali scriptures, you will find that when new people came along to see the Buddha, he always made a point of welcoming them. And in fact the Pali scriptures mention in a number of Places that the Buddha had the reputation of being one who always spoke first.

End of Side One

S: It's all right to talk of testing people if they are already committed; it is all right to talk of testing people within the context of a strong spiritual tradition. But not ... It's ridiculous. This is really an example of silavrata-paramarsa; it's going through a set of motions without really understanding what they're all about.

Friends of mine have told me that the Ouspensky/Gurdjieff people in their various groups have got the same sort of style. They don't encourage conversation; they are quite stand-offish when you go along; they try to give the impression of some tremendous mystery, of something very esoteric, that they're into, but which you might be allowed into if you prove yourself worthy. And that does attract some people - not necessarily for the best of motives - but it puts a lot of other people off. They interpret it - and perhaps their instinct isn't altogether wrong - as just unfriendliness. Perhaps those people are just blocked!

Ratnaguna: Actually, we have had somebody else coming along from that group, and he was going along for twelve years, and he still found it like that! (Laughter)

S: Well, he sounds like a masochist! (Laughter)

But, you see, people do such extraordinary things with such Wrong View. One can only say that. They've heard about this story, no doubt, of the candidate for admission to the Zen monastery kneeling outside in the snow for three days, so they think they ought to do something equivalent. They don't consider the situation; they're not aware of what sort of people come along; they're not aware of their own mental states, perhaps. They just blindly follow whatever they have understood - or misunderstood - of some other tradition in some remote other part of the world.

So, yes, let there be no misunderstanding that in the FWBO, as an Order Member, as a Mitra, you are expected to welcome new people. You are expected, in traditional phraseology - in the [13] phraseology used of the Buddha himself - to welcome them 'with a smiling face' and actually speak to them. Not leave them to their own devices, but actually to make them welcome in the best sense. (Pause)

Also, one must be very, very careful about yourself testing other people. It is only very advanced gurus who can legitimately put other people to the test. Life itself provides quite enough tests as it is, without some pseudo-guru imposing some little artificial tests of his own devising. So don't think in terms of yourself testing other people; you are just not in a position to do that. We never read that the Buddha tested anybody. Perhaps certain Tantric gurus did, but they knew what they were doing and they were testing quite advanced disciples, and there was no misunderstanding between them - not in the long run anyway. So give up any idea that you might have about testing other people to see what they are made of, or to see whether they have reached a certain point or not. No; you can observe other people, get to know other people, communicate with other people, try to understand other people - but it is not incumbent on you to try to test other people. This suggests a very, very conceited idea of oneself; it suggests a very strange kind of self-image, of yourself as the tester of other people.

Malcolm Webb: I'm not quite sure, Bhante; how do you mean 'test'? Give me an example of how one might test another.

S: Well, for instance, supposing you are cooking, and you deliberately burn all the food. You think: 'Aha, I'll test all the other members of the community, just to see their reaction.' This is just a sort of common or garden example, but this sort of thing. (Laughter) Life provides enough tests, as I said. Tests will occur; you don't have to manipulate them in that sort of way. This suggests a very superior attitude on your part to other people: you testing them. (Pause)

Murray Wright: This question that Bob asked in relation to this first encounter when the Buddha sent forth sixty arhants. It seems to me that it is a key verse, inasmuch as that it is often quoted as being the justification for teaching the Dharma, going forth and so on. But it seems to me that there's a key difference inasmuch as we're encouraged to teach the Dharma from a very basic level, if you could even call it that. But the Buddha actually waited until those people were arhants; he didn't send them forth as stream-entrants, he didn't even send them forth as non-returners, he sent them forth as arhants. He waited that long before he sent ...

S: Well, how long did he wait?

Murray Wright: Well, he waited until he saw that they were Enlightened.

S: Well, did he?

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Murray Wright: Well, it would appear from accounts that.

S: Well, the point to consider is: what does arhant mean in this context?

Murray Wright: It seems to mean one who is Enlightened.

S: Well, it seems to be, but is it actually? Because if we look through the Pali Canon we see, as I think I mentioned some days ago, that different words had different meanings at different times, and that the word 'arhant' originally meant, and was originally used by the Buddha as meaning, someone who was spiritually worthy. So therefore I think we have to beware of thinking the sixty people that the Buddha sent forth were arhants in the later technical sense. They were spiritually worthy people and he asked them to proclaim the Brahmachariya, which we translate as 'the spiritual life'. I think one should be careful not to conclude from this passage that one cannot teach at all until one has gained full Enlightenment. I think rather one should see that it isn't a question of teaching or not teaching; you're teaching all the time, whoever you are. Because you're having an influence on others all the time; you cannot but teach, you cannot but influence, whether you are Enlightened or unenlightened. The only question is the degree and nature of that influence. And if you've reached some level of spiritual development, then, yes, the influence, the effect, that you will have on other people will be highly positive and encouraging and stimulating and inspiring; otherwise not, otherwise it will be of a very different kind.

So we mustn't therefore think in terms of someone - or even the Buddha - as encouraging someone simply to work on his own development in a limited or narrow or one-sided sense, and then think in terms of helping others. Because you are either helping or hindering others all the time, whenever you come into contact with them. You can't avoid that.

It is said that Milarepa did advise his disciples to go on meditating until they reached higher realization. He said: 'Then will be plenty of time for you to teach.' So why did Milarepa say that? After all, Milarepa lived within the context of the Mahayana and Vajrayana, within the context of the Bodhisattva ideal. Well, one can only assume that there were a lot of people around - as there are nowadays - who were sort of pseudo-Bodhisattvas, and who were more concerned with teaching than with practice. So Milarepa was reminding them that a genuine expression of the Dharma can only come from your own genuine experience of the Dharma. To the extent that you experience it, you'll be able to teach it. But be under no illusion - one is in fact influencing people all the time. The only question is: how are you influencing them?

Murray Wright: So it's not formal in the sense that you're either teaching or not teaching. As soon as you open your mouth ..

[15]

S: As soon as you open your mouth you produce a certain effect on other people. Your whole being produces an effect just by living with them. You may not say anything, or try to teach anything, but the quality of your being is felt by other people and it affects them.

Murray Wright: Well then, do you think that the argument for the Pratyekabuddha, that, inasmuch as he is Enlightened and exists in the world, he is an influence ... ?

S: Well, the whole conception of the Pratyekabuddha is a very mysterious one. As eventually systematized in the Hinayana, yes, a Pratyekabuddha is Enlightened. He is more Enlightened - if one can use that term - than an arhant, but less Enlightened than a Buddha. But is such a being really possible? One has to ask that question. The Pratyekabuddha doesn't really figure very prominently in Buddhist history; there's no example of someone aspiring to be a Pratyekabuddha or even becoming a Pratyekabuddha - not within the historical period. Pratyekabuddhas seem to be referred to the remote past and some scholars or some students of Pali texts and the Hinayana are of the opinion that the Pratyekabuddha represents a Buddhistic reminiscence of the ancient Indian, not to say Hindu, not to say Vedic, rishis, who lived on their own in the forest. Because, according to the Hinayana tradition, the Pratyekabuddha has gained Enlightenment, yes, he's attained pratyeka Bodhi, but he doesn't teach. This would seem to contradict, in a way, the very nature of Bodhi itself; that Bodhi is not only Wisdom but also Compassion; that it is essentially self-giving, so to speak. So it would seem to me that this sort of Pratyekabuddha ideal, like the associated later arhant ideal, is just a product of a very one-sided development of Buddhism after the Buddha's own day, that for the Buddha himself there was no real distinction between 'Buddha' and 'arhant'. And probably the term 'Pratyekabuddha' was unknown to the Buddha himself.

So this also brings us back to the question of the arhant ideal and the bodhisattva ideal. Howsoever they are presented in Hinayana literature, they are just not really two separate ideals or paths. One cannot really have a spiritual life which is entirely, or even predominantly, self-regarding, or a spiritual life which is entirely or predominantly other-regarding. The two are different aspects of the same thing. As you develop spiritually, yes, you cannot but influence and help others, and if you want to influence or help others in a positive way, it must be out of some inner resources of your own. So you have to be on both the arhant path and the bodhisattva path. They are really one path.

Murray Wright: But then why does the Pratyekabuddha feature so prominently in something



like the 'White Lotus Sutra'?

[16]

S: Ah, because the White Lotus Sutra ... the Pratyekabuddha doesn't feature prominently; but all the different beings which have come down from tradition as existing in the universe are represented as being in the audience. He features there.

Murray Wright: So it's just that he's more mythological then?

S: No, I wouldn't say more mythological. But the Mahayana took over the whole tradition of the Hinayana, but without any critical sort of historical sense such as we have now. They couldn't say: Well, that was a misunderstanding, that was a wrong historical development. Because the Hinayana teaching had come down in the scriptures and so on. But the Mahayanists weren't altogether satisfied with it, so they took the view that that was an earlier, incomplete teaching of the Buddha, which he revealed to people whose capacities were not very great - and that afterwards he revealed the Mahayana. And you have got various schemes which different Mahayana teachers worked out: in this period the Buddha taught the Hinayana sutras; in that period he taught the Mahayana sutras; and in such-and-such other period this particular group of Mahayana sutras which were less advanced and closer to the Hinayana; in such-and-such other period another group of Mahayana sutras which were completely Mahayanistic, and so on. All that was because they didn't have the sort of historical critical viewpoint that we can have now.

But we don't need to resort to those quite cumbersome procedures. We can see that after the Parinirvana of the Buddha a certain hardening of the arteries did set in in some circles among the Buddhists, and this gave rise to what eventually came to be called the Hinayana. So we don't need to go through that, or regard that as a genuine stage, or a genuine part of the Buddha's teaching. It is better if we try to get back to what the Buddha really taught, as far as we can see it, which is something much more positive and something much more akin to the Mahayana than those Hinayanistic developments. The whole antithesis between arhant and bodhisattva, and arhant and Buddha, belongs to that Hinayanistic development, rather than to the Buddha's own teaching.

It's unfortunate in a way that we have to go so much into history and development of doctrine in order just to practise the Dharma. But if you want to be a doctrine follower, well, that is what you have to do. If you want to be a faith follower, well, yes, you can just accept the simple practices and institutions of the FWBO and just not bother your head about how Buddhism developed two thousand years ago. Some people do that quite successfully. But if you insist on being a doctrine follower, well, yes, there is a lot of hard study and hard thinking ahead for you.

[17]

Dave Rice: I'm curious about this Pratyekabuddha...

S: Well, the Theosophists have a view of their own. They say, they have their famous doctrine of the seven-rays - they say the Pratyekabuddha is on the Administrative Ray. He is sort of responsible for the spiritual administration of the Universe; he doesn't actually teach. They see the Pratyekabuddha as a sort of glorified Chairman; you have got nothing to do with the Teaching of the Dharma, but he administers something. Well what he administers is

not especially clear. The Theosophists seem to have developed this idea of a sort of spiritual bureaucracy, (laughter) presiding in Tibet, which was ... and they have a quite elaborate teaching of the spiritual government of the world. So they place the Pratyekabuddha, without any sort of justification from Buddhist sources, in this sort of context.

Dave Rice: It strikes me, with all due respect for what you have to say - I am not a doctrine follower, as it were, but to the extent that you are, so you may be quite right - but, (laughter) with the Pratyekabuddha, I was thinking perhaps he may be a being who has in some way attained Enlightenment, but he just isn't motivated to teach in the strictly Buddhist sense; perhaps he just continues to be what he always has been, in a practical sense. He might be a candle-maker or a...

S: No, the texts don't bear you out. The Pratyekabuddha is invariably represented as a bhikkhu, and invariably represented as living in solitude.

Dave: In other words he has been ordained.

S: Yes. But of course don't forget, that in order to be ordained, and this again is according to Hinayana tradition, in the case of someone gaining Arhantship or Pratyekabuddhahood, when there is no Sangha around to ordain you, the insignia of bhikkhuhood appear on you spontaneously: your head becomes spontaneously shaved and the yellow robes appear on you, etc., etc., and your bowl appears in your hands. Because the Hinayana could not accept that someone who was not a bhikkhu could become an Arhant or a Pratyekabuddha - so they have this particular teaching or doctrine.

Dave: They are almost synonymous, aren't they, the Pratyekabuddha and the Arhant?

S: There are technical differences. The Pratyekabuddha gains Enlightenment, especially by meditating upon the Twelvefold Nidana chain; not the positive one, the other one. Whereas the Arhant according to the same tradition becomes such by meditation on the Four Noble Truths, which are considered to be not so profound. I am only relating the tradition.

Dave: But this raises another question, is it possible then for [18] a human being on the planet somewhere even now or in history to gain Enlightenment without the Buddhist context; in other words not within the Buddhist framework, not being a Buddhist at all?

S: Oh yes, but then you would be a Buddha.

Subhuti: The Buddha himself did that.

S: Yes, he wasn't a Buddhist, but again it is Buddhist tradition - Hinayana tradition taken over by the Mahayana - that a Buddha in that sense of course does not, in fact cannot, appear until the Dharma has entirely disappeared for the time being.

Dave: O.K. so admittedly another person in the world cannot become Enlightened outside of the Buddhist context otherwise he would be a Buddha, because he is not, if you like, transcended to the point of understanding the doctrine of the Buddhists of Buddhism, which is non-theistic for one thing, but surely a very realized being in other countries or other cultures, how could you classify a very realized being who made through other some other

system had attained a very high degree...?

S: Ah well, then the question arises: well, what other system? In the Digha-Nikaya, the Buddha says very clearly that outside the Eightfold Path there is no higher transcendental attainment. So if you believe that somebody had attained higher transcendental attainments outside the fold of Buddhism, you would have to if one could check it so to speak externally, make quite sure that he had in fact followed the Noble Eightfold Path, for him to qualify as Enlightened in the Buddhistic sense.

Dave: Whether he knew it or not ?

S: Yes; whether he know the Pali or Sanskrit words, presumably that wouldn't matter, though some Theravadins might insist that he would have know the Pali words (laughter) I am not prepared to debate that point. But I think we have to be very careful of sort of woolly universalism. Giving our diploma of enlightenment to any sort of western mystic or whatever that happens to take our fancy. Some people do this.

Dave: For instance, Blake, I am not suggesting that he is enlightened, but in the Movement there is quite a lot of interest stimulated by Blake...

S: I would say, my personal impression is that Blake was not enlightened. Nonetheless, I would say that Blake had attained a certain degree of illumination and I think that Blake was definitely on the spiritual path as we understand it, and I think perhaps he is all the more useful to us because he wasn't enlightened. He is nearer to where we are, but he is definitely going so to speak in the right direction. And especially in the Four Zoas, or Vala , the way that he sets forth the Four Zoas, and their interactions and their various relationships and unifications and dissolutions and all the rest of it, it is very, very germane to where a lot of people are in the spiritual life, and there are many pointers in the right direction, at least pointers in the direction of psychic integration, which is very, very important. So yes we can make use of Blake, fully, and I am quite sure that [19] Blake was on the spiritual path, but I don't get the impression reading Blake's writings etc., that he was enlightened in the same sense that the Buddha was, and I wouldn't even like to say that he was a Bodhisattva, but certainly he was on the spiritual path in a very genuine sense, and certainly we can derive a lot of benefit from him.

Dave: Do you consider that any other beings like Blake who might have reached Enlightenment outside...

S: (interrupting) Well it is just quite easy to posit hypothetical figures who might have gained Enlightenment, so one cannot deny obviously that there may have been people who gained enlightenment quite independently, but one cannot help asking well what is the purpose of positing these unknown figures? And if they are known figures, well their lives and their writings and their teachings have to be examined, in order to say or before one can say whether they were on the same spiritual path. One might for instance encounter a Christian saint who seemed a very worthy person and uttered all sorts of worthy sentiments, but then one discovers that he encouraged the burning of heretics at the stake. So then from a Buddhist point of view, one is justified in doubting whether he was so highly developed spiritually after all.

On the one hand we have to be quite open to the possibility of spiritual development outside the technical Buddhist fold, and we are on quite safe ground Buddhistically speaking in doing that, because the Buddha makes it quite clear that the Dharma consists in certain specific qualities and experiences and attainments. But on the other hand I think we have to be a little critical and not just sort of hail any Western Christian mystic as Enlightened or a Bodhisattva or a western Buddha and so on and so forth.

Vessantara: What do you think is the best way for dealing with beginners who come along and have a pet Indian sage, or somebody who they feel is enlightened, and they say well surely there are people who are enlightened in other traditions, and in some ways you don't want to appear dogmatic...

S: Yes, well one has to adopt the same attitude that one adopts with regard with God. You say, "all right, there are people who believe that that person was enlightened; you believe it; I have nothing to say against that; I don't know that person; I don't know anything about him; but anyway this is the path that we follow". You cannot possibly enter into discussion about someone you don't know, or about whom you know nothing, that he could not have been enlightened. That would seem a little a priori, taking what has been called the high a priori path. But on the other hand if that person insists too strongly that Baba so-and-so is enlightened, "well if you really feel that, why aren't you sitting at his feet ?"

Mike: The answer that usually comes back is that Baba So-and-So is in the Himalayas right now, and besides Baba So-and-So says all paths lead the same way, so he has come along to the Buddhist centre...

S: But if all paths lead to the same goal you can forget all about Baba So-and-So and follow this path, it doesn't matter... Baba is irrelevant. They cannot have it both ways. I mean this is what [20] I used to find with some Hindus objecting to people who become Buddhists. They say, "Yes all paths lead to same goal, Buddhism leads to the same goal as Hinduism. It is not a separate religion". They would be very annoyed if you suggest that it is a separate religion, but if anyone became a Buddhist, they did not like it. (laughter)

So if people adopt this line that all paths lead to the same goal, there is no need to argue with them, you just say, "well all right, you may be right, all paths lead to the same goal, so that means that our path leads to the goal, all right let's follow it". "There is no point here when we are following this path talking about some other path, you don't need to, they all lead to the same goal anyway, according to you. But don't get involved in an argument with beginners about all paths not leading to the same goal.

Alan: It is a question of all paths leading to the same goal, rather than all paths being the same.

S: Well, some do introduce that distinction. I don't think it really amounts to very much. I personally prefer the actual Buddhist approach, that there is one as it were principle path, there is only one path, and to the extent that you are genuinely trying to develop, you follow that path. There is as it were one Archetypal Path. It is not that Buddhism properly understood, certainly not the Mahayana, is as it were one path among the many. It is as it were the Archetypal path. This is what the Buddha made clear to Maha Prajapati Gotami in the text which I often refer to.

David: I think that there are other systems that recognize that, that there is an Archetypal Path, it is just that their language and symbolism are completely different from say the Buddhist language and symbolism.

S: Well there are quite a few traditions that do not recognize an Archetypal Path in that sort of way and who would say well Buddhists are on the wrong path. But they are unlikely to come along to you unless they want to try to convert you.

I did used to find in my earlier days in England after I returned from India for the first time, and mixed with many semi-Buddhists that there are a lot of people who want to hedge their bets, they want to not commit themselves to Buddhism or maybe not to any thing else. It is really that they don't want to commit themselves. They want to have a sort of foot in every camp and finger in every pie. And they adopt this ecumenical pseudo-universalist attitude as a great big rationalization for that. Because they can go along to the Theosophists one week, and the Bahais the next, and then come along to you, and do a bit of this and a bit of that. They never get deeply into anything. They never threw themselves into anything. It is all very much on the intellectual comparative eclectic level. So one must learn to recognize this sort of thing.

Dave: I remember Ramdas said that at first one becomes eclectic in that one looks out for something that one feels a leaning towards and then at some point one has to make a decision and plunge straight into a lineage. But then he said after that comes universalism.

[21]

S: Well lets wait and see. (laughter)

We need not jump to any premature conclusions. It depends also what one means by universalism. When the Buddha looked out over the world after his Enlightenment, he saw some lotus plants as sunk in the mud. I mean if you carry universalism to an extreme people will tell you that whatever they are doing is a path. That if they are eating, drinking and making merry, well that is their path to God. (laughter) Well they can put up a very good defence of their position on occasion.

But I think the main point which emerges out of this, here, as on other occasions, be very careful what sort of arguments you get into with beginners. Don't get into an argument which causes you to miss the main point, which is well they have come along and presumably they want to get into some kind of practice. So don't have so much intellectual argument, that that point is lost sight of; even if you have to, not exactly agree with what they say, but at least keep your objections in reserve. You don't have to sort of fight out every issue with them on the spot the first time that they come along. Don't be in too much of a hurry to refute them, it may well be that they are just quite sincere, quite genuine people under some misunderstanding, they may feel that they are saying the right thing, or they may even feel that that is your point of view too, and they are just trying to be friendly. Sometimes that happens. So you don't have to be in too great a hurry to spring to the defence of traditional Buddhist doctrine. In other words, let beginners get away with quite a lot (laughing).

Preordination Retreat Tuscany 1981

Questions and Answers Session 13

S: ... spiral path today.

You've really pushed on then. So you must have quite a lot of questions.

(silence) (laughter)

Subhuti: We've got some.

S: Well, who is going to start off?

Dave Rice: Well just really a technical question. Subhuti just now said that um - I forget the word for it. (laughter) What's the... ?

Subhuti: Passaddhi.

Dave Rice: Yes, Passaddi, which is after priti, is not mentioned in the dhyanas. It is stated that it could not be associated with one of the dhyanas and I wondered why? Does it not fit in there? Surely it must?

S: Not, not quite sure what you are asking.

Subhuti: As it's not one of the factors, is it enumerated as a defining feature of any of the dhyanas?

S: No, it isn't.

[2]

Subhuti: I think then what we want to know is: how does it correlate?

S: Well, this is quite clear, you just have... what ... prasarabdhi is a calming down - so what is it a calming down of? It is a calming down of priti. So if you look at the dhyanas you will find that priti is a dhyana factor, a dhyana anga, up to a certain point in the dhyana series. After that it ceases to be a dhyana factor. What has happened is that it has calmed down. In other words that factor called prasarabdhi has come into operation even though it is not explicitly mentioned in the dhyana series.

Dave Rice: But why isn't it mentioned?

S: Well, the analysis of the dhyanas is not complete. It gives the most prominent factors in each dhyana state. It is not a completely exhaustive enumeration of all the dhyana factors present.

Dave Rice: So maybe the relevance of prasarabdhi in the dhyana experience is just that it isn't related.

S: No, I think that you are hypostasizing prasarabdhi too much. It is a process. It is the process of calming down of the priti. It is not a factor in itself.

It is that stage in which the external manifestations of priti, the excitability of priti, subsides.

So it isn't, it isn't and it couldn't be, a dhyana factor in the same way that priti itself say or sukha are.

[3]

Dave Rice: So it is more of a refined priti isn't it?

S: No, it isn't a refined priti. It is the process of refinement of priti.

Voice: Into, into what?

S: Well eventually, in the fourth dhyana, you have left only upekkha and sukha, so it is a refinement of the priti into one or the other of those states, or both combined.

Dave Rice: Upekha isn't mentioned in the Omnibus. How does that come into it?

S: Upekha has got a double meaning. Upekha occurs as one of the four Brahma Viharas. As such it is usually considered by the Theravada tradition as mundane. Upekha also occurs as the seventh bodhyanga, which is a series very similar to the twelve positive nidanas. You find that series repeatedly in Pali Canonical literature. So here upekha, as the seventh member of the bodhyanga series, is equivalent, one could say, to Nirvana.

Voice: Which would be equivalent to which stage of the spiral path?

S: Well, if you are going to correlate, it would be the last. Because if the bodhyangas is a complete series, and if the twelve positive nidanas are a complete series, then the last two members of the series should coincide, even though one or other of them may or may not have a broader connotation than the other. But I think the important thing is to get this idea of a positive [4] progressive series. And you get that, both in the twelve positive nidanas and in the bodhyangas. You mustn't expect to be able to find a completely exact, stage by stage, point by point correlation between the two in so much as the mind, and spiritual experience itself, is much more complex and many-sided than that.

Dave Rice: Yes, I think that one of the analogies that you used is of the colours of the rainbow blending into one another.

S: I mean, there is also the whole question of where do you put the Brahma Viharas. This raises many questions. The Theravada tradition sort of disposes of the matter by, you know, regarding the first three Brahma Viharas as leading you only up to upacara-samadhi, or preliminary samadhi, so they don't enter into the dhyanas at all, but it isn't really quite as simple as that. But we won't go into that now. Nonetheless, the Brahma Viharas are very, very important. Much more important, according to the Pali texts themselves, than they have been regarded as being by the, the general Theravada tradition.

Subhuti: I'd first like to clarify something that you said yesterday. Can you experience priti outside of dhyana? Does priti occur outside of dhyana?

S: Well, priti, in the sense that the term is used generally in Buddhist tradition and especially in connection with meditation does not occur outside of dhyana. But nonetheless one might well have outside of dhyana, that is to say on the level of Karma vacara consciousness, an

experience analogous to that to priti [5] in the dhyanas. It's mainly a question of terminology, and certainly, as I explained yesterday, Buddhaghosa does envisage a whole series of priti-type experiences from the comparatively gross to the very much more refined. I've mentioned these in 'The Three Jewels' dealing with this particular nidana.

Subhuti: Heading on from that, to what extent can you operate from the state of dhyana.

S: Well, er, if one is thinking in terms of full dhyanic experience even that in which vitaka vicara have ceased - that is to say from the third dhyana onwards if one thinks in terms of the four dhyana series -sometimes the dhyanas are enumerated as five - If one thinks of the dhyanas as fourfold, and if one is thinking of dhyanas two, three and four, then clearly it isn't possible to function efficiently in the world in a dhyanic state. It probably is just about possible to move about while in a somewhat dhyanic state, but if that moving about requires any thought, any reflection, then of course that is incompatible with, you know, the maintenance of the dhyanic state.

Insight of course is quite another matter. As regards Insight: once insight has been developed it cannot be lost. It doesn't matter whether you are sitting and 'meditating' - inverted commas - or moving about, or speaking or doing things with people.

Peter Shan: Can you experience the second dhyana say in 'just looking' in communication exercises?

[6]

S: Well, there is the point that in dhyana experience sense experience becomes progressively attenuated and peripheral. As the dhyana experience intensifies, you become less and less conscious of sense impressions, and therefore less and less conscious of sense objects, including people. So I think it's possible to have an experience of very intense concentration while doing the communication exercises, but you might well reach a point where the concentration becomes so intense you feel the person opposite sort of fading away or just receding into the distance.

Inasmuch as communication with another human being includes experiencing them by the senses, and inasmuch as sense experience tends to become attenuated with the dhyanic experience, to that extent you would not be able to communicate with another person in that state. Of course, that does not preclude a direct mind-to-mind contact. That is another matter. It would be less and less easy to communicate via sense impressions, via your impressions of that person's physical presence.

Peter Shan: So do I take it that, in the higher dhyanas, you would actually not really perceive anything even if you were looking, so to speak?

S: Yes. The eyes could be open and perhaps sense impressions being registered, but there would be no consciousness of them. Well, I think people are well aware of this. You can be reading a book, really concentrated, and there can be a very loud noise nearby and you may not hear it. Once your attention is disturbed you may then recollect that there was a loud noise but that you did not actually hear it at the time. It sort of registered, but you hadn't become conscious that it registered.



Voice: In other words, the organism registers it so that (words obscure)

S: Yes. (Pause) Anything more from you?

Subhuti: About the same sort of thing: the correlation between visionary levels and dhyana. Somebody was saying you could have a vision with your eyes open, so that you could see something in the midst of the ordinary objective world. So is there, can you correlate the visionary experience with the dhyanas?

S: Well, clearly one has got to distinguish between different visionary experiences, or visionary experiences on, so to speak, different levels, or different planes. For instance, you can have spots floating in front of your eyes. They are not actually physically there, so what is that? Is that a vision? That is the lowest and crudest level.

[7]

Again, you can produce a sort of eidetic image, a sort of counterpart of a gross material object. This is a visionary experience. But then on a higher level you can have the same kind of experience but imbued, so to speak, with a sort of higher meaning. And this is visionary experience in the higher sense of the term. The last is a union in the sense of something perceived by the Imagination with a capital 'I'. And sometimes one can have any of these experiences at the same time that one continues to perceive the external world, so that it may appear in the midst of the external world, as it were. This sometimes happens - though probably not with the very deepest kind of experience, when you are oblivious of the external world and in a very deep dhyana state and the visionary experience occurs then.

Jon. Rice: So is the visionary experience when the perceiver is perceiving a vision of the Imagination - in the higher sense - in the world? Is that correlated to a dhyana state? Is his visionary experience correlated to the dhyana state?

S: Well, according to the general Buddhist tradition, each dhyana is correlated with a corresponding world. On the subjective side you have jhana or dhyana; on your objective side you have loka or world. So it is said that the attainment to a particular dhyana gives you access to a particular world, so that you perceive and even converse with the beings of that world. So your perceiving and even conversing with the inhabitants of that world to which you have gained access through the dhyana is the work of your Imagination with a capital 'I'.

So one perceives the vision so to speak in its own world you could say. There may be a sort of residuum of consciousness of the world of the senses, and you may, as it were, project the vision - what you see on to that world of the senses. But you don't really see it in it; it doesn't actually belong to it.

Clive Pomfret: I think the main thing that we were wondering about was that you obviously need to talk about two - well, not two, probably about many - different kinds of visions, some of which have some directly dhyanic elements and some which don't. And those which have a link with the dhyanas - i.e. actually correspond to the experience of dhyana - you can't actually be walking down the street and see one of those visions, because you wouldn't be able to function.

[8]

S: You wouldn't be able to walk down the street because you would be, you know, in a dhyanic state and not therefore perceiving any sensual input at all.

Vessantara: Can you answer the question about perceiving sense, through the senses in meditation and those proceeding from the periphery of consciousness in dhyana. You get in the Zen tradition, as I understand it, people doing shikantaza, or 'just sitting', where their total practice actually seems to be complete awareness of surrounding phenomena. So you have, like, experiments with Zen monks who are wired up in a laboratory and there is a click, clicking noise made somewhere, and whereas most people's attention to it would gradually diminish, they register, as far as one can measure on an electro-encephalograph, the same reaction to each click of the clicks. So their attention actually seems to be going out, as it were, to the external object. Would that mean they weren't in a particularly deep state of meditation.

S: Well it depends on the use of the term. It would mean they are not in a dhyana state. Because Zen, that is, the word 'Zen' itself is used loosely, but Zen in the fullest sense, or one might say Zen in the highest sense, in the sense, the fourth of the senses I've referred to in the "Essence of Zen" is not concerned with the attainment of the dhyanas, - that they regard as what is called Tathagata Ch'an.

They are concerned with the development of Insight, and as a basis for the development of insight they try to maintain this [9] intense awareness of everything, of their surroundings and so on. So that is quite compatible, that sort of experiment is quite compatible with that sort of practice. But if you were wiring up an Indian Yogi, or someone like that who was in the dhyanas, if he was deep enough in the dhyanas, he would not respond to those stimuli.

Vessantara: So these Zen practitioners then, how is it possible for them to attain insight if there is firstly no dhyana experience, and secondly if their practice is just based on this absolute awareness of phenomena? Where is the sort of intelligible concept which you need?

S: I would say as regards the current practice of Zen as far as I have been able to gather, you know, from people who have actually practised Zen, there is a certain dryness to it. There is a certain lack of the emotional element, and I think that is probably associated with the non-development of the dhyanas. And the general Buddhist tradition of course is that the energies really need to be unified before one can really penetrate into the nature of things, and that unification of energies takes place by the incorporation of, among other things, more and more emotionally positive factors. So in that way Zen sometimes, because there are so many different ways of practising Zen, so many teachers, and I can't generalize too much. Sometimes Zen seems to approximate a bit to the Vipassana practice. It's a bit dry.

(Long Pause)

'Dry' is also a technical term in the Buddhist tradition for 'devoid of the dhyanas' or 'devoid of dhyanic experience'. which [10] is perhaps interesting.

One speaks of sukka-vipassana, or 'dry-insight' or insight arising without, you know, being dependent on the dhyanas as usually understood. Though many teachers maintain that that kind of 'dry insight' is not in fact a possibility.

Vessantara: And what of this point if you're simply, if your practice is totally devoted to intense awareness of your, of phenomena in a rather bare sort of way. There's quite a lot of intelligible concepts that will want integrating in some way.

S: Yes. Yes. Though, though yes and no. Because you know the Zen practitioner, at least in some forms of Zen tradition, will have his koan on which he will be working which fulfils the same kind of function.

Voice: What do you think of the value of this, this practice, I've never heard of it. Is there any?

S: Well, I think the practice of pure awareness and mindfulness is a perfectly valid practice provided it is an integrated awareness and not an alienated awareness. Why it is so important to develop the positive, various positive emotional factors is that we are in a process of transition from alienated awareness to integrated awareness. If you have an integrated awareness all those positive emotional factors are there, and then if someone who is fully integrated, in whom all those highly emotional factors are present and operating, if as such a person you just look out over the world, you just remain purely aware, that is an integrated awareness and, yes, it is possible then for Insight to arise. [11] But not if you do that same thing with an alienated awareness, then that is not possible.

But perhaps we need to sort of reconsider, even revalue, this whole idea of awareness. We tend to think of it as something a bit dry, a bit abstract, a bit empty, but integrated awareness isn't like that. It really does contain a very powerful emotional component. But not emotional as we usually understand it. It is very sensitive, it is very alive. It contains the element of metta. It is perhaps analogous to equanimity, upeksa. You know there is a danger, some of you must be aware of this, of upeksa, being equanimity, being regarded as indifference. And I mean, there is a little story I sometimes tell in this connection which was told to me by Lama Govinda.

Years and years ago Lama Govinda was invited to a conference. I think it was in Rane, to represent Tibetan Buddhism. It was some sort of parliament of religions or something like that, a conference of faiths. So Lama Govinda was present, and present also was a very pleasant young Nepalese monk whom I subsequently also got to know. So in the course of the discussion in one of the sessions the question arose as to whether love was higher than indifference or indifference higher than love. So the young, you know, Nepalese monk jumped up and said that well, according to Buddhism indifference was much higher than love, that is to say upekkha was higher than metta. But he was speaking in English, and he said that indifference according to Buddhism was much higher than love. Then all the Catholic Theologians present, according to Lama Govinda, smiled, because that was just what they wanted to hear. And then, of course, they proceeded to say, Well, in Christianity love, charity was far higher than indifference. It was very [12] interesting to hear that the highest virtue of Buddhism was indifference. Yes. They suspected as much... That Buddhism was selfish and individualistic and that indifference was a far higher virtue than love.

Then of course, Lama Govinda said he had to get up and explain that it was not really quite like that. That upekkha was not in fact indifference, upekkha was equanimity.

So even if one says that, even that is not sufficient explanation. Because what happens? First

of all one develops metta, and one develops metta towards all living beings equally. This is the important point. You remember in the regular practice one develops metta equally to the self, the neutral person or the self, the near and dear friend, the neutral person and the enemy, and it is equal intensity, towards all four. The same with regard to karuna, whether it's yourself suffering, a near and dear friend, a neutral person, or an enemy, you feel the same karuna. And similarly with mudita, sympathetic joy, whether it's your own well being, whether it's the well being of a near and dear friend, or the well being of an enemy - you rejoice equally.

So what about upekkha. And how do you develop upekkha. Upekkha is developed when you concentrate on the element of equality, as between your, or with regard to your metta, your Karuna, and your mudita. you dwell upon and develop the idea of equality. That your metta is the same for all, that your karuna is the same for all, that your mudita is the same for all - you dwell on and develop an equal attitude towards all. And that is equanimity. But - and this is the important point - you do not leave behind the experience of metta, you do not leave behind the experience of karuna, you do not leave behind the experience of mudita. They are all subsumed in, in the equanimity.

[13]

S: Do you see what I mean? So equanimity is not to be seen as excluding metta or excluding Karuna or excluding mudita. It includes them, at their highest possible development. So therefore it's quite impossible to translate upekkha as 'indifference, and it is even really difficult to translate it as equanimity. It is even much more than that - it is a quite different sort of experience. It goes far beyond even equanimity. So it is important to remember that.

(Pause)

So therefore as I have said sometimes in the past you can see that the experience of the Brahma Viharas can lead to something that begins to look rather like insight. Do you see what I mean? Because you are not influenced by any, you know subjective considerations of like and dislike. You are seeing all beings equally without that sort of subjective distortion, and therefore at least to some extent you are seeing them as they really are. And it is in seeing things as they really are that insight consists.

So therefore it seems to me that the Brahma Viharas have to be upgraded from the position they usually occupy in standard Theravada tradition. And also you can understand why in the Mahayana tradition and the Vajrayana tradition the development, the cultivation of the four Brahma Viharas are a sort of proreductive [?] to the arising of the Bodhicitta itself. They are the basis. There can be according to the well, modern Tibetan tradition, no development of Bodhicitta without a very thorough cultivation and experience of the four Brahma Viharas. And of course if you haven't well developed the Bodhicitta, if the Bodhicitta has not arisen, if you are not a Bodhisattva, how can you possibly enter upon the practice of the Vajrayana?

[14] So when you find that neither Tibetan lamas, Tibetan teachers, nor their pupils have extensively practised the Four Brahma Viharas, in fact have not practised them at all - then one cannot help wondering, 'Where is their Bodhicitta', and also what is their practice really of the Vajrayana. The four Brahma Viharas are the basis of it all, just as the refuges are the basis of the Brahma Viharas. I mean the refuges as representing the essence of the Hinayana according to the Triyana tradition, the four Brahma Viharas and the Bodhicitta as representing the essence of the Mahayana.

Any way, where did we get to that from?

Dave Rice: Well, there's still one that concerns me. It's a technical question Subhuti asked. I think he wanted to know that if in fact a vision arose which could be classed as "knowledge and vision of things as they really are", then which dhyana would that relate to.

S: No. It's a mixed-up question.

No, see, vision is here being used as an equivalent of insight. When one is using the word vision in connection with the imagination, one does not use it in that particular sense. One refers to an actual form, which corresponds to the imagination, the imagination, the image seen by the imagination. The objective correlate of the vision which is, you know, the imaginal vision, and which exists in it's own, what we can only call, world. It's own Loka - other than that of the, you know, other than the world disclosed to the five senses. So does that leave you a question or not?

Dave Rice: Yeah, I'm still wondering where this 'knowledge and vision of [15] things as they really are' fits in with the dhyanas. Is it the fourth stage? The fourth dhyana. It seems to me it would have to be.

S: No. I did explain I think the other day that one develops insight, and 'knowledge and vision of things as they really are' is the culmination of insight. One develops insight having suffused oneself with the dhyana experience, the higher dhyana experience, and then as it were came down to the level of the first dhyana, where vitakka vicara, that is to say discursive mental activity is possible, and then one reflects, or one calls to mind traditional conceptual formulations expressive of the nature of reality, and dwells upon them. Or bears them in mind in such a way that the insight arises. One must also point out that even though in the series of the positive nidanas 'knowledge and vision of things as they really are' arises where it does arise, and though it is equivalent to insight, all the subsequent nidanas in that series are so many different aspects of insight, representing so many repercussions in some instances, of insight on the total personality.

Dave Rice: So in as much as they constitute insight, they don't really relate to the dhyanas

(Pause)

or at least...

S: They relate to the dhyanas - but if they relate to them it is to the first dhyana. In other words the process is somewhat more complicated than it might appear to be as set forth simply in the sequence of those twelve nidanas. There are some intermediate [16] stages which are, so to speak, left out.

Also one must bear in mind - it isn't, you know, a series like the ascending steps of a stairway. It isn't quite so cut and dried as that.

V: Is that the dhyanas or the spiral path?

S: The spiral path - but yes it refers to the dhyanas too. It refers also to the ordinary twelve

nidanas. I mean each subsequent one arises in dependence on the preceding one by way of conditionality, but the Abhidhamma points out that there are twenty-four different kinds of conditionality. There is one book in the Abhidhamma Pitaka in the Pali tradition which deals with these 24 paccayas. 24 different types of conditionality. And the type of conditionality in which one nidana arises in dependence on its preceding nidana is not necessarily the same as the type of conditionality in dependence on which some other nidana arises in dependence on its preceding nidana. That's why it's not, you know, a straightforward relationship of cause and effect.

It's rather more complex, and in a way more haphazard than that. It's not completely linear. It sort of wanders about all over the place. Which is what one might expect from a genuinely natural process. I've touched upon this I think in the 'Three Jewels'. But one could in fact, you know, view those last five nidanas of the positive series as explaining in some detail the whole process whereby Insight breaks through the fetters. Because you start with insight and you end up with the destruction of the asravas, which of course is complete only with the destruction of all ten fetters.

[17]

Mike Scherk: Would it be fair to say that the asravas and the fetters are different ways of looking at the things that stop one from seeing. (unclear)

S: Oh yes, yes indeed

Do you recollect what the asravas are?

The Pali text usually give two different lists, one longer than the other. The first list is Kama-asava or Kama-asrava, bhava asava, and dit asava or ditthi asava, and the, the other list adds abhija asava. And the second list according to scholars is later. The fourth asava in other words represents, according to them, a later addition to the series. But you get both series in Pali texts. And there is another series of terms that partially overlaps, That is the three tanhas, the three cravings. That is to say Kama, Kama tanha, bhava tanha and nibhava tanha. All these are dealt with somewhere or other in the 'Survey'.

Anyway you, you covered the whole of the spiral today? So you do get, or you are left with, an impression of an upward ascending movement?

(Pause)

Did you have other questions?

Vessantara: We had sort of areas - I don't know how well-formulated the questions will be, but anyway Bob, do you...

Bob Jones: Well talking about the fetters we started off discussing around about yesterday's questions and answers. The whole sort of, the whole area of stream entry, and just exactly how, I'm a little confused as to just exactly how - just where stream entry is? [18] Like sometimes I've been left with the impression that stream entry is not so exalted a state, and other times like particularly yesterday, I was left with the impression that it was considerably further away than I had previously believed. (Laughter)

S: Well, perhaps one should oscillate between the two.

Vajraketu: Well, that does seem to be what you do. That's the problem.

S: In your better moments it seems not so far away, but when things kind of get a bit tough and the going becomes difficult, then even stream entry seems to recede into the far distance.

Vajraketu: You even once yesterday seemed a little bit dismissive even of our endeavours towards piti, which is (pause) a pity (laughter)

S: There is a talk I gave some years ago, er, I think it was in the first series I gave under the auspices of the FWBO on 'Aspects of Buddhist Psychology' - and wasn't there a lecture there on Stream Entry or, and/or the point of no-return. Does anyone remember that?

Subhuti: 'The Higher Evolution of Man'

S: Was that 'The Higher Evolution of Man'? Stream entry, or the point of no-return. The essence of the matter is really given there, in a way in symbolic form, because in that lecture I spoke in terms of the gravitational pull of the conditioned and the gravitational pull of the unconditioned. Does anyone [19] remember this lecture? And one might say that stream entry is that point at which the, the pull of the unconditioned becomes stronger than the pull of the conditioned. It's that point where you make that transition, or where that transition is made. Where you begin to feel the, the pull of the unconditioned out weighing the pull of the conditioned. It's not that the conditioned is no longer exerting any pull at all it is exerting some - but it is no longer decisive and that's why you can't fall back.

Vajraketu: But it seems to me quite important whether you interpret that in quite a number of lives, or within this one, because you made a remark about Theravada Monks who took deliberate meditations on the three fetters, and I think you implied, if you didn't actually say, that they had broken them, when I think.

S: No, I don't think they would say that, but they would certainly say, or certainly believe, that they had understood what those three fetters represented. In fact the majority of Theravada bhikkhus today believe that such attainments are no longer possible, that one has to wait until the advent of the next Buddha. There has been some change in the situation over the last few years. Some people, especially those connected with, you know, the Vipassana meditation, they do believe that stream entry can be attained. But apart from that, that's rather an exception, the vast majority even of bhikkhus in Theravada countries nowadays seem to believe that stream entry cannot be attained, not to speak of Arhantship.

Vajraketu: So well, another aspect of this point...

[20]

S: So, so to come back actually to the point that you made - the universal tradition is that stream entry is something to be attained in this life. That you can attain it in this life, so to speak, starting from scratch.

Vajraketu: So the point arose that if the FWBO structures as they are, are conducive to the arising of Insight, and therefore to the achieving of Stream Entry, where are our Stream

Entrants?

End of side one

S: Well you just have to look around and take a good look.

Vajraketu: Well, I have! (laughter)

S: But you know again this ties up with a similar question that is to say whether people are ready for ordination. Whether they are really going for refuge and one might say if it is difficult even to tell whether people are really going for refuge how much more difficult is it to tell whether they've actually broken, you know, those three fetters. Unless you've actually broken those three fetters yourself it is going to be highly unlikely that you are going to be able to tell whether other people have broken them. You've only got external signs and manifestations to go by. You can go by those to some extent. You can infer from the fact that certain people do or do not do certain things that they well may be stream entrants, but you cannot be absolutely certain until you can perceive that directly for yourself as a result of your own experience of Stream Entry.

Ratnaguna: The thing is, if you see it in terms of the spiral path, and you ask people in the FWBO whether they have experienced rapture, [21] bliss and so on, most people would say no, so if you look at it in those terms you could infer that nobody has reached anywhere like stream entry.

S: Not necessarily. Because the development of Vipassana, the development of insight, depends upon a relatively modest degree of dhyana experience.

Ratnaguna: You have said that you have to, you know, traverse the four and then go back.

S: Yes, this is certainly, this is certainly (word lost in laughter) I haven't said that you have to. I haven't said that you have to. If you have traversed the four and then come back to the first, having traversed the other three, there is a much greater likelihood of your developing Insight in as much as all your energies are much more consolidated behind the Insight that you are trying to set up. But it is, it is by no means impossible to develop Insight with only the experience of the first dhyana. But inasmuch as the thrust behind it is less, well the possibilities are less - but no, it should not be said that you have to experience the four dhyanas before you can develop Insight, no. But certainly you would stand a better chance of developing it if you have absorbed yourself in those dhyanas before hand.

Vajraketu: So carrying on the point, would you say that within the FWBO structures that, that just, you know, being, working in a centre, and going on solitaires, retreats, and so on, is sufficient to develop Insight, or are what we are doing is just getting ourselves in a position where we can go off and develop it.

[22]

S: You mustn't think that any structure whatever guarantees anything. What guarantees anything, or something, is the use that you make of that structure.

Vajraketu: Well put it this way, if you talk in terms of the right conditions.



S: But if one has the right conditions, and if one makes full use of those conditions, well I am sure those conditions are fully adequate.

Vessantara: By those conditions you mean the conditions that are already existing in the Friends?

S: Yes, not that those conditions are perfect. They can certainly be improved. They can certainly be extended. But I doubt whether one will nowadays find anywhere a complex of conditions which is in fact more conducive certainly to the type of person, you know, being born in the West and becoming interested in, spiritual development.

Vajraketu: But what I mean - it is conducive directly to the, say the development of Insight, rather than conducive to getting you to the point where you can go and live in a cave and develop it? This...

S: ... er. One doesn't necessarily develop Insight living in a cave, nor not develop it not being in a cave. Some people do the one, some people do the other. There are many people who have lived in caves without developing Insight and (laughter) there are many people who have not lived in caves but who have developed Insight. [23] I did, something did, occur to me just now you know, with regard to this whole question of work, say especially work in a co-op. And this idea of the, or experience of the pull of the unconditioned. The pull of the conditioned usually operates, or operates to a great extent through the pull of your own little likes and dislikes, that 'I want to do this,' 'I don't want to do this or that' etc. That is all the pull of the conditioned. Well when one is in a work situation such as is typified by a co-op, and when you have say committed yourself to that situation and you are, so to speak, sacrificing all personal interests say to get a particular job done, that seems to exemplify the pull of the unconditioned because it is a pull which is not related to any personal subjective interest of yours - you are definitely being pulled away from yourself. Do you see what I mean?

So it is in this sort of way that that kind of situation has its value. And that one should not think necessarily in terms of, 'Well this is not doing me much good and that I should go off and find a cave in which to meditate. Perhaps that actual work situation is more suitable and is more conducive to your higher development than even living in a cave would be.

Dharmapriya: What you have been saying just now seems to, seems to me to negate something which I had thought you stressed in the past. I think that is one of the things Ratnaguna was getting at. Well, I had understood that you did emphasize the sort of importance of soaking oneself, as it were, in the dhyanas over a time in order to provide a suitable medium in which Insight would not only arise, but actually so it would not blast you apart, but you could cope with it and deal with it positively.

[24]

S: Well there is also the difference of individuals. One must not forget that some people are relatively psychologically, emotionally integrated. That is to say even without so to speak formal experience of the dhyanas, their energies are pretty much behind what they do and behind, say, their reflections on the conceptual formulations of the teaching. In the case of other people less integrated and less in touch with positive emotions, well a greater degree of dhyana experience may well be necessary. One has to bear that in mind also. But if one can do all these things, well, so much the better. You see one doesn't want on the one hand not to

stress any necessary factor, but on the other hand one doesn't want to make it sound so difficult that people feel well, we are never going to be able to do all these things. And one doesn't also want to sort of give the impression that there is a very set, very definite, very rigid path almost, which you have to go item by item, ticking them off one by one, and then be sure you are going to get there. It isn't like that.

So one may, you know, strongly advise people to have as much dhyana experience as possible, but on the other hand one may also point out that, well, insight can arise for someone without ever having experienced the higher dhyanas. It isn't quite so cut and dried as people sometimes would like to think, or certainly as the Theravadins seem to have thought. I mean, we are leaving out of consideration things like devotion. I mean some people can feel so intensely devoted, you know, say to the Buddha or a bodhisattva, that they are lifted up into an equivalent of a dhyana state. Some people experience something dhyanic in the course of say a puja.

(Pause)

You might possibly experience Insight you know, when you are sort [25] of tripping through the fields enjoying the sunshine and listening to the birds, and have as it were forgotten all about Buddhism. It is possible that an Insight arises. No doubt not altogether you know, unconnected with your previous practise of the dhyana, and your previous meditations. But it can arise also when least expected, least looked for. So one can't pin things down too much, though people like to pin things down. Sometimes one feels people trying very hard to pin things down and therefore trying very hard to pin you down. But things can't be pinned down in this way, nor can you be pinned down in this way really.

Dharmapriya: Running the risk of trying to pin you down a bit too much, um, is this the reason, in a sense, this fact that, that it is hard to specify too closely, why at one point in the sutras the Buddha talks of going through the four rupa dhyanas and then through the four arupa dhyanas before achieving Insight and the mind of Enlightenment, whereas you speak quite often of in a sense completely ignoring the four arupa dhyanas as if they were irrelevant to the development of Insight. Is that just because one or both possibilities are... ?

S: Well, there is, what are these 'four arupa dhyanas'? It is also said by the tradition that these, you know, four arupa dhyanas are sort of refinements of the fourth dhyana. In a sense they don't go beyond the fourth dhyana.

(Pause)

[26]

In some formulations it's the dhyanas and certain other practices, the brahma viharas and certain other practices, which link up with that particular series. It does seem to me there is quite a connection between equanimity and, say, the experience of the infinity of space or consciousness. I certainly don't regard the arupa-dhyanas as unimportant. But that introduces all sorts of other quite complex questions connected with the texts and the presentation of the Dhamma in those texts - and how to correlate one presentation with another. There is a lot of things that the Theravada tradition seem to have lost the key to, which they don't understand any longer; like the ten vimokkhas. The arupa-dhyanas are also included in the vimokkhas, the ten vimokkhas. They are not even sure what the first of the vimokkhas really is all about,

what it really means, what the term itself really means. So there is a lot of sorting out to be done, and it can't be done just on the basis of understanding of the texts, but also by relating these things to one's own experience.

I think also one must not think too literally in terms of a straight series of dhyanas and that's the one way. I mean, people ought to know from their experiences with acid that the mind is multi-dimensional. There's not just literally one way in the sense of one set path or one stairway. There's several ways round, as it were. So the brahma viharas represent, it seems, another way round; because it seems, judging by certain texts, you can by-pass the rupa-dhyanas and reach the arupa-dhyanas by the brahma viharas. This is what some texts seem to suggest. And that seems to me quite acceptable, quite natural, in a way. This is perhaps why the Theravada commentators have difficulty finding a place for the brahma viharas - because they are thinking too exclusively in terms of one single linear series.

But, you know, whether it's a four dhyana formulation or a four brahma vihara formulation or whatever, these are simply aspects of the same spiral process. It does seem there is really more than one formulation of that spiral process. It's not just one mental state leading to another mental state and that's it and that's the only possible formulation. It's not like that at all. [27] But you know, to come back to this question of stream entry. One is probably justified in thinking, though I shouldn't think too much (laughter) that one has entered the stream when over a period of several years you consistently feel the pull of the unconditioned out-weighting the pull of the conditioned, and feel it even getting stronger. That shouldn't really be a matter of guesswork.

(Laughter and applause)

And also one might say, you know, in the light of what I said a few minutes ago, that a certain span of time is required, and most people in the FWBO have not been in the FWBO very, very long, or for many years. But may be, if one wanted to be quite sure, if one say could look back over a period of say of twenty years, and if one had seen over that period of say twenty years, or even 15 years, someone's commitment gradually deepening one could see that they were less and less attracted by conditioned things, to use those expressions, and were definitely more and more and more committed to their individual development, and in fact were developing, and therefore that the unconditioned (again to use that terminology) was pulling them more and more strongly... well one would be justified in concluding, if one was not able to perceive it directly, that they had entered the stream.

Vajraketu: Well, what about some of these Theravada monks that you used to know who have presumably been in monasteries from whenever and presumably are committed to the Dharma..

S: ... and presumably?

[28]

Vajraketu: ... are committed to the Dharma. Presumably some of them are and well, presumably you've known some for 15 or 20 years?

S: Hm. Yes.

Vajraketu: So you would say you knew some Theravada monks who are Stream Entrants?

S: Well I would say with regard to the majority of Theravada monks that I have met I hold out no hope whatsoever! (laughter) Because they don't even make an effort you know, and that at least one must be making an effort otherwise it's not even worth wondering if someone might have entered the stream, or might enter it in a few years time, if he's not even making an effort. I mean, I mean Theravada bhikkhus are very much like Christian Clergymen, in a way; they're respectable, decent people, often quite learned and knowing Pali, reasonably well behaved. But they aren't really thinking in terms of gaining Enlightenment. A few yes, you might find here and there, though much more likely not to be, you know, not very much known. But certainly those who are in general circulation, those who are well-known organizationally, it is very unlikely they would be anywhere near. They probably wouldn't even be thinking in those terms.

Pete Shan: Are people of that nature thicker on the ground in Tibetan circles?

S: I think it's much more likely, at least, you know, those who had the experience of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibet. It is in a way a quite sad state of affairs that one can't have [29] greater confidence than that.

I did meet once somebody, a Burmese monk in India, who was reputed to be an Arhant. And those were the days when I was not quite as sceptical as I am now, and I was really looking forward to meeting him. After spending a couple of days with him I came to the conclusion that he wasn't an Arhant at all, wasn't even very mindful as far as I could see. And he seemed to be suffering from some kind of nervous tension. He kept screwing up his eyes every few minutes and sort of grimacing, and I thought this quite odd in an Arhant. He was quite a well-known person. He had a troop of disciples. He had lots of little lady disciples who were dressed in brown and white. They couldn't be bhikkhunis of course. And they were travelling with him, they were Burmese travelling with him around India, and everywhere where they stopped, though they were supposed to be yoginis, their main interest was to find the local shopping centre and go out and do some shopping and buy some new clothes. So I wasn't very much impressed by them either.

So I was with him for a couple of days, and for a couple of days I kept him I might say under fairly close observation, and I wasn't at all impressed. And I said to people afterwards, 'Well, people who believed he was an Arhant 'If that is what an Arhant is, I just don't want to be one'. (laughter)

He was a worthy person, yes, but, no, no, one couldn't accept that as representing the peak of human achievement according to Buddhism.

Saddhaloka: Can one correlate at all Stream Entry and the Arising of the Bodhicitta?

[30]

S: Well, this is quite a question. I don't think one can actually. The contexts are really quite different. If there is anything parallel in the experience of the bodhisattva it is the attainment of irreversibility, because Stream Entry is an experience of irreversibility. I mean you can't fall back, you can't fall back on the path leading to Nirvana. In the same way irreversibility for the Bodhisattva is he cannot fall back on to the lower levels of 'spiritual individualism' as

I've called it. He is definitely going to attain Buddhahood. So there is some sort of parallel here, some sort of correspondence.

Nonetheless, not being as it were, not literalistic one can see a sort of similarity if one sort of does not allow oneself to be misled too much by the difference of context. That is to say the difference as to between Hinayana and Mahayana. Say the concept of Stream Entry arising say within the Hinayana. The concept of the Bodhicitta arising, you know, within the Mahayana. If one refuses to allow oneself to be misled by that too much, if one can see that there is quite a bit of overlap between the two Yanas, especially if you go back to their origins in the Buddha's teaching and try to think more in terms of the spirit of the teaching, I would say yes, that Bodhicitta the arising of the Bodhicitta can be regarded - I won't say as an aspect of the Stream Entry - but that Stream Entry and Bodhicitta are, as it were, different dimensions of what is essentially the same spiritual process. The Bodhicitta of course has reference rather to the, sort of the cosmic context of the spiritual life. The Bodhicitta, the arising of the Bodhicitta brings out the implications of your Stream Entry for other living beings. In other words I don't [31] really think, say disregarding this difference of Yanas, that in the teaching of the Buddha, Stream Entry represented an individualistic sort of experience as it became in the later Hinayana. So if one doesn't see it in those individualistic terms, and I think one shouldn't, then it becomes quite easy to see the Bodhicitta, the arising of the Bodhicitta, as constituting another dimension of that experience - its more, as it were, more altruistic aspect - and really inseparable from it.

Because one sees in the Pali Canon that even Arhants, the arhant disciples of the Buddha taught the Dhamma. And the Buddha in his first charge to the sixty first disciples, he said 'Go out and teach the Dharma out of compassion for the many'. So how can one regard the attitude of the Buddha say in the Hinayana, or even of the Arhants of those early days as individualistic? The compassion element was clearly present. So therefore the Bodhicitta aspect must have been present. One can't really completely separate Stream Entry from the arising of the Bodhicitta unless one takes Hinayana and Mahayana very sort of literalistically as two mutually exclusive systems or regards the Mahayana quite literally as a sort of continuation from where the Hinayana left off. I don't think one can really do that. So yes, I would say, I would go further than that, I would say there is a whole sort of cluster of experiences, a cluster of terms which revolve around the same basic experience. If one thinks in terms of real Going for Refuge, and real Going Forth, and real Stream Entry, and real arising of the Bodhicitta, they are all different dimensions of the same thing. Do you see what I mean?

Because there are examples of people Going for Refuge to the [32] Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha and developing Insight at the same time, developing, you know, 'the eye of the Dharma' as it is called. Becoming stream Entrants the instant that they heard the Buddha expound the Dharma and at that instant Going for Refuge; so for them, Going for Refuge and Stream Entry were one and the same experience. Or also that Going Forth was the same experience. At one and the same moment they were a householder, a layman, they heard the Buddha, at the instant they were completely changed. Sociologically speaking they went forth, psychologically speaking they broke the fetters, spiritually speaking they gained Insight into the Truth, and as it were altruistically speaking they developed the Bodhicitta. You get all those things happening as it were at the same time. All different aspects of one and the same spiritual event. So you can't really try to string them out as different stages in a single linear process. But of course you can separate them too, because you can go for Refuge

without attaining Stream Entry. That is what I have called effective Going for Refuge, if your Going for Refuge is sincere with a view to genuine development, well that will eventually merge in the real Going for Refuge, which is Stream Entry. Or you can sort of transpose the subject and you can speak not only of Stream Entry in the real sense, but entering the stream of the spiritual life as a mitra in a just provisional sense or effective sense. Do you see what I mean?

These terms all have applicability on different levels. I mean all Mahayana Buddhists in a sense have caused the Bodhicitta to arise, but it is only a quite provisional Bodhicitta it is just an idea that they should develop themselves to the salvation of all. The Bodhicitta, even the relative Bodhicitta hasn't actually arisen. So you could say you've got, you see a [33] a provisional Going for Refuge, a provisional Stream Entry, a provisional Bodhicitta, and a provisional Going Forth. You've also got an effective Going for Refuge, an effective Stream Entry and so on, and then of course you've got the real Going for Refuge and the real Stream Entry, the real Going Forth, and the real arising of the Bodhicitta. Do you see what I mean?

These terms all represent different ways of looking at the same event, and that event can take place on different levels. So this represents a sort of synthesis, a sort of unification of these different ways of looking at the spiritual life from the standpoint of the different Yanas and different Buddhist traditions. And I think one has to bring them together in this sort of way in order to do full justice to what actually happens in the course of the spiritual life. So one is aiming one might say, you know, in the FWBO, one is aiming really to Go for Refuge, one is aiming really to enter the stream, one is aiming really to go forth, one is aiming really to develop the Bodhicitta - all these things. None of which as yet, at least for the majority of people, have yet happened. Do you see what I mean?

They are all different aspects of the same thing. I've sometimes thought that I should perhaps give a lecture or even write a little booklet on these four things you know, Stream Entry, Going for Refuge, Stream Entry, Going Forth and the Arising of the Bodhicitta. They are all quite intimately related.

Ratnaguna: Bhante, that seems to be a bit over-loose to me, because if you say you can have effective Stream Entry, and that Stream Entry is breaking the first three fetters, then breaking the first three fetters is real isn't it - it's not effective?

[34]

S: No, I think you are missing my reference to the terminology that I established with regard to the three, the Refuges. Didn't I speak of provisional Going for Refuge, or cultural Going for Refuge, effective Going for Refuge and real Going for Refuge and Absolute Going for Refuge.

So it's those terms in the sense that I've then defined them that I have in mind. Effective here means when you are actually trying to practise. Provisional Going for Refuge is when you are just a born Buddhist, a cultural Buddhist. Effective Going for Refuge is when you are really trying to develop yourself, but you haven't yet of course, gained Stream Entry and then the Real Going for Refuge takes place when you gain Stream Entry.

Ratnaguna: But I thought you just talked just now of, you know, that you could talk in terms of, for instance, effective Going for Refuge in the same way as talking about effective Stream

Entry, effective Bodhicitta etc.

S: Yes, but I've correlated effective Stream Entry with effective Going for Refuge, and therefore I've distinguished in this context, between effective Stream Entry and real Stream Entry. So you might ask what is the difference between effective Stream Entry and real Stream Entry.

Effective Stream Entry is when you have at least an intellectual grasp of the meaning of those three fetters, so at least you've broken the fetters intellectually, at least theoretically even though you haven't broken them really. You've got the right ideas, even though you've not been able to bring your life in accordance, in harmony with those ideas. You've got right views as distinct from Perfect Vision. So to have right views is to, [35] is to enter the Stream, is to break the fetters effectively. That's the effective breaking of the fetters, which is not the real breaking of the fetters. You need a chart setting forth all these things.

Vajraketu: Is, which is, the, your order members feeling over many years more and more the gravitational pull of the unconditioned is a real Stream Entrant rather than an effective Stream Entrant?

S: Oh yes, I'm talking of real Stream Entry in that context, yes. And I think with some people one might perceive that process as having taken place over a shorter period. But one needs the length of time to make sure it's not just the result of willed effort that someone is able to do something, and that therefore there is not going to be a reaction.

Rudiger Jensen: We're adding a fourth - absolute Going for Refuge. What do you mean by this?

S: Ahh - I did explain it. I think I mentioned these things in a lecture. The absolute Going for Refuge is when you no longer go for Refuge, because your object of Refuge is yourself.

You've gained Enlightenment, so you are now your own Refuge. That is absolute Going for Refuge.

Ratnaguna: It might be worth mentioning Bhante, that you gave that to the Order.

S: Well that was at a convention - but it has been generally released, [36] so to speak.

Voices: Hm, yes.

Subhuti: Not in the books. Not in the tape lists for sale. But it is available.

S: Ah is that so?

So therefore it becomes very important, one can see, to as it were work on the scriptures and work on the traditions, and try to understand what they are really all about, and relate them to one's actual experience. And certainly all these terms: Going for Refuge, Going Forth, Stream Entry, Arising of the Bodhicitta, - represent absolutely crucial events. In fact are different ways of looking at or different dimensions of one and the same crucial event, having repercussions in different areas of experience. I mean the Going Forth is clearly more external

through ultimately I suppose it does become a matter of body, speech and mind. Ultimately you Go forth not just from the house, from the home, but from the world. So perhaps one could even have a talk on, you know, provisional Going Forth and effective Going Forth etc., etc. Provisional Going Forth is where someone in a Buddhist country just gets ordained as a Buddhist monk as a purely cultural phenomena, but is not thinking in terms of spiritual development at all. That is provisional Going Forth, and it corresponds to Provisional Going for Refuge. Effective Going Forth is where you literally do leave home and you go and live in a monastery and you are actually trying to use that as a means of spiritual development. And then real Going Forth is when you Go Forth from conditioned mental states, when you Go Forth from the lower [37] states of existence in the sense that you can never fall back into them, and that is equivalent to Stream Entry. You've gone Forth from certain aspects of the conditioned permanently. And Absolute Going Forth is when you can never come back into conditioned existence at all because you are Enlightened. You have Gone Forth from conditioned existence itself then. So one can look at all of these events on these different levels, these four different levels, as provisional, as effective as real and as absolute. You know, whether it's Going Forth or Going for Refuge, or Stream Entry - or Stream Entry, or the developing of the Bodhicitta.

I mean provisional development of the Bodhicitta is when you are just born into Mahayana surroundings and consider yourself as following the Bodhisattva path even though you are not making any actual effort to do so and so on, and so on.

(pause)

Anyway, I think time is up.

Preordination Retreat Tuscany 1981

Questions and Answers.

Day 11 Tape 11

S: What ground was covered this morning for our questions?

Subhuti: We started off by going into the Communication Exercises - going over the instructions you gave, and one or two questions came up.

Dhammaloka: Yes, when we tried to recollect what you said yesterday concerning communication exercises We didn't remember anything you said about the third stage, the mutual exchange of friends and I would like to ask you if you would like to comment on this.

S: I didn't in fact say very much, because what I said describing the second stage with regard to the partner who initiates the communication applies in the third stage to both partners, because both are initiating, you could say, and both are responding.

Dhammaloka: So it's just more a mutual flow of initiating and responding?

S: Yes. One point I did make was, that just as in the second stage you need to receive, allow yourself to receive, allow yourself time to receive the initiating communication before



coming back with your acknowledgement, in the same way in the third stage you need each time to receive the other person's communication [2] before responding with your own. A few people at least on a few occasions were not in fact doing that, they were coming in much too quickly with their response, if you like, not giving themselves time, first, to receive the other person's communication. There's a lot that could be said which I didn't say which one may well discover in the course of one's own experience: the way in which the communication changes, the way in which, even though you are communicating through the medium of the same sentence, you communicate in so many different ways, you ring so many changes. It can be a sort of game, in a way it isn't a game, it's not a game in the sense that we usually use that term. It's a sort of delightful game, it's not a 'game-playing game'. It's a real game, you could say. And that becomes an exploration of your communication itself, an exploration of each other, which is very important.

Dhammaloka: I personally find this third stage (? ?) is like improvising music with each other. One can go to different notes ...

S: Yes, yes. Sometimes someone can communicate in a way that is quite unexpected, therefore the element of spontaneity, even of playfulness, does come in. You are playful just because you are taking delight in the communication, not because you want to play a game, in the ordinary psychological sense. The game is not part of your defensiveness, as the psychological game is, the game is part of your expressiveness, the game is part of your openness, the game is part of your self-revelation, your self-disclosure to the other person. [3] You are revealing to the other person different aspects of your being, you're not hiding anything when you play in that sort of way, and you can only play in that sort of way when you've established a certain degree of trust, when you don't feel threatened by the other person, when the other person doesn't feel threatened by you, when you feel it's quite safe, so to speak, to be quite open. We did run through the exercises a little rapidly, partly because everybody was quite reasonably familiar with them. But I suggest that when you yourselves actually take people for these exercises you spend a little more time on them, say, at least 1 1/2 hours, that would be good. And if you're taking a course in these exercises for complete beginners, they could well last for a couple of hours, with a tea or coffee break half way through.

Voice: How long do you leave between exercises?

S: It depends. I wasn't leaving too much time yesterday, partly because I wanted to finish by 1 pm. One could probably, especially with beginners, leave a little more time than I did, because you see in a way, they deceive themselves, or you deceive them, once the exercise is over they think they're not communicating any more now, so they talk quite freely with each other! (Amusement)

So there's a possibility of some quite genuine communication then, though only a possibility. One has known, on certain occasions beginners under such circumstances, starting to chat about quite irrelevant things, or starting to play games with each other. Or even to find fault with each others' communication in a way that isn't very helpful. So you must make sure that [4] the interval between two sets of communication is not being used in this sort of way.

Ratnaguna: Bhante, why do you emphasize having only five minutes or so, or seven minutes at the most for a communication exercise?

Is it because beginners are involved?

S: I think for most people longer if they're doing it properly would be a bit of a strain, unless you've got really into it and it's become completely spontaneous, which is comparatively rare.

Pete Shan: Bhante, do you see this as a regular activity of communities, or is it really mostly of any use to the beginner.

S: Well, I think it's most dramatically of use to the beginner. When you introduce beginners to these exercises if they're beginners so to speak, straight off the street, if they're people coming straight, so to speak from the 'straight' world, with all their inhibitions and conditionings, sometimes the communication exercises can produce at least momentarily, at least for the time being, quite dramatic results. But I think none the less that quite a lot of people will continue to need the communication exercises for quite a long time, because even if you have a breakthrough in communication, it's very easy to relapse into your old non-communication with people. I have said, from time to time, that the communication exercises should not be necessary as between Order Members, by which I mean, that Order Members, having understood what communication is, having done the communication exercises, should [5] be in a position, should be prepared, to apply them each time they meet, they should be doing them in a sense, all the time though not as exercises, they should have become natural, they should have become natural, they should have become second nature. If you're communicating with another Order Member it should be natural that you just look at them, instead of to one side or over their heads. Do you see what I mean? So communication should be part of an Order Members functioning to such an extent that he or she shouldn't need the communication exercises. However, Order Members do sometimes fall by the wayside, so they may need to refresh their communication with an actual bout of communication exercises with other people, maybe Order Members maybe others. But nonetheless, perhaps I should continue to insist that Order Members shouldn't really need the communication exercises among themselves. There should be that flow of communication all the time, within the Order, at least. But I think what is important to remember if you are taking or leading communication exercises is, just as when you lead a meditation group, you retain your freshness of approach. It doesn't just become a sort of mechanical routine, and you should be very careful that you yourself are in communication when you take the communication exercises, not take them in a mechanical, alienated sort of way just because that's the evening you have communication exercises, just put people through their paces, that is not enough.

Devapriya: I've a very practical question Bhante, and that is it seems communication exercises aren't done unless there's a certain number of people present who would do them. What would be [6] your minimum?

S: Yes, this isn't easy to lay down as a rule. First of all why does one think in that sort of way? I'm thinking here especially with beginners or people who aren't much more than beginners. If you've got a lot people doing them, say at least a dozen to twenty, it does create a certain atmosphere, a certain atmosphere is generated, and it does seem that that does help people to open up. Also, if you've got say 12 to 20 people at least, when you come to change them around then of course, there's a possibility of ringing all sorts of changes, perhaps if there's someone who is not at all good at the exercises, who is not getting on with them at all well - well amongst 12 or 20 people there's some chance that you'll find someone considerably

better that you can put with that first person to help him. Do you see what I mean? If you've got very few people, the range of choice is comparatively limited. I'd say 20 or 30 is quite good. The number we have here is probably almost ideal. But none-the-less, especially with people who've done the exercises for sometime, yes, you can have smaller groups. Or sometimes I have known people just get together, just two people who felt that they wanted to do the exercises or perhaps they felt the need of improving their personal communication, and just do them quietly. That possibility mustn't be excluded. But I think on retreat, or in a situation where most of the people participating are beginners, 20 to 30 people is desirable.

Vessantara: I sort of came to the conclusion empirically, over a period of time, you needed, unless you had really experienced people, you [7] needed four pairs minimum for anything to get started, for it to function as it should.

S: There's also the point that when it gets beyond 30, it's rather difficult for one person to keep his eye on everybody, and sometimes, as you probably know, people can get into quite odd states in the course of the exercises and you need to be able to talk to them, maybe even reassure them. I've taken in the old days up to, I think it was about eighty, but that is quite a lot! (Laughter). Is that all the questions about the communications exercises, then?

Devapriya: There's one other point that I wasn't clear on, that was to what degree do you make an effort? To do with the difference between making an effort and willing it, it seems to be what we spoke about, for a little while in our group, in some communication exercises, it seems there's an element of trying to whip up a feeling, trying to 'get it all going...'

S: Yes, this is what I was referring to when I referred to 'the young, inexperienced Order Member in search of results,' just to reassure himself that he was in fact leading the exercises correctly and that people were achieving something and experiencing something, in other words, getting results. The same thing also must be applied to the person actually doing the exercises. You're not really satisfied with the way that they're going and you think that you should be experiencing something more, so you try to whip them up by shouting, perhaps, or indulging in a bit of letting off steam. So if you're the individual doing the exercises, one [8] must watch that too. You haven't faith in the possibility of communication, this is what it really means, perhaps it even means that you're afraid of communication. You're not prepared to work at it steadily and sincerely, wholeheartedly. It's not just a question of wanting to force the pace, perhaps you're really looking for something quite different.

Subhuti: When we discussed it someone raised the question that sometimes people have a need to express quite a lot of energy...

S: Well if it comes up so to speak, spontaneously, that's all right, and that will happen with beginners. I remember quite a number of instances when people did express quite fearsome anger, and they got into it quite spontaneously. They were not indulging. Some quite terrifying anger did come out and find expression, quite terrifying to their partners, and one had to hover a bit near, if one was taking that particular set of exercises to sort of reassure the other person that help was at hand if needed, (laughter) because sometimes it seemed as though the person expressing the anger could become violent at any minute. So that is acceptable, one can say, because that is genuine. But someone perhaps who has heard about the exercises or done them, you know, perhaps several times before, but who feels the need to indulge in anger, even produce the anger so he can indulge in it - that's quite a different sort

of thing. Of course, before you get into, you know the giving of, the flow of communication, there may be a bit of preliminary playing around in the psychological sense, a bit of game-playing, but you should very quickly get through that, and settle down to serious communication. I can [9] remember, you know, from long ago, individual instances of particular people's game-playing, even people who are still around, I can just sort of envisage them actually doing it, yes. (laughter) I can remember them sitting there and making a mental note of what they were doing and the way they were behaving, the particular little game they seemed to be playing.

Voice: You've got me sussed! (laughter)

S: It doesn't relate to anybody actually present, but I can remember individual instances quite clearly!

Vessantara: I still don't feel quite satisfied somehow by the way in which we are talking about the exercises. I suppose it relates to this thing that there would be no need for Order Members to do...

S: ... perhaps I'm expecting too much of Order Members, but that is how I feel.

Vessantara: Well even assuming you're in a way correct about Order Members, it seems as if we're saying that the communication exercises just take your communication to an acceptable level of communication.

S: No, no I'm not really saying that. What I'm saying is you should be doing the exercises all the time. Perhaps what I should say is that, not that Order Members, you know, resort to the communication exercises on certain occasions, or when [10] they happen to be leading retreats. They should be doing them all the time with one another, perhaps I'd better put it in that way, yes!

Vessantara: But even assuming Order Members are in good communication with each other, is it not the case that the concentrated context of the communication exercises should actually enable an even further deepening of your communication.

S: Well, perhaps I'm expecting that sort of more concentrated context on every occasion when Order Members get together.

Vessantara: Would it still not be like, say the difference between meditation, carrying your meditation experience into your action outside the meditation, would it not be the case...

S: No, I think there's a much greater similarity between actually sitting opposite somebody and doing the communication exercises and actually sitting opposite somebody and talking! The framework is similar, except you set it up for yourself instead of having it set up for you.

Vajrananda: But as you said after about an hour of communication exercises it gets to be a bit of a strain...

S: Well, cut down on the quantity of talking and improve its quality. The rest of the time just go off quietly by yourself, or think things over, or meditate or study.

Vajrananda: But you shouldn't find good communication a strain, surely?

[11]

S: I think even the best communication is sometimes a little too much for ordinary human nature to bear, (Laughter) after a while. You know sometimes it happens that you are having a very good meditation, and you're well into it and enjoying it, but it's as though a little demon sort of creeps upon you and suggests that you bring it to an end. (amusement) Do you see what I mean? That is what I call the weakness of human nature. I'm not suggesting that you should always listen to that little voice, but one does hear that little voice, and sometimes the communication will give you so much that you need to go away and think about it, to assimilate it. It's not so much that you shouldn't remain on the heights, or that you can't remain on the heights so much as perhaps you shouldn't, because there is a process, a path of transformation as well as a path of insight. You need time and space to assimilate what you've understood, what you've seen, what you've experienced. So there should be that sort of natural rhythm almost. Otherwise one's desire to prolong that good communication indefinitely can become, if one isn't careful, a sort of greed. As when one was a child, you know, the party goes on and you just want it to go on, you're tired but you don't want to go to bed, even though, really, you need to go to bed, but you don't want to, you can't say, 'that was a wonderful party full stop, now it's time to go to bed!' You want the party to go on and on, but actually you're too tired to enjoy it any longer but you can't give it up. I think that, to go back to the former point, I think I do expect quite a high level of communication among Order Members, and perhaps I'm quite right to expect that. But perhaps I should in future phrase it by saying 'I expect [12] Order Members to be doing the communication exercises with one another all the time.'

Sudhana: What immediately sprung to my mind, Bhante, was when I learned to drive, the driving examiner turned round to me after I had passed my test, and explained to me that I was now free to learn on my own...

S: Yes, in one sense none of these things ever come to an end. Study never comes to an end. The study of the Dharma never comes to an end, communication never comes to an end, you can always go deeper. Meditation never comes to an end. Buddhism never comes to an end, you never reach the end of it, actually which is rather fortunate because if you did or could, what would you do after that? But luckily you can't (amusement) you can only go further and deeper. Anyway perhaps we'd better get on to questions arising out of the text.

Sumitra: Yes, we were talking about the wheel of life, and discussion arose out of the idea of craving and desire, and how this could be applied in the animal kingdom in that the desire of an animal in its natural state for water, say, when it's thirsty, it's quite an objective necessity. So it just goes and drinks, and yet it remains on the circular path. So in that context the craving is not neurotic, it's quite objective, and yet it still remains on that circular path. So the thing about that was, how does an animal, or why is an animal therefore able to get off the path, off the circular path because its behaviour is quite natural, you know, or does [13] it just not apply? It was quite confusing.

S: This in a way is a sort of semi-literalistic question, but one can put two questions here;

(1) What is an animal and

(2) Is it not an assumption that animals don't get off the round, so what is an animal to begin with, what does one mean by animal?

I'm thinking in terms of consciousness and volition, what does one mean by animal. I remember in this connection one of my sort of semi-Abhidharma-like discussions with some of my Sinhalese bhikkhu friends in Calcutta. We used to have some very interesting discussions, sometimes, especially as some of them were students of science, they were in fact students attending the Calcutta University, - at the same time they were bhikkhus and some of them had some knowledge of Buddhist teaching and traditions, so sometimes quite interesting questions would arise out of, you know, conflicts between their Buddhist Knowledge and their newly acquired scientific knowledge. So one of the questions which arose was in connection with the Amoeba. One of these bhikkhus had been hearing about amoebas apparently in the course of his science lectures, and I think the question which puzzled him was, whether an amoeba could generate karma? (amusement) He couldn't work it out for himself so he came and asked me what I thought about this, and I said 'I think before you ask the question, 'Whether an amoeba can generate Karma?', you've got to establish a prior point, that whether an amoeba is endowed with cetana, which is sort of consciousness - [14] volition. That really comes first, so in the same way we've got to establish, what is an animal? You're sort of looking at an animal very much after the analogy of the human being, a sort of limited and circumscribed human being - well how is it that he or it cannot get off the round?

This does raise the question of the nature of animal consciousness, therefore animal volition, I mean, using terms which I have sometimes used in the past, does the animal, does the 'individual' animal actually possess an individual consciousness in the sense that a human being does? Or does it not so to speak, participate in a sort of collective consciousness, and is it possible to speak of a collective consciousness as evolving in the literal sense? It is rather as though individual consciousnesses, or more highly individuated consciousnesses have to emerge from the collective mass before one can speak in terms of individual development or getting off the round. In other words, the animal, to the extent that it does participate simply in a collective consciousness is by virtue of that very fact, by definition indefinitely on the round, or perhaps you can't even speak of it as being on the round.

Sumitra: It hasn't really even got that far.

S: Yes, but that does nevertheless leave the point that one does sometimes have contact with animals that one does feel have got some degree of individual consciousness, and some people do hold that it is through their association with human beings that some animals at least, do develop an individualized consciousness, and therefore, on the decease of the animal body may be reborn into, again in a manner of speaking, a human body, [15] do you see what I mean? Sometimes one can feel this of certain animals, maybe dogs, horses, and so on, that, yes, they are almost individuals in the way that human beings are individuals, and this degree of individuality according to some teachings, is developed in association with human beings. Sometimes you find that certain animals like associating with human beings. I've also noticed unfortunately that human beings can affect animals in an unfortunate way, especially again dogs and horses. You can get, as I've seen myself, neurotic dogs, dogs that have acquired the neurotic symptoms of their owners and one does hear that in the USA, in that great country, at the moment there are some thousands of people practising, men and women, as dog psychotherapists! (Laughter)

If your dog is showing symptoms of neurosis, you take him or her along to a dog psychotherapist (laughter), a dog analyst. So I don't know when they'll start having meditation classes for dogs, but that would be better (laughter). Bring your dog along or your cat, if you're a cat person (more laughter) or your budgerigar, but I remember when I was in Kalimpong, we had a dog. That dog was called Leika, presumably named after the famous Russian dog Leika which hit the headlines a while back - a name given to this dog by some of my students which just appeared one day. What happened was this - I was walking from the Vihara to the bazaar, and a dog appeared in front of me, that is he scampered across the road in front of me. He was about two years and a bit like an Alsation. So he appeared in front of me, bounced about and wagged his tail, ran after me several times and followed me to the bazaar, and then followed me home - followed me to the Vihara, and insisted on [16] staying there. Now some of my students formed the theory, in fact it wasn't only a theory, it was a firm conviction, that this particular dog was the reincarnation of an earlier disciple of mine. Here you see the process is being reversed. A disciple of mine, an English disciple of mine, I'm sorry to say, called Miss Helena Barclay, in fact it was the Honourable Miss Helena Barclay, a disciple who had received the three refuges from me - and there is a warning here for Order Members - in the early days of my sojourn in Kalimpong, and who had unfortunately died. She had suffered accidental death, and Leika was actually born in the very house where she had died, shortly after her death. So my students, who were pious Buddhists, many of them, they put two and two together, and they firmly believed that Leika was the reincarnation of Miss Barclay, who had had a rather unfortunate temper, which might have accounted for her being reborn as a dog. But at least it was a dog, it wasn't a bitch! (laughter)

So, Leika, as I've said, followed me home to the vihara, and there he remained, and he became quite a character at the vihara, because he insisted on attending all the pujas and meditations! (laughter) Yes, it was quite impossible to leave him outside! He attended every single Puja and meditation that we had, and believe it or not, he sat immediately in the front row of the shrine with one paw (laughter, words lost) ... He didn't utter a sound the whole time, he always remained awake, he didn't nod off, and as soon as the puja and meditation were over he insisted always on being the first person to leave, he wouldn't allow anybody to leave before him. (laughter) and this went on for some years. In the end, for some unknown reason Leika disappeared, he started spending time away from the vihara, and eventually it seemed that he established himself [17] elsewhere. But getting to know Leika, you know, whether he really was the incarnation of my old disciple Helena Barclay, I really don't know... I was never personally convinced, I couldn't feel it. I didn't sort of feel Miss Barclay coming through that doggie persona. But there's no doubt that there was something almost human there, and I have heard in my travels around India, in fact I've met teachers who had pets, in one case a cow, if you can call a cow a pet, who was believed to be well on the path to Enlightenment, if not actually liberated. But this was a Hindu cow and perhaps that's a little bit different. So there is this point that perhaps it is through their contact with human beings that animals do develop the rudiments at least of individualized consciousness, and it does thereafter become possible for them to be reborn as human beings. So that there is a sort of movement from the animal kingdom to the human. This does seem to be a possibility, though I wouldn't like to take it too seriously, just to offer it as a suggestion simply to account for the fact that one does feel this sometimes about some animals, especially dogs and horses. I do know that some teachers in some traditions maintain that cats and horses, not dogs for some reason or another, have an especially close relationship with the human race, and are quite different from other animals, but I'm not personally very sure about that.

Dharmapriya: This is a slightly different question from that. It's just that research with dolphins tends to indicate that they are not only roughly as intelligent as human beings, in as much as one can measure such intelligence, but also have very definite emotional build-ups and characters and very readily respond to [18] warmth in human beings and senses of what can only be described as a sense of humour, identify people, respond with warmth and love to closely related species of whales and similar things.

S: I remember very well my own first visit to the aquarium at Brighton where they do have a number of dolphins, and I have suggested to people that they visit the aquarium and see the dolphins, because it was winter time, and there was nobody else present, except an attendant who was just keeping an eye on things through a glass panel, but as soon as I entered the aquarium, and you know there is a sort of viewing area where the dolphins can rise to the surface. As soon as I entered the aquarium there was such excitement among the dolphins, and they were really pleased it was quite clear, to see a human being, and they wanted to establish contact. It's almost as though they wanted to touch you, and were really pleased to see you and this wasn't just sort of oneself being a bit anthropomorphic, just reading, as it were, human feelings and emotions into animals, but one really did genuinely feel that, that they really were pleased to see one, they enjoyed the contact, and on another occasion I went during the summer and watched them playing their various games, and that really was remarkable, because they have been able to learn those games which were in some cases quite remarkable and they did things which a human being couldn't have done, I think, even with training, perhaps even things which depended on their more highly developed sensory perceptions. But they did enjoy the whole business, they could even sing in chorus, they'd been taught to sing, and they let out screams of delight on certain occasions and they thoroughly enjoyed performing in front of an audience and doing all those things. So yes, dolphins are a very [19] interesting example, although obviously a question which does arise is 'what is intelligence?' But clearly, there's a lot of study to be done in these sort of areas. I believe there are other animals too, that people have studied recently, not just aquatic.

Voice: Monkeys.

S: Monkeys, chimpanzees or course. But there are others as well. Perhaps whales have also been studied, but dolphins seem to be the most interesting.

Dharmapriya: I've thought this before when you've mentioned this that self consciousness is a prerequisite for developing, and so the question is, well, I suppose it's because I tie self-consciousness with intelligence, and if for the moment one assumes that dolphins have some sort of higher intelligence of some sort, does this mean they have self-consciousness, which raises the obvious question.

S: Well it would seem that the conclusion which is to be drawn from some experiments with chimpanzees, is that they do have the rudiments of self-consciousness, and it does seem that the line of division between the human race and certain other animal species is becoming more and more difficult to draw. Because it was thought formerly that there are certain things that only human beings could do, certain mental operations only human beings could perform, it has been shown now that chimpanzees, or at least some chimpanzees can perform, on the other hand not all human beings can perform, so there is a certain amount of overlap, so to speak, in terms of intelligence, if one calls it [20] intelligence. Chimpanzees can work out problems, they can come to conclusions, but they can develop a sort of self-image, and



this is where self-consciousness comes in. Experiments have apparently been conducted with chimpanzees and mirrors, and so on, I can't recall the details, but I have read about them. But I think what is important here is that when one starts seeing animals in this sort of way, thinking of animals in the sort of way, it does induce a greater sense of solidarity with other forms of life, and I think perhaps this has been very much lacking in the West, partly due to our Christian heritage. 'Animals do not have souls therefore man is justified in exploiting them'. I think now we're beginning to realize it isn't such a simple matter as that, and of course if we do realize our solidarity, or feel our solidarity with the rest of the animal kingdom to a greater degree, in fact with all forms of life, we'll be much less likely to exploit, I think it's probably better to believe that animals can speak than that animals don't have souls.

Sudhana: Would it be too big a question to bring up here whether you think it's a good idea that animals are used for medical research?

S: I personally don't reconcile myself to that. I'm not saying that this is a very rational conclusion but my instinctive reaction is... (end of side one)

Anyway any further questions arising out of the study?

Devapriya: Somewhere I remember, or seem to remember that you likened sexual desire to craving. I think you said that the epitome of craving would be sexual desire.

[21]

S: I can't remember likening it in that way, because I have sometimes drawn the distinction between healthy and neurotic sexuality. Do you see what I mean? But you may be thinking perhaps of a reference I sometimes make to a saying of the Buddha's that 'had there been another desire in human beings as strong as the sexual desire, then no human being ever would have gained Enlightenment'. So that perhaps requires a bit of pondering. But as a matter of terminology I think we have to be quite careful to distinguish between desire and craving, especially when dealing with beginners, because it's one of the old, sort of hoary chestnuts produced by those who want to criticize or attack Buddhism that it's self-contradictory because it advises you to get rid of all desire, but then they point out, 'What about the desire to get rid of desire?' 'Hence, Buddhism is self contradictory'. The word in the nidana chain which is sometimes translated as 'desire', which I don't translate as desire, I translate it as craving, is 'trishna' or 'tanha' in Pali, which literally means thirst'. So I think it's better to translate this as craving', not 'desire. There is another word which could be translated as desire and that is 'chanda', and it is quite significant that in Pali one has reference to Kama Chanda which is sensuous desire, among which is included sexual desire and Dhamma Chanda, which is desire for the Dharma, or spiritual desire, or desire for spiritual things. So desire as such, desire in the sense of chanda is not dismissed by Buddhism, one is not in fact advised to extirpate all desire. The desire for the Dharma you should certainly cultivate. So when speaking in very general terms especially to beginners one should be careful to speak in terms of the elimination of craving, not in terms of the elimination of desire.

[22]

Subhuti: Do you think the term, 'neurotic desire' could be used interchangeably with 'craving'?

S: Yes, I think it can.

Subhuti: So you're interpreting neurotic there...

S: One is using neurotic in a quite untechnical sense, just to indicate there's something wrong, something not quite healthy. Neurotic is one of those words that have passed into general circulation and have become rather dissociated from their original technical provenance.

Vessantara: There was also a discussion about Karmas operating at the time of death and we may have talked about this on a previous occasion, but we wondered what the situation was with, for instance, senile people. It seems that their actual state at the time of death is very poor, in fact it's sub-human.

S: Well, what is senility? I think one has to answer that question first, really. What is senility?

Vessantara: There seem to be a number of elements. There's a loss of memory, there also seems to be a return to a childlike state of dependence, and there seems to be a dimming of consciousness, a lack of awareness of surroundings or seemingly what is ... ?

S: It seems to me, and I've had a bit of contact with old, even senile people and reflected on it, it does seem to me that the so-called senile person is simply dissociating himself or herself from this present level of being. I mean, memory, [23] well what does memory have to do with and what does one mean for instance by, you know, being dependent on others? Well, one may be physically dependent because one is not able to do things for oneself, but in a sense one may not bother. You just don't care any more! And you do see this with old people. They just don't bother any more, and in the end the not bothering reaches such a state or such a stage that other people even have to look after your physical body for you, your consciousness is sort of withdrawn, you just can't be bothered any more. I think many old people get into this sort of state. It's a state of withdrawal, prior to the consciousness becoming entirely dissociated from the physical body process. You see death can occur in two ways, one might say, it can either occur suddenly, or it can occur gradually. So what is death? It's a dissociation, popularly speaking at least, conventionally speaking, of the consciousness, for want of a better term, from the physical body. So all right, it can be dissociated suddenly, as when you're run over by a bus, or someone stabs you. Or it can be dissociated gradually. If your consciousness dissociated itself gradually from the physical body, well, what sort of process would there be set up? Well, that would seem to be senility, that would be the sort of symptoms that one manifests if the consciousness dissociated itself bit by bit from the physical body, and from the process of material life.

Saddhaloka: One feels it is a negative withdrawal though, just a weariness of the consciousness struggling in this body rather than a conscious withdrawing looking for something different or better.

S: I think it can be either. I think in the case of most people it is 'negative', they are weary, if you've lived for 60, 70, 80 [24] years, that's enough, you know, for the time being. You do want to withdraw, you do want to rest, and according to some traditions the, you know, the periods intermediate between different lives are periods of rest, for the majority of people, that they're not so much, at the very least, periods of fresh achievement. They just rest and then come back again. So I think it's not surprising that the very old want to rest, especially if the physical body is breaking down, it's a natural process. You've had enough, you've had enough of life for the time being. You don't want to see things, and hear things and do things,

think things, and bother about things, any more. You cease to recognize even your own children, after a while, you mix them up, you mix up your children with your grandchildren, you just can't be bothered any more, you know, children, grandchildren... it's all the same (laughter) ... you don't want to bother about those things any more, you've had enough. Do you see what I mean? It's the natural process.

Voice: Would it be a bit like Dhyana States?

S: Only if you practised dhyana during your lifetime, yes if you've been a yogi, your withdrawal can be a sort of yogic withdrawal, you are withdrawing into dhyana states. But if you haven't practised dhyana you just withdraw into a drowsy, semi-sleep like state, a rather state of relative non-differentiation of consciousness, very much like that of the infant.

Dharmapriya: So does that explain why a senile person often behaves like an infant?

[25]

S: Yes, I won't be very sure of this, I don't assert it as something actually known, but it does seem like that. It's as though the two ends connect, and so that dying in that state and then remaining in that state for a while, and then being reborn, it's only natural that you're reborn as a baby, you know, not as an adult human being, and then you have to build up your consciousness afresh, and your life afresh and your learning afresh.

Kevala: Would it be possible for someone to come out of senility if there was a need for it if they were committed to helping others and there was a need for this and they would come out of it.

S: Yes, one could say that in the case of someone who has practised dhyana or say who has taken the Bodhisattva vow, they may withdraw from the physical body towards the end of life, but within themselves they are alert and conscious, and they may recover that consciousness quite soon after their next rebirth, according to some traditions they might not even lose it even during the process of intrauterine development.

Subhuti: It's the same relationship as between waking and sleeping...

S: Yes, there is an analogy.

Sudhana: Some people get quite upset when they see their parents have gone senile, and go to quite lengthy ends to try to bring them back, as it were.

[26]

S: One must accept it. It may be a bit distressing; what is the most distressing thing for most people? The fact that your parents don't recognize you. But, you know, let them go free. Do they always have to be thinking of you for eternity? You're just one child, born to them in one particular life, according to Buddhists teaching, they've had thousands of children, you've had thousands of parents, why hang on to that particular relationship, let them go on their way, don't insist that they remember you for ever and ever. But, you know, if you've been used to being recognized by them and dependent on them, yes, it's not very easy perhaps to let it go and accept the fact that they look at you but they don't know who it is. I think one must be prepared for that.

Dharmapriya: It appears that people who are very active mentally, it's as if they can stave off senility till the very end, especially academics. It's as if even alienated intellect as long as it's very active will keep the senile process at bay.

S: I've seen this in the case of some people. I'm thinking of one or two examples that I can recall. It's a quite terrible thing. It's as though there's this sort of process, this almost mechanical process of intellection going on and there's such a powerful thrust behind it it just can't stop, but sometimes it gets out of gear or doesn't function quite properly, but it's still functioning, even functioning quite vigorously even powerfully, but it won't stop. It becomes almost demonic in a way.

Kevala: Are you suggesting that the person has withdrawn except for one faculty which ...

[27]

S: It is a bit like that, just like a faculty operating without a person, a brain continuing to operate, an intellect continuing to operate, but there's no person really there... a disembodied intellect, even more than disembodied because there's no soul so to speak there either. I've known such people.

Sudhana: It's sort of self-perpetuating...

S: Yes, and such people tend to reminisce a lot, they can be very dogmatic, very rigid in their ideas they can't learn anything fresh.

Kevala: Presumably that faculty won't allow them to die, it will keep on.

S: Yes, it will keep on, and sometimes the physical body may be quite strong and healthy, so you get the phenomenon of a person maybe well on into their eighties even nineties, but you know, they just carry on, this healthy body and this unhealthy brain in the sense of intellect, continuing to function together, and not much else. It's quite frightening sometimes, to see this. It reminds me of Blake's description of the self or the Spectre.

Sudhana: Do you feel senility is liable to happen to someone who's practising as much as someone who isn't?

S: Yes, in a sense, it will equally appear to be senility, but in their case they may be withdrawing into relatively speaking, dhyana states, not into a drowsy, sleepy sort of state. [28] But the external symptoms may be much the same.

Saddhaloka: Just from the experience of people dying - old relatives - it does seem to be that people who've been more human beings somehow keep alive in all their faculties, body and mind, much later than people who've somehow had limits on them always as human beings, it's the burden, the friction of it seems to grind them down much earlier. So actually senility doesn't seem to set in with some people, I mean, their faculties weaken, but there's still a sort of spark there.

S: It also depends on how you die, what causes you to die, because you can be quite healthy and in the sense that you still have the use of all your limits and faculties you can die quite quickly, some little clot of blood on the brain, something like that. That is like sudden death

almost, it's not a gradual exhaustion of all the faculties.

Dharmapriya: It's as if you're describing senility as a healthy process almost.

S: Natural, I would say natural rather than healthy, I don't think it is something that we should be dismayed at or that should upset us or that, you know, we should rebel against when it befalls our own near and dear ones of the older generation.

Dharmapriya: I was just thinking in contrast, it's as if some people's way of life encourages a premature almost start of senility, say the businessman who is retired at the age of sixty, or even earlier and bang! It just comes pouring in, it is as if the last forty years as if he has somehow ceased living. It is as if in that [29] case, maybe it's not inherently wrong but it's as if it's a recognition of defeat in his life.

Kevala: I think if some people don't want to think all their lives, like a businessman who is entirely engaged in business, as soon as he stops he's got nothing to occupy his mind at all, he's not developed any other interests...

S: He is no longer able to go on doing what he was doing and it's too late to learn to do anything new, or at least he feels it's too late.

Vajrananda: Does this apply to an Enlightened mind, is there any different rules that apply there?

S: What were you thinking of particularly, with regard to senility? Well, again even an enlightened mind might feel that it's done enough in the world for this time round, so perhaps it's time to start thinking about an additional career somewhere else perhaps. (laughter) The Buddha does maintain in a Sutra in the Majjhima Nikaya that he will definitely maintain all his mental faculties until the last, even though the physical body becomes so decrepit that it has to be carried around on the litter. It does make that point, that there will not be any change in his, you know, the alertness and the capacity of his mental faculties, and that even if relays of bhikkhus were to question him night and day, he would still be able to answer all their questions, he said.

Vajrananda: So the yogi has presumably more power over his...

[30]

S: Yes, he can either withdraw before physical death or not withdraw, as he chooses, whichever he thinks is more useful to do.

Yashopala: Because if he does withdraw into states of dhyana when the point of death comes that's a chance for Insight.

S: It is also said of many yogis, or meditation masters, spiritually developed people, that they do die in a state so to speak of meditation and that is very difficult to detect the exact moment of death. This is what happened in the case of the Buddha, according to some records, that some of the enlightened disciples for instance, thought that he was dead before he actually was! The enlightened disciples perceived that he was in fact in a dhyana state and that the link with the physical body had not yet been severed. There are stories of dhyana masters

remaining erect in meditation for several weeks and the disciples not being sure whether they were engaging in an extra-long meditation or whether they in fact had died because the physical body was still erect. (laughter) That's why it's generally believed in Buddhism that you can enter a mental state, a sort of dhyana state, a sort of semi-cataleptic state in which all bodily functions are suspended just as in death but in which the process of decay does not set in, a very subtle link with the physical body is still maintained.

Sudhana: Do you feel that you would be able to predict when you were going to die?

S: Predict! I don't know. I don't have any sort of feeling at the [31] moment that I'm going to die at this particular moment or that particular moment. I have a feeling it could happen at any moment, but I'm not very much bothered at which moment provided I'd been able to do a few things more as regards the Order and the FWBO But whether I actually will be able to, whether I actually will have time left, well I don't really know. I'm not in a sense really bothered to know, but just in case I do so to speak, disappear, so to speak prematurely, well I have left a few instructions with a few people as to how to carry on with things, that's all that's really needed. I used to have an idea that I'd die when I was 52 but 52 has come and gone so... anyway, it was only an idea, I don't know why I had it but I'd had it from quite an early age. Or perhaps I did die at 52 and came back again. (laughter) I did have two sort of experiences of death, I won't relate the stories now because I've related them more than once in the past, but it might even have something to do with that, who knows. Anyway, was there any other question we've a few minutes left.

Vessantara: Bob had a question on a similar sort of theme.

Vajraketu: People in comas, I've always felt personally that if I was in an accident for example, and in a coma I'd rather they pulled the plug on me rather than live on as a cabbage.

S: But you're assuming that you're a conscious cabbage. It doesn't mean, for instance, what has happened to one's consciousness when one is asleep? I mean there is the same [32] dissociation from physical sense activity with some sort of residual not very clear consciousness left. That might well be the state that you're in. But it seems that we don't really know. You could be fully aware of your physical body but unable to do anything about it, there is that possibility too. I'm personally not that in favour of indefinitely prolonging human life under all circumstances. I think those immediately concerned in an individual case should be free to take whatever decision they think is best in the circumstances.

Vajraketu: Would you extend that principle to the extent that... my grandfather went gaga and was for three years what is conventionally called senile, and my father said to me in all seriousness that if he ever got like that I was to put something in his tea (laughter) and actually my father meant it. Would you extend the principle you've mentioned that far?

S: I'm not quite sure, but as I've said I think those immediately concerned in any particular case should have complete freedom of choice or decision and I think that if someone feels that he has lived his life and doesn't want to linger any longer and it isn't a sort of emotional reaction against anything, but simply a unwillingness to go on, not to take advantage of current medical facilities to prolong his life for a few more days or weeks, I think he should be allowed to do that. If someone really wants to die, there's no need really to ask someone else to put something in your tea; if you really want to die, you will. If you really want to die

you can at least stop taking food, in fact if you really want to die you won't feel like eating, you'll gradually give up food, and you'll just sort of fade away, and I think you should be allowed to do that. [33] The teacher of one of my teachers did this, I've mentioned this case I think before, he was Dharmananda Koshambi, who was a well known Buddhist scholar from Maharashtra, whose books are still in circulation, and he was a monk, a bhikkhu, and he was living in Sarnath, and my own teacher, Bhikshu Jagdish then as a young monk was attending upon him. So Kashyap Dharmananda Koshambi said to Jagdish Kashyap that I don't want you just to spend your time in this way, it's a waste of time for you, just looking after me, I'm just going to stop taking food, and don't try to give me food forcibly. So he stopped taking food and after about three weeks he passed away, quite peacefully. This is what Kashyapji told me. So I think this is quite acceptable, quite legitimate. But unfortunately there are some legal complications in some countries, this could happen in India; it might not happen in England so easily. There might be neighbours who come to know, or doctors who come to know, that your parent has stopped taking food, and who try to force-feed him, and you might be held culpable, even legally responsible, you might be even accused of not providing your father with proper care, etc. You might at the very least be assailed by quite a lot of social opprobrium, even if there was no legal penalty. So it isn't quite so easy for us. But I do know quite a number of old people do express these sort of ideas.

Vajraketu: I don't doubt that my father's fear was of slipping to the same stage too quickly, or perhaps too gradually, to do anything himself. But definitely his rational decision was...

[34]

S: There was the famous case in the Pali Cannon of the bhikkhu who committed suicide, and the Buddha refused to condemn the action. This is a very curious case and there's no proper explanation given because it involves a technical term which the commentators are unable to explain satisfactorily, it's Samaya Vimutti. It is said that he attained to technical emancipation, and fell away from it seven times, now 'temporary emancipation' is not a concept which is admitted by the Theravada Tradition; how can you be 'temporally emancipated'? You're either emancipated or not. But that's what the text says, that he attained Samaya Vimutti, Samaya means 'time' or temporal or temporary. Vimutti - several times, six, seven times and each time he fell away from it, so he didn't want to fall away from it any more, so he decided that next time he was in that state of vimutti he would as he put it, 'use the knife', he'd cut his own throat. Which he did, and the Buddha was asked about the case and affirmed that he would not be reborn anywhere, that he had in fact attained Arhantship. So that is a rather curious case. Perhaps the episode has not been correctly transmitted to us, but that is how it has come down. So at least it suggests that the Buddha did not condemn what one might call religious suicide. But certainly suicide is an offence, and to abet suicide, in the ordinary sense, is an offence, according to the law. That is, if someone commits suicide or tries to commit suicide, for unskilful reasons when in an unskilful mental state, through desperation, fear, greed, rage. This is a highly unskilful action. But allowing oneself to die, is perhaps not strictly speaking suicide. That is to say not having recourse to treatment and medicines as would prolong [35] one's life beyond what seems to be the natural span, that sort of refusal would not seem to constitute an act of suicide. Or even ceasing to take food because you just don't want to take food anymore. You've eaten enough in your day. You just can't be bothered with putting that crude material in your mouth any more, especially as life is becoming a bit difficult. You can't move around, can't do anything without other people's help, you'd much rather get into a fresh, young new body and start all over again.

Dharmapriya: Isn't there a Mahayana tradition about suicide, something out of the White Lotus Sutra, that under certain circumstances sort of for the sake of the Dharma.

S: There is, there is, there are these ancient traditions and of course the text refers them to previous Kalpas in which a Bodhisattva showed his devotion to the Buddha by wrapping himself in bandages and soaking them in oil and then setting fire to himself, and making himself a human torch. Of course that tradition was behind the 'suicide' of the Vietnamese monks in Vietnam, some years ago. I'm not quite sure about that, I doubt whether the text intends that episode to be taken as a moral, you know, for human conduct in this age; it's more I think to hold up an example of extremely intense devotion. But it's quite clear, from what I've been able to find out about the instances, that at least the first of those Vietnamese monks to commit 'suicide' in that way, died in a quite calm, peaceful state of mind. There are these famous photographs of him seated there in meditation posture, quite erect, quite upright, quite firm, with the flames rising all round, or from him, his [36] clothes, his whole body, but he's still sitting there. So he could not have been in an ordinary state of mind. And he left behind a letter in which he mentioned that he did not perform his action out of hatred or ill-will towards anybody, but he simply wanted to make the point that Buddhism should be permitted to be practised freely, in Vietnam. This was at the time of the Diem regime when Buddhism was persecuted by the State, the state of course being virtually Catholics, President Diem was an ardent Catholic, his wife being an even more ardent Catholic, her brother an ardent Catholic, he was in charge of the secret police, and another brother, who was of course the Archbishop of Vietnam (Catholic), and he of course, was quite an ardent... (laughter). So Buddhists had rather a thin time of it. You mustn't forget that it was those events, that it was really the persecution of Buddhism by the representative of Catholicism in Vietnam which sparked off the Vietnam War.

Voice: Really?

S: Oh, yes. And the immediate incident, and I remember it very well because I was very much concerned with these things at that time, and I knew many of the Vietnamese monks, that the archbishop of Saigon had celebrated a sort of jubilee, you know, so many years in the priesthood, so many years a bishop and Vatican flags had been flown all over the place. A few weeks later, came Buddha Jyanti, and the government refused permission to fly the five coloured Buddhists flag, and this led to great dissatisfaction, representations were made to the government, and then there were peaceful demonstrations, [37] and the demonstrators got beaten up in some cases, and this led eventually to war. Dien, of course, was overthrown there was a coup inspired by the Americans who realized they had to get rid of him quick because he was too unpopular, so he was assassinated, the CIA was undoubtedly behind all that, I think that's generally known, and things just got worse and worse. So there's something else you could say, the Catholic Church has to answer for. Appeals were made to the Pope but what did he do? Nothing at all. Now that was an instance where he was in a position to do something, you know, call his own people to heel, as it were. But he didn't do anything at all. And there was Madam Nu's famous remark - the famous 'dragon lady' - she was quite a terrible character, an ardent Catholic, it was she who made the famous remark that the sacraments were her vitamins and she took them every day, and also when the monks committed suicide by fire, it was she who made the famous remark about 'barbecued monks'. Yes, she was quite a terrible character. I think she's living peacefully in America now. She's sort of retired as first lady of Vietnam. She was living there a little while ago.



Vajraketu: Was it that or the present regime that... (words unclear) ?

S: Well, apparently there has been some revival, I've heard some very indirect news through friends of friends. Of course Buddhism had a very difficult time all during the war, for obvious reasons, and there was quite a lot of politics among the monks themselves, who to support for the best interests of Vietnam, who not to support. I remember when I was in contact with these things, Big Ming had a lot of support from the Buddhist monks.

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S: He was a general and took over as president at one stage. He was very popular and seems to have been a good man, and he was a good Buddhist, but it seems he wasn't quite smart enough, though, to be a politician, so eventually he was ousted, but I remember that most of my bhikkhu friends from Vietnam they did support Big Ming, and spoke very highly of him. And there was the famous monk Kwon Dugh, who got very much involved in politics. But I was in contact with Vietnamese monks from the middle 50's and I remained in close contact with them for many years, and one of them came and stayed with me while I was at the Hampstead Vihara, and it was at their invitation I went to Paris in 1970 and they were always inviting me to Vietnam, especially to the Buddhist University, they tried very hard to get me there as one of their lecturers or professors, but I wouldn't go. That was before all the troubles. I often used to say I would visit Saigon one day, visit the Buddhist University it's still functioning, but it's been demoted to a Buddhist college by the present regime, but it's still there, but I've not been able to establish any contact with my old friends whom I knew 20-30 years ago. I don't know what's happened to them. Some of them may be alive. One of them, another one, visited me, Min Chow, he visited me in Hampstead about a year after I arrived in England. He'd been to the states for a while. Tien Tan was the other one who stayed with me in Hampstead and he also came over and stayed at Aryatara for a while - some people may remember that - for some weeks.

Subhuti: Did he go back to Vietnam after the war?

S: He wanted to go back. Yes, he did go back and then he returned to Paris. I lost track of him. I've not heard of him for a long time. I'm not sure if he went back a second time.

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Subhuti: We had a letter quite recently from a man in Ho Chi Minh City who wanted us to get hold of a Rupa for him.

S: Yes, that suggests they're having some difficulties there. Anyway perhaps that's all for this morning.

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S: Who is going to start, who has some questions? Subhuti or Vessantara or ...?

Vessantara: We've only got one question.

Subhuti: We've got one question but it's a big one.

S: Is yours a big one?

Vessantara: I'm sure you can sort it out. (laughter)

S: Well, I was only thinking in terms of time, but anyway let's have your question first.

Vessantara: Well it's basically Pete Hill's question.

Pete Hill: I was asking, if the unconditioned is totally ... dependant upon the conditioned, can insight, if not Enlightenment then dawn spontaneously, so to speak?

S: Well, if by spontaneously one means without any cause, well no, because that would rule out - this is of course the argumentum ad hominum (?) - it would rule out any spiritual practice. Because if Enlightenment simply happened, regardless of what you did then there would be no point in engaging in any spiritual practice. So even though the unconditioned doesn't depend upon the conditioned ones insight into the unconditioned arises very definitely in dependence upon a sequence of conditioned factors of a more refined kind, i.e. the Dhyanas and so on.

That is the short answer. Of course one can add something to this by way of rider. The Mahayana, especially the Perfection of Wisdom sutras would not agree that the conditioned and the unconditioned, the Samskrta and the Asamskrta, constitute an irreducible duality. Because they have their 'concept' of Maha-sunyata and both the conditioned and the unconditioned are equally Maha-sunyata. In other words, in the last analysis they hold that the distinction between the conditioned and the unconditioned is merely conventional.

But it is a distinction, conventional though it may be, which operates so powerfully in our case and which is so real for us that as I said some days ago, to begin with at least, our spiritual practice cannot but be based upon that dualism between conditioned and unconditioned. We cannot but think of the spiritual life as a transition from the conditioned to the unconditioned.

Vessantara: In our group the point was raised about people who seem to have, as it were, spontaneous experiences of perfect vision.

S: But here again perhaps we need to remember what I might call the latent imagination. We may not be aware of this latent imagination, this sort of higher spiritual faculty and we may not be aware of it partly because there is no current term generally to describe it. And if there is no word for a particular thing we tend to forget that such a thing exists at all.

But none the less, the latent imagination is there and it may be sparked off, it may be activated or brought to life by our contact with some object, some experience belonging to [2] the external world and then we have that flash of insight or of vision. Even though perhaps formally we had no idea, no conception of any kind of imaginal faculty or spiritual life or vision or anything of that kind at all.

But isn't that, well someone has never heard about Buddhism, so how come he spontaneously gets into a Dhyana state, or someone who's never heard about meditation, how come he gets into meditative states spontaneously? You don't have to hear about it, you don't have to know about it, you don't have to learn about it because the possibility of getting into that state is really within you. It's what I've called not an abstract possibility, it's a living possibility, it is a

potential. It is what I've just called the latent imagination, and that can be sparked off by some reflection of that, so to speak, in the external world. Even though you may have no conceptual framework corresponding to those particular facts of the spiritual life at all, hence you are taken by surprise.

As for instance if you suddenly saw an angel. Maybe you've had a scientific education and an angel wasn't included among the flora and fauna that you'd studied at all, but maybe suddenly one day you see an angel. Your universe of discourse does not accommodate angels; where has he come from? Well clearly he has come from the depths of your, I was going to say soul but I use the word soul in the non-Christian sense, come from some aspect of reality, some dimension of reality of which science has not kept you informed.

Vessantara: Can you relate conditionality or see conditionality in terms of probability?

S: Conditionality in terms of probability?

Vessantara: Like if you see things in terms of cause and effect, you have an absolute certainty that a particular cause has a particular effect.

S: Though of course Buddhism doesn't quite phrase it like that

Vessantara: Yes, I'm talking about somebody who has a scientific view, not a Buddhist view. I'm wondering whether they would think you take a more Buddhist view of things arising in dependence on conditions, or whether something... Like someone who has practised meditation very intensively they would produce a high probability that in time it will arise; perhaps just somebody walking along the road who has just come into contact with something that may stimulate their latent imagination but if you like the probability is much lower. But it is still a possibility; (S: Yes) there's a ten percent chance that it happens. Is that a reasonable way to look at it?

S: Yes, I think one could accept that one must never forget that there is the experience of life itself. One can have an experience, say, of impermanence and that may eventually give rise to insight into impermanence, into the truth of impermanence, without having had any contact with Buddhism at all. It is as though the universe itself is Buddhist, you might say. You don't have to have it separately in a book.

Of course if you, via your rational mind, learn about Buddhism from books or by hearing well you are more [3] likely, here probability comes in, to be more alert to any message that existence itself may be, so to speak conveying to you.

But you don't have to be a Buddhist in the more technical sense to be able to see an example of say impermanence in a falling leaf. Plenty of poets have seen that without being Buddhists at all. I think where Buddhism makes a difference is through its systematic discipline of meditation whereby all the powers and forces of the mind, of the psyche, are consolidated into a single powerful stream with which it proceeds to put behind your intellectual understanding, behind your incipient insight, so it can develop into real Insight, with a capital T.

Otherwise you might just have little glimpses of the truth but you're never really able to catch

hold of them, they just remain very intangible, evanescent. So they are never really assimilated into the structure, or fibre, to use a rather static sort of image, of ones being.

Andy Friends: Bhante, I didn't quite understand the answer you gave to Pete's question. Now can I put it in another way? Does insight invariably and automatically arise on the right conditions? Can you absolutely guarantee Insight arising if you set up the right conditions?

S: Ahh, well in a way one has answered the question already or the answer is contained in the question because one uses the word 'right'. What does one mean by 'right' conditions? Those conditions which will produce the anticipated effect.

Andy: But I thought you couldn't dictate to the unconditioned when it would arise. You could only...

S: But one is not speaking of the unconditioned arising, but of an understanding of or insight into the unconditioned arising. Of course, from another point of view, maybe from the point of view of the Mahayana, there is in fact no difference between your understanding of the conditioned and the conditioned itself, but nonetheless, within the framework of duality, yes, there is a difference between your understanding of the unconditioned and the unconditioned itself. So therefore what arises is an understanding in dependence on the anticipated conditions, not the unconditioned itself; which in a sense cannot arise.

Well it cannot arise because it transcends time; there is no question of it arising, there is no question of it passing out of existence. Time itself, according the Abhidharma, is a concept. But ones understanding of the unconditioned is a process in time, though of course in a sense even that can be disputed, because in understanding the unconditioned one could say, yes, you transcend time, in that sense it isn't even a process. This is one of the reasons why we speak of that flash of insight, something that is, so to speak, instantaneous. Not thereby meaning that it is very quick or that the flash doesn't last very long, but that doesn't, in a sense, take place within time at all.

That probably doesn't so much answer the question as make the whole thing more complicated.

Andy: Can you guarantee that flash with the right conditions?

S: I think what one has to beware of thinking in terms [4] of is mechanical causality. That is to say, that: all right, if you produce such and such causes, such and such conditions, you can guarantee the effect. Well, yes, in a sense you can. Yes, one might say one can; one has only to be certain that one is able to marshal the whole complex, the whole assemblage of causes and conditions required. So in that sense, yes, insight can be, so to speak, guaranteed. But still you mustn't think of it too mechanistically - press the right button and you'll get the result. Because you are dealing with yourself, you are dealing with your whole psycho physical organism, your whole stream of consciousness. And you may think sometimes that you have put together the entire assemblage of necessary causes and conditions but nonetheless insight doesn't arise. There are factors, perhaps, left out, factors of which you are not conscious.

So in theory, yes, when all the conditions are there, certainly insight arises but it is not so easy to be sure that all the conditions are there. In any case one shouldn't think too mechanistically.

Sometimes one knows that people go on retreats and they say, well here we are on retreat, beautiful quiet place, I've come here just in order to meditate and have got every opportunity, physically in quite good health. No disturbance, I am with friendly cheerful people who also want to meditate, I ought to be able to get on with my meditation really well, in fact I want to, but nonetheless I seem to be having quite bad meditations. You see, you can't understand why, there is some X factor at work of which you are not conscious. Or maybe there is some X factor absent that ought to be there but you can't identify.

Andy: So therefore again in theory you haven't set up the right conditions for Insight, it can't possibly arise.

S: If you haven't set up the right conditions it can't possibly arise. Though it may, as a matter of fact, be sometimes quite difficult to identify what are the exact right conditions.

Andy: You may arrive at them by accident.

S: You may arrive at them by accident, yes.

Andy: But it would be necessary for them to be there.

S: Yes. You might be just walking in the garden and a leaf might fall, you hadn't brought that about, you hadn't planned that that leaf should fall but just happening to see it you might develop a flash of insight because you were in the appropriate mood and that leaf had fallen at just the right instant. But supposing you tried to set it all up, and you asked a friend, just as you were passing under the tree to shake it (laughing) so that a leaf fell and you could then observe the leaf and develop insight. It might not work quite in the same way, yes? That's what I mean by saying you can't reduce the process to something mechanical which you very deliberately set up. Even though, at the same time, insight or understanding doesn't arise except on the right conditions.

One of the conditions would seem to be the absence of over self-consciousness or over-deliberation on your part. You can't set up spontaneity, you have to sort of just catch [5] yourself at the right moment without really having intended to do so. Maybe sometimes this is what happens with regard to the instance I mentioned. Someone going on retreat and apparently having all the right conditions but not being able to get on with their meditations. They are too conscious of the whole situation, they are too conscious of having set up all the right conditions and that over consciousness, that very attitude on their part, is a condition inhibiting the arising, in fact, of what they wanted to arise.

It's like on another level of life maybe you just want to get on with someone really well, someone you have met and someone you like, so you do all the right things. Maybe you invite them along for a meal and you are very keen to get to know them well. So you invite them along, you arrange for something very nice to be prepared and you've got a bottle of the right kind of wine and you've decorated the place nicely and along they come, you greet them pleasantly. But for some reason or other, despite the fact that you have set up all the right conditions the evening just doesn't go as you had expected. Perhaps you have been over-anxious or over-careful to set up all the "right" (inverted commas) conditions.

In other words a certain absence of care, a certain spontaneity is also essential to the situation.

It's just the same in the case of the spiritual life, you can't set up the 'right' conditions too deliberately, as it were. That seems to be self-defeating. On the other hand it won't just happen without your having set up any conditions at all.

Pete Shann: It seems to be the difference between will and effort.

S: Yes. Even effort isn't perhaps quite the right word in this connection. It's more like seeing that the right things are happening rather than doing the right things. But anyway we'll take that point as being sufficiently made.

Any further questions?

Subhuti: This is a three-part question. You speak in the Mitrata Omnibus, in the section on 'The Word of the Buddha' about the Buddha Mind, Reality experienced as the Buddha Mind. You equate the terms 'reality' and the 'Buddha Mind'. Can you go into that idea?

Can you also relate that to the One Mind and the Alaya Vijnana, the Absolute Vijnana?

And lastly can you say how this differs from some mystical conceptions of God?

S: Expressions like Buddha Mind are expressions I usually avoid; I use them only when I am forced to. So ask your question again please.

Subhuti: Well, can you just go into the conception of Buddha Mind?

S: This is not, of course, a conception you find in the Pali Canon, you don't even find it really in the Mahayana sutras, you tend to find it in Zen literature. I suppose it arises in this sort of way: the Buddha has gained Enlightenment; the Buddha has a mind; and in as much as the Buddha has gained Enlightenment his mind is an Enlightened mind. And that is the Buddha Mind. But one can go somewhat further than that. It is as though reality itself is thought [6] of in terms of mind, or that the Enlightened consciousness of the Buddha is thought of as synonymous with reality itself. In other words it's as though the human historical Buddha is rather lost to sight, you don't even think in terms of the Dharmakaya; Buddhahood or Buddha nature becomes a symbol for Enlightenment itself, for reality itself. You can see how that took place. So if one thinks of mind as constituting ultimate reality, of absolute mind as constituting ultimate reality, then one speaks in terms of or thinks in terms of the Buddha Mind.

The Buddha Mind is, as it were, the culmination of the Bodhicitta. The two are, of course, quite distinct. The Bodhicitta is the mind, so to speak, in movement towards Enlightenment and the Buddha Mind is the mind as having realized Enlightenment. And in as much as the content of Enlightenment is a cognition of reality itself, reality itself is thought of in terms of mind. Does that seem clear? What was the further question about the One mind?

Subhuti: Is this the same conception - the Yogacara conception of the One mind - is that the same as the Buddha Mind?

S: Yes, of course when one speaks of One mind one doesn't mean One mind as opposed to many minds. One means that the fundamental stuff of existence, of reality if you like, is to be

described in terms of mind rather than in terms of matter. It is not easy for us to think of mind without there being anybody whose mind it is, but that is really the Yogacara conception. One doesn't think of reality in abstract, even in personal terms, one thinks of reality as being, well fundamentally one can only say 'mind'. One really can't get more fundamental than that.

Mind, one could say is analogous to light. Usually we are familiar with light as coming from a source, light comes from the sun, so far as our universe is concerned. But supposing you think of light which doesn't come from any source, that is to say, light which is equally diffused in all directions without any limits at all. Well that is analogous to the One Mind, which is absolute mind. It is not anybody's mind, it is not a mind which is a subject as distinct from an object. It is not even the mind of the Buddha, in a sense, though the Buddha realizes that mind. It is mind without any locus, mind in which there is no distinction of subject and object. So, in a sense it transcends mind as we experience it. We experience mind as subject, but we experience mind as subject in the sense that mind, in the sense of the One Mind, is reflected on to what in us is subject, and that is experienced or perceived, one might say, as our mind.

Another analogy is metta, if you practice the metta bhavana the time comes when you have, or you experience what might be called floating metta. Do you know what I mean? You start off by experiencing metta towards yourself and then towards this person and that person, even lots of people. But in the end you dissociate your feeling of metta from any object of that metta. You are experiencing metta, you are feeling metta, but there is no one in particular towards whom you are experiencing metta, there is just metta. In the same way there is just mind, just as there is just light in the other analogy. Do you see what I mean?

So different spiritual traditions, including Buddhism, are trying to indicate ultimate reality in this sort of [7] way. It is just mind or it is just light, or even it is just metta raised to a very high power, etc., etc. In other words the subject/object duality is transcended here. There is metta broken loose from anybody who develops or experiences metta; there is mind set free or liberated from any actually perceiving or percipient subject; and there is light, to speak more symbolically, that doesn't come from any particular source but which is everywhere.

So in this way the Mahayana traditions, and Zen, try to indicate the absolute which is beyond the mind, beyond the dualistic consciousness. But clearly it isn't easy.

Was there any further question?

Subhuti: Is the absolute Alaya, is that the same as the one mind?

S: Yes, one might say, as far as those sort of identifications have any meaning on that level, yes it is the same.

Subhuti: But they are different words.

S: Different aspects. It corresponds to the absolute Bodhicitta also as distinct from the relative Bodhicitta, the Bodhicitta that passes through successive stages.

Subhuti: What is the Sanskrit term for the One Mind?

S: It's 'ekacitta'. Or 'cittamatra', not so much One Mind, that is a more Chinese Zen term, it is cittamatra which is nothing but mind, only mind.

Clive: This is probably picking at it again but we were talking about One Mind in terms of it being reducible, finally, to sunyata. Whereas you are talking now about absolute mind.

S: Well, yes. When one speaks of one mind, as I said, you mustn't think it is one as distinct from two or three. Not that there is one mind rather than a plurality of minds. So when one speaks of reducing the One Mind to sunyata one is merely reminding oneself of that fact. In other words, one is reminding oneself of the fact that the expression 'one' is not to be taken literally, it is not a numerical one, it is a one that precedes any numerical series. It is what the Neoplatonists call 'The One'.

Clive: The point that I was getting at was that it seemed like there was another level, beyond the One Mind, which is called sunyata. But you are talking about One Mind in terms of absolute, which I associate with Sunyata.

S: As I said, if one takes the expression One Mind too literally then one needs the concept of sunyata to dissolve that literalness. If you start taking Sunyata literally there is no hope for one at all (laughter) according to Nagarjuna..

Perhaps under certain circumstances the concept of Sunyata is an antidote for an over-literal understanding of the One Mind, but under certain circumstances also the concept of the One Mind is an antidote for an over-literal understanding of sunyata.

[8]

Subhuti: And lastly there were comparisons with mystical understanding of the word 'God'.

S: Well, it's really unfortunate that in the West mystics have been hampered by this word 'God'. Eckhart tried to jettison the word 'God' and introduce a distinction between God and Godhead but that led him into rather perilous paths, I think. I think in connection with the Absolute you are better off without the word God at all and mystics who insist on using it or who are compelled to use it only introduce confusion. They sometimes muddle their own experience, or at least their own understanding of their own experience.

Steve: What kind of confusions do you feel can arise out of that use of the word God?

S: Well the word God is associated with all sorts of theological teachings. You've got God as the creator of the whole of existence, God as the creator of the whole of the universe, therefore you have got distinction between creator and created. And that sort of distinction, according to the Mahayana, does not exist in ultimate reality. Some mystics even claim, even some Christian mystics claim to go beyond God, even some Islamic mystics. But they get into trouble with the Church authorities very quickly if they make claims of that sort.

Clive: I think that you have said that the experience of God in a lot of these situations is roughly analogous to the second dhyana.

S: When a certain say Christian mystic claims that he has had an experience of God, well one just has to examine the actual experience as best one can, and try to elicit from him what sort



of experience actually has taken place. Sometimes people hear voices, and they may believe that God is speaking to them. Well, it could be the voice of their own unconscious, it could be the voice of a deva, from a Buddhist point of view, it could be the voice of a Brahma, it could be the voice of a Bodhisattva. They have only got the term 'God' to cover all that. Christians don't even believe in angels anymore, apparently. Or they might be convinced it's the voice of Jesus, or the voice of the Devil.

Clive: From one point of view you wouldn't be able to hear a voice in anything beyond the second Dhyana, would you?

S: It depends what you mean by 'voice'. There is a subtle voice as well as a gross voice, an interior voice as well as an exterior voice.

Clive: It wouldn't be able to form itself into actual words beyond the second Dhyana?

S: It wouldn't be able to form itself into actual words but it could leave an impression that you could subsequently translate into actual words when you came down to the appropriate level.

That's why I sometimes say that there are some experiences which you might have - not to speak of not having the words to [9] fit those experiences, you don't even have the thoughts. So sometimes there is what I have described as an impression left as the result of an experience and after the experience itself ceases, only then are you able to translate the impression which it has left into concepts; and only after that the concepts into words. It is not just a simple matter of not having words for ones experiences.

John Rice: Is that as your state of consciousness changes?

S: Yes, that is as ones state of consciousness changes, taking consciousness as, taking the term consciousness as applicable to the whole range of what I've called experience. Were those all the questions you had?

Dave Rice: There's just one which I'm not quite clear on; the word 'Emptiness' is often translated from Sunyata. Could you say something about this 'Emptiness'? I mean a literal interpretation is often confusing.

S: 'Sunyata' literally does means 'empty'. Sunya is the Sanskrit term for zero as we would call it. But Conze has pointed out that something is empty because it is full. That is to say, if you've got a sphere, a hollow sphere, you look at it from one point of view, from the inside, so to speak, it's empty. But you look at it from the outside, it's full. So you mustn't take Sunyata or Emptiness as a one-sided sort of term.

Literally, of course, the Mahayana usually says that Sunyata means empty of all concepts, empty of all limiting ideas. So it is empty of emptiness, the concept of Emptiness also, just as it is empty of the concept of fullness. So operationally speaking, as Guenther might say, the term Sunya is just a sort of symbol, really, representing or indicating the total abolition of all concepts about reality and indicating reality itself or the necessity to establish contact with reality itself, as distinct from merely concepts about reality.

Suzuki - I think it's Suzuki - holds that Emptiness is really quite a good word for Sunyata,

because it's nice and baffling. It baffles the Western mind to be told that something is Emptiness, or that reality is Emptiness. Because you are accustomed to thinking in terms of a nice comfortable personal God figure. Instead you are told that according to Buddhism that the ultimate truth, the ultimate reality is Emptiness, with a big E. So you can't help thinking of a sort of metaphysical 'void', a sort of cosmic drain down which everything disappears, including you, and there's nothing left. Quite a horrifying thought, yes? But Suzuki seems to think that Emptiness is very concrete, very highly expressive, even poetical.

Malcolm Webb: When people make the mistake of identifying it with alienation, empty of feelings, that seems to be a possible...

S: Well it seems that they are just ignoring the capital E there.

Clive: Although you could say that it's empty of creation. you can think of it in terms of the creative can't you?

[10]

S: Well, the Mahayana teachers do make the point that it is only because of Emptiness that all things are possible. Emptiness, I think Suzuki says, is unrestricted potentiality. It is because things are nothing in particular that they can be anything at all. So Suzuki, I think, makes much of this, that Emptiness is the ground, in a way, of the cosmic process.

If things have a particular determinate nature, only particular determinate things can follow therefrom. But if things have no particular determinate nature, if they are empty, if Emptiness is the fundamental reality - then anything can happen - anything is possible. Any change is possible.

Subhuti: I remember you giving a Chinese translation of Sunyata once, which was a "dark something".

S: Oh, I think you are thinking of the 'Dark Wisdom', the Dark Wisdom was the Chinese expression for Prajna. Prajna of course being the faculty which apprehends sunyata. They call it the Dark Wisdom; or the teaching about sunyata was the Dark Wisdom.

Just as in the darkness nothing is seen, so in Sunyata no concept is visible. But again one mustn't take it too intellectualistically or metaphysically or ontologically. Sunyata is not an ontological principle but it just represents an appeal, a sort of desperate appeal on behalf of the Mahayana, or on the part of the Mahayana to people just to leave concepts aside and just return to the bedrock of actual experience.

So what section were you doing this morning, then?

Subhuti: 'The Word of the Buddha'.

S: What did that actually cover?

Subhuti: The four levels of communication and the three levels of transition.

S: Ahh, right. (long pause)

It seems that everything was reasonably clear.

Dave Rice: You just mentioned at the tail end of one your sentences - change. Could you..., is it possible that the only formulation or conception of Sunyata is change? The only..., like I know that Sunyata is empty, Emptiness of all conceptualization whatsoever, but is not change inherent in Sunyata?

S: One doesn't really approach it in that sort of way. Sunyata is, of course, linked to Nairatmya, Nairatmya meaning no self. That is to say no unchanging self, no permanent unchanging self. And the Buddha, of course, historically, as far as we can tell, was greatly concerned to safeguard, so to speak the fluidity of experience, the fluidity of being. Because, if there was in you some ultimate, irreducible, unchanging, unchangeable, some what, some element, well no real spiritual progress and development was possible. So the Buddha insisted on what became a Nairatmya or Anatman or Anata doctrine, from this purely practical point of view. So Sunyata represents an extension of that way of looking at things to the whole of existence, as it were. And the raising of it to a sort of "pseudo"-(inverted commas), that is to say provisional, metaphysical principle. That all things are Sunyata means that all things can change, can change into one another. Not immediately but certainly through intermediate [11] steps. So you get a very different picture of the universe. Sunyata guarantees that the universe can evolve, Sunyata guarantees that the individual can develop.

Any further questions?

(end side 1)

Steve Francis: There's something that interests me quite, because we were speaking about initiation towards the end in terms of the number of Tibetan Buddhists, or Tibetan Buddhist groups that there are in England, and the attraction that people find in the idea of going to a particular lama and receiving an initiation and the fact that the initiations do seem to be given out. How do you personally feel about that going on? Do you think that there is any value in it at all?

S: Well, it does seem to me to represent a debasement, not to say an exploitation. Not that it is peculiar to the West because I have seen Tibetans themselves in places like Kalimpong indulging in the same sort of thing. But one might ask, well why do people want to be initiated, why are they so keen on receiving these initiations? I can remember, when I was in Kalimpong in my own case, I was certainly keen on receiving certain initiations, but that was because I wanted to do the relevant practices. But the impression one gets is that most people who go along to Tibetan lamas aren't so much interested in doing the relevant practice - and the initiation is essentially an initiation into a practice -they just want to receive the initiation. Now why do they want to receive the initiation?

Perhaps some of you are, maybe, in a better position to answer that question than me. Why do people flock to Tibetan lamas, do you think, for the sake of initiations? Perhaps they don't even know what the initiations are all about. Or what the giving of an initiation implies or involves, and they still want the initiation. So clearly it represents something, it means something. Even if they aren't able to express it perhaps very well. So what is that, what is one looking for, what is one hoping to receive from an initiation? What takes place so far as you are concerned, or what do you hope will take place?

Pete Shann: Is it something to do with a sort of saviour? Being saved, getting something that is going to save you.

S: Could be; any other suggestions?

Dave Rice: I got the impression that quite a few people expected that something magical was going to happen which would give them an insight into the nature of Sunyata or whatever, so that they wouldn't have to do it themselves. Like being touched by the magic wand of transcendentalism.

Malcolm Webb: I think it's almost like a buzz for some people. Just trying to get the energy out of that other person, just sucking energy. That's the impression that I first got, that people went along to these great lamas who are giving you this buzz, you could go along and receive.

S: It is of course significant, and some people do know this, that in Tibetan "Wong Kur" which translates, though it doesn't really translate, the Sanskrit "Abhisheka" means literally transmission of power. Do you see what I mean? And the idea [12] of having power transmitted to you seems to appeal to quite a lot of people. So they see the lama as a sort of power house, as a powerful figure, who can transmit power to them in an almost literal sense.

I remember I did come across this even when I was in Kalimpong in this sort of way when a Chinese Buddhist came up to Kalimpong in order to receive an initiation from a teacher of mine. And he, I got to know him slightly through some friends, he seemed to have this idea very very much. That he was receiving power and that this power could help him not only in his life but especially in his business. He was a big business man from Hong Kong. And he said, after receiving the initiation, he was very keen on having a chart of the lineage of the initiation because he wanted to have it written properly in Chinese characters and framed and hung above his desk in his office so that people would see this and he would be sitting behind his desk with this chart behind him, that he was the latest holder of this power. This was the way that he saw it.

Again, when I was in Malaysia, I remember. On my way to, I think Ipoh where I was going to give a talk, I was discussing this very matter with some of the Chinese Buddhist friends who took me there, because they happened to mention just talking about my own visit - that there had been visits from quite a number of Tibetan lamas, including the Karmapa I think, to Ipoh itself, certainly to Malaysia. And many Chinese Buddhists, especially wealthy Chinese Buddhists had flocked to the lama, especially to the Karmapa, and I asked what was the reason for this, were they really interested in the Vajrayana? So these young Chinese Buddhists who were of a more serious type, said no that they were after power. They saw the lamas as sources of power. Power which would help them in their personal lives, their worldly lives and especially in their business.

In other words they saw the initiation as a very powerful, mundane blessing and of course many Tibetan Buddhists do see initiations in the sense of Wong Kurs, abhishekas in this sort of way. So they just go along and get as many as possible, they get whatever initiation is going, when they will have no intention, in most cases, of ever practising the relevant disciplines. They may not even know exactly what initiations they are getting. Some lamas are relatively lax, I think some lamas think that even if they are not going to practise it or take it seriously as an initiation, at least they take it as a blessing, they have got a sort of

devotional attitude. But I think from that one can very easily slip into just handing out initiations almost as a source of popularity and even income. Because there are supposed to be substantial offerings made to the lama at the end of the initiation and they usually take the form of cash payments.

Vessantara: Although these people who have come for such initiations may have completely missed the basic point of the initiation, is it not quite likely that as a spin off they actually, in a sense, do have their energies stirred up? In the same way that if I meet somebody who is very energetic when I go away from them I actually have more of my energy stirred up. So presumably if they go in being very receptive at least on that level, to somebody who is quite spiritually developed, this will be something, it will be stirred up in them.

[13]

S: Well you see, I do know that among the Tibetans some lamas have the reputation of being able to give very powerful initiations, that is to say something tangible happens. It appears that one has received some energy. So yes, there is no doubt that even if people were to go along even in a very casual way, if they were moderately receptive they might experience a sort of charge of energy. But I think that will just be of the nature of a temporary high if they didn't take the initiation seriously as an initiation and actually start practising the relative disciplines, then the high would very quickly fade away, probably in a matter of an hour or two, even a matter of minutes.

Dave Rice: I think that some of the misconceptions may have arisen through the books on popular Buddhism that have given people the impression that lamas have a lot of power and secondly they read the interpretation of a Wong as being a transmission of power. So that putting two and two together they come up with a very simplistic answer.

S: Yes, and it is their understanding of power. It is as though the lama literally has power, he is the powerful one and they are weak, they don't have power and he transmits his power to them. In that way it does become a sort of saving approach, a process of salvation, he saves you from your weakness. You feel very weak and inadequate, so many people do, and along comes a lama and he gives you a great charge of power, it has come from outside you. You are looking to it as coming from outside, rather than thinking of it in terms of something you have to develop from within.

Of course it must be said that some lamas would justify the whole process, not to say the whole business, by saying that what is important is that people should establish some kind of contact with the Dharma, and in a sense what does it matter. They don't understand what it is all about, that means they don't know what initiation really means but they do come along, they do establish contact with the lama, they do establish contact with the Dharma. So there may be something in that but though there may well be something in that, it is a rather dangerous procedure none the less, especially in the West. Because after all, what is the initiation, what is the Tantra, it is supposed to be the very highest form of Buddhism, according to the Tibetans themselves. You are supposed to enter upon the practice of the Tantra, or even have any knowledge of it, even to see the representations of the divinities of the Tantra only after going through the Hinayana, going through the Mahayana and reaching quite a high stage of Bodhisattva development.

So are you not really sort of throwing pearls before swine? I remember in this connection, one

of my own teachers Dhardo Rimpoche, he had a visit once from another friend of mine, someone whom I knew quite well in Kalimpong, that is Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark. And he took along with him a scholar, a Western scholar, a Tibetologist, who wanted to question Dhardo Rimpoche about the Tantras. So he kept asking this question, asking that question but he didn't get much out of Dhardo Rimpoche. So Dhardo Rimpoche actually understood a little English, though they didn't know that he did. Prince Peter was translating the scholars questions into Tibetan, Prince Peter knew Tibetan quite well, colloquial Tibetan. So Dhardo Rimpoche heard, or over heard Prince Peter say to the scholar, 'You know I think he doesn't actually know much [14] about the Tantra, really'. So Dhardo Rimpoche told me this story afterwards and laughed a lot and then gave me the Tibetan equivalent, I forget what it was now, of 'of course in the Tantra we don't cast pearls before swine'.

But, I'm afraid lots of Tibetan lamas are going around really broadcasting the pearls, handfuls of pearls before swine. But what one suspects is that they are all imitation pearls, they are not real pearls. If they were they would not be treating them in that sort of way, they would be much more reticent. Even though, yes, they wanted as many people as possible to establish a connection with the Dharma, I think they would do it in different ways, I think they would really lead them much more step by step. And I really do think that there are some Tibetan lamas who are just exploiting people in this sort of way. Yes, they have learned how to give initiations technically, learned how to perform certain rituals but they are just using it as a source of ... , profit almost, in some cases.

But even those who are not doing that, I think are under some serious misunderstanding, and there are only a few, quite genuine Tibetan lamas who do go around in the West who know what they are doing and who operate in a quite different sort of way. Fortunately such lamas there are, but they are not necessarily the best known by any means, and for obvious reasons. They just don't operate in that sort of way.

Steve Francis: Do you feel that there is any way in which the FWBO as an organization, or as a Buddhist movement, could improve the quality of the Buddhism practised by other Tibetan groups?

S: Well you say 'other Tibetan groups' but we're not a Tibetan group

Steve: I mean other Buddhist groups, you know, which are...

S: I think only very indirectly and very slowly. I'll just give an example of this, well I can give you several examples though the first of them isn't directly related to the FWBO it's related to me and the process started before the FWBO came into existence; that is to say the actual practice of meditation.

When I came back to England in 1964, I found a very strange situation with regard to meditation. There were really only two Buddhist groups, English Buddhist groups, that was, one the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara and two the Buddhist Society. The Hampstead Buddhist Vihara had been the scene of practice of a very strange form of Vipassana which I proceeded to discourage. At the Buddhist society they had been really scared by this rather odd sort of Vipassana; to a certain extent they practically banned meditation altogether. Christmas Humphreys used to tell me in all seriousness; don't give these people more than five minutes meditation at a time; they can't stand it. This was told me by him in all seriousness. But

anyway, after a while I did manage to persuade him to allow me to lead meditation classes at the society. And I had a twice-weekly meditation class at the Buddhist Society doing simply Mindfulness of breathing and Metta bhavana. Mr Humphreys was always very anxious that I might push people too hard, especially when I got them up to twenty minutes at a time. But nothing actually [15] went wrong so he got a bit reassured and he just left me to it so in the end we were doing an hour's meditation at a time, and nothing happened. No one went crazy or started shooting their head off or anything like that though these sort of things had happened before with other monks who had been teaching meditation. So therefore that established a sort of precedent, or sort of tradition even of meditation practice at the Buddhist society which they continued thereafter. Even though after I came back the second time they didn't want to have very much to do with me, but they still carried on that tradition of meditation. And two or three of the people who had learned it from me actually continued teaching under the auspices of the Society. So that was just one little example.

Another: that as a result of criticism emanating from myself and subsequently from Subhuti, the Buddhist Society became aware, or vaguely started becoming aware, that it wasn't strictly speaking a Buddhist society. Not a society of Buddhists. And they therefore made some little changes in their constitution. Formerly you could be a member of the Buddhist society, and be elected on to its council, which of course guided the society, without even being a Buddhist. Without even having practised Buddhism, and that led to disastrous results. But quite recently they have introduced new rules whereby you cannot be elected to their council unless you have been attending classes at the society for, I think it's at least a year. So that seems a quite healthy development, though a very limited one. And that is as a result of the example set by the FWBO and even criticism voiced by people within the FWBO.

These are quite small examples of influence but I think we are having a little influence of that sort and I think people have become a bit more aware of the importance of Right Livelihood through us, and the possibility of Right Livelihood, Right Livelihood projects, especially. So, yes, we have had some... At least they are a bit more careful about doing or not doing certain things as a result of the FWBO being around. They are a bit afraid that we will jump on them, and I do jump on them quite hard sometimes. Sometimes, these things aren't generally known in the FWBO because it is just a matter of a letter sent by me or Subhuti to someone or other, and it does produce certain results, and that usually of a somewhat positive nature. Correcting either misunderstandings or even certain misconduct, as we might say, I don't mean misconduct in the moral sense but more in the organizational-cum-administrative sense.

Clive: The point is they can do a lot of harm, can't they.

S: Yes, I think probably at present our influence tends to reduce the amount of harm that some of these groups are doing. Some - we don't seem to have much influence where the Tibetan groups are concerned. I think they regard us, or some of their members regard us as rather lacking because we don't have all these colourful initiations and so on and so forth.

Dave Rice: I've questioned one or two of the followers, close followers of the Lama Zopa Rinpoche about this question of their bringing initiations into the West and publicly. The answer that I got back was that it was something that came from much higher up, in fact the Dalai Lama had given his O.K. on the whole business and in fact it seemed to be very important for this particular lineage, the Gelugpas, that these [16] initiations and the message of the Buddha was gotten into the West as quickly as possible, I suppose to preserve the

Tibetan traditions.

S: Well this is quite true, but they are preserved only by people actually practising them. People don't practice them merely because you subject them to a ritual which they don't understand and then at the end you tell them that they have been initiated. I do know, from my own personal sources of information that some years ago the Dalai Lama was really very concerned that so many initiations were being, as it were, handed out. He did raise the matter with some Tibetan lamas but in the end he concluded that there was just nothing he could do about it, it was going to happen and no one was going to listen to him and he wasn't able to stop it.

Subhuti: I had heard, Bhante, actually that Lama Zopa had the view that he had to scatter as many initiations as possible, a bit like seeds, and that many of them would fall on fallow ground but some of them would sprout, which seems to be a rather mechanistic view of initiation.

S: Right, but then again if they are to sprout they can only sprout on ground which has been prepared. So how is the ground prepared? Well, by the practice of the Hinayana and by the practice of the Mahayana, according to Tibetan tradition itself. So if you really want to scatter the seed of the Vajrayana you must first scatter the seed of the Hinayana and then you must scatter the seed of the Mahayana.

Subhuti: There seems to be this rather literalistic, magical conception of initiation, as if it's an actual thing.

Dave Rice: I think ... to be a distinction between the way in which Lama Zopa and Lama Yeshe are doing it in comparison with the Kagyupas. Some of the Kagyupa lamas are just handing these things out like a dime a dozen. But with Lama Zopa and Lama Yeshe there tends to be a retreat involved, the first eight days of which is quite intensive Lamrim practice, which leads up to an understanding and compassion and then perhaps an initiation ...

S: But even that, according to Tibetan tradition is terrible. It is a travesty. Because they speak of a minimum of, I think it's eight years devoted to the Hinayana and twelve years devoted to the Mahayana and then Tantric initiation. I mean, yes, all right they show willing, it's better than nothing but if you've got completely new people, people who really don't know anything about Buddhism, then even at the end of a twelve day intensive - and what does one mean by intensive? - you give them Tantric initiation. It's as though they really misunderstood their own tradition, they've taken it much too literally.

Vessantara: Just to play Devils advocate again, could you not...

S: Well do, because people are going to hear lots of Devils advocates, probably, real ones!

Vessantara: Could you not try to justify it on the grounds that, say, the purpose of initiation apart from passing on [17] certain practices and knowledges, is, if you like, to stimulate that sort of magical quality that we've been talking about. Now if we use the terms which we were using earlier on about the latent imagination, could you not hand out these initiations in the hope that you would in some way stimulate that latent imagination. You may have quite a high failure rate but that in certain people you will succeed in stimulating that latent



imagination.

S: You certainly could, but all right, supposing you were engaged in this activity you would be using a certain amount of energy, taking up a certain amount of time. You have to ask yourself whether that is the best use of your time and your energy. Whether just handing out Tantric initiations, performing rituals of Tantric initiation in the hope of someone's imagination being stimulated. Well you see it's much more than that, it is even more than stimulating the Bodhicitta, it is even more than that, because you are in the midst of the Vajrayana. And even you are in the midst, not only of the Vajrayana, but of the Anuttara Yoga Tantra in many cases. That is the sort of initiations they often give out.

So are you in fact really stimulating anything? You might create a little emotional excitement, a bit of a flutter in people's minds but you are supposedly operating on a very high level indeed. It's really as though you are using, as it were, the best of your treasures to perform a very mundane operation indeed.

Vessantara: It almost suggests a sort of lack of faith in the more basic practice, doesn't it?

S: Yes. Well it even suggests that your Vajrayana is a pseudo Vajrayana. It suggests that within the Vajrayanic context you have fallen victim to 'silbbata paramasa' - dependence on rules and, you could say here, ceremonies.

Dave Rice: What do you think then about the karmic result of these initiations?

S: Well according to Vajrayana tradition, if a lama who is not qualified gives pseudo-initiations to pupils who are not qualified, he goes to hell. I have been told there is a special hell, been told by Tibetan lamas that there is a special hell for lamas who give pseudo-Tantric initiations of this sort. It is supposed to be as bad as the practice is itself good.

If a Theravadin, as it were, misbehaves or teaches wrongly, well that's not all that bad. If a pseudo-Bodhisattva misinterprets the Mahayana, say the doctrine of Sunyata, that's much more serious. But if a lama wrongly uses or exploits the Tantric teachings that is considered more terrible still. So from the point of view of their own tradition they are heaping up very very terrible karma indeed, about the worst they possibly could heap up.

Dave Rice: Suppose you are talking about a lama who is a little more realized than that, who gives initiation to the public ... What about the karmic results stimulated in peoples minds who are there, taking the initiations? Do you not feel that in some ways it is a bit like a carrot on a string and that it is drawing quite a lot of attention in the [18] West to people who perhaps are being drawn under the pretext of something that they don't fully understand, but that in the long run it gets them interested in Buddhism and that following initiation they might start from the beginning?

S: I haven't yet heard of any actual case where this has occurred. I mean it might, in theory, but it just doesn't seem to be happening. People want another carrot, they want another initiation, so there is another lama comes along and he's got another initiation, even higher than the ones they had before. Again this you find with Tibetans themselves. There are hundreds of initiations, even thousands, there is an inexhaustible supply.

Not only that, some of the people who receive, allegedly, these initiation they develop an attitude of contempt towards ordinary Buddhists who have not received these. They look down on you if you just practice 'ordinary' meditation and not Tantric meditation, or if you haven't had an initiation. So they develop a sort of aversion for the very basic principles that they should be practising even to make a foundation for any real practice of the Vajrayana. So they become alienated from the rest of the tradition, they have a purely intellectual understanding of the Vajrayana, if even that. They are rendered incapable of practising the Hinayana and the Mahayana because they look down upon it so much.

Dave Rice: So you really, personally feel then that any good that might be done through these initiations is completely cancelled out by the negative elements.

S: I'm not denying that some good may be done, as it were by accident, that a seed may fall in the heart of some person who is genuinely receptive. That can never be ruled out, but to the best of my knowledge these instances are very few and far between.

Alan Angel: It does seem that nowadays, from my experience anyway, the initiations aren't dished out so wildly, the Tibetan lamas have seemingly got a small group of regular practitioners around them

S: Well, one has met some of these people, but then what are they practising? They aren't really practising the Vajrayana; they can't, because they haven't laid the foundations.

Dave Luce: At the Manjusri Institute they seem to do a lot of study, just looking at their programmes, they seem to run a lot of courses, not just initiations.

S: Well they have to fill in with a course on Jungian psychology and things like that. They would be much better filling in with things like Mindfulness of breathing and maybe some work!

Dave Rice: Well, I draw that distinction too. I appreciate what Dave is saying, because in Auckland these Kagyupa lamas came out and I'd never heard their name before but everybody was jumping up and down about them. They gave initiations out at a Buddhist community in the countryside. They were just given private ordinations and all these different initiation practices, in fact there were sixty people were going the Going for Refuge and were initiated and I thought it was [19] just absolutely incredible, I couldn't believe it. Whereas Lama Zopa and Lama Yeshe don't do that, as far as I know, there is always a course involved, a build up through the Lamrim process to an initiation which doesn't involve private initiation.

S: Well Tantric initiations in Tibet nowadays are not necessarily private, they are very often given to a number of people at the same time. Very often there is one leading person who has asked for it and others are allowed to attend at the same time and do receive. But as I said, even if there is a twelve day course preceding Tantric initiations, that is not really enough.

Subhuti: Bhante, to play Devils advocate again, could we not be accused of being somewhat irregular?

S: Oh, yes indeed, we are. But it is a question of degree of irregularity. I think their degree of irregularity is so gross as to be really quite inexcusable. But our degree of irregularity is the

minimum that permits us to function at all. For instance if you are very very strict, following the path of regular steps, yes you must perfect your morality before you take up meditation, we don't insist on that: so to that extent we are irregular. But it does seem that a degree of irregularity, at least to that modest extent, is inseparable from spreading the Dharma at all in the West.

Subhuti: But I was thinking that some of the sadhanas that we do, do belong to the Tantra?

S: Ahh, this raises the question of what is Vajrayana and what is Mahayana. No, one cannot say that a sadhana is Tantric or Mahayanistic in itself, it depends on the way in which you receive it. Usually it is said that if you receive the sadhana subsequent upon what is called Tantric initiation, then it is a Tantric practice, otherwise not. Supposing you just read it in a sutra and then you start doing it by yourself, then it is a Mahayana practice. If you receive it from a Guru, after a Tantric initiation, then it is a Vajrayana practice. But again, what is a Tantric initiation? You could get that charge of energy, so to speak, that inspiration from somebody without the formality, so to speak of a formal Tantric ritual initiation.

In fact we find that this is very often what happens with Vajrayana in India. There was not the extensive ritualistic apparatus, certainly not with the Mahasiddhas and the Sahajas that we do find today in Tibet.

So one has to distinguish realities from appearance. Something is not Tantric because its labelled Tantric. So in that case there is very little Vajrayana in the West, hardly any Vajrayana has been spread to the West, possibly none at all, but there is a bit of appearance of it.

Malcolm Webb: So if one saw those people as... poor things that are being palmed off with not really the real thing (?) ...

S: There is just the appearance of the Vajrayana, for the most part, and just the name of the Vajrayana, but the Vajrayana is by its very nature esoteric. Not by esoteric meaning something that can be kept private but something [20] that is of the nature of an experience and cannot just be handed over. Actually, I'd say that in the true sense much more Vajrayana is in the FWBO, in the true sense. But that is not what a lot of people are interested in, they want the trappings.

Mike Scherk: You mentioned this sort of eight years of Hinayana, twelve years of Mahayana teaching. I was just thinking ...

S: Some say the other way around, but it adds up to twenty years of practice. Some say four and eight, which adds up to twelve years of practice, but anyway it is quite a good long spell.

I remember one of my own friends who wouldn't allow himself to be called a Guru, but anyway he did really function like that, Mr Chen, he said, and I've repeated this more than once, he said "without an actual realization of Sunyata the visualizations and rituals of the Vajrayana are mere vulgar magic".

All right, so the people who, supposedly practice Vajrayana, even give Vajrayana initiations, have they really Gone For Refuge? That's the first thing you must ask, have they really Gone

for Refuge? Have they really, extensively practised the Four Brahma Viharas? Have they, and here one is only following the Vajrayana preliminaries, have they actually developed the Bodhicitta? Are they really Bodhisattvas? And finally have they had a profound experience of Sunyata itself? Because if they haven't they are not in a position even to think about the Vajrayana.

So not to speak of where does that leave the disciples, where does it leave the Gurus? Especially when one knows some of them personally, one knows that they have not fulfilled these conditions, from one's very contact with them, from one's very experience of them.

So, sometimes it's a source of considerable sadness to one, that by name so many things have been publicized in the West, that Buddhism appears to have spread more in the West, but if one looks a little more deeply that isn't really quite what is happening or quite what has happened, yes and is happening.

Anyway perhaps we had better leave it there.

Preordination Course 1981 Tuscany

Question and Answers

Day 9 Tape 1

S: All right then, has Subhuti's Group been able to produce any questions this morning?

Subhuti: We haven't got many but people have got one.

S: Well, perhaps it's a big one.

(laughter)

Subhuti: It's a small one.

(laughter)

S: Well let's wait and see.

Steve: When a Buddha figure is represented with his consort, I've always understood the fact that the female figure was represented as being smaller than the Buddha figure as indicating that the female aspect of Enlightenment was less important than the male aspect. Now in view of the fact that the male figure represents Compassion and the female figure represents Wisdom, does this mean, given that my first assumption is correct, does this mean that Wisdom is slightly less important than Compassion? You know, that's the basis of my question.

S: No, I'd say that's an entire assumption on your part. It's [2] true that when the male and female figures are represented that the female figure is shown as much smaller than that of the male figure, especially in thangka paintings, but if you reflect a little you'll see that that is due to entirely iconographical, not to say pictorial, reasons. Because if you have the female

figure equally big as the male figure, the female figure will then completely obscure the male figure. Do you see what I mean? Whereas you need to see both, so therefore the painter or rather the icon-maker, seems to have reduced the scale of the female figure so that the male figure is visible, so to speak, all round the female figure. You can therefore see both of them clearly and also the female figure is usually represented as a lighter shade of the colour that the male figure is depicted in. One would say that this interpretation is correct when one looks at three dimensional representations of yab-yum figures, where there's no question of one possibly obscuring the other. There, usually the two figures are of the same size, because you can view them usually from the side as well as from the front or from the back, see what I mean? So therefore it would seem that the smallness of the female figure is an iconographical convention for purely practical reasons and this is indeed what one would expect because Wisdom and Compassion are definitely considered co-ordinate and therefore equally important. The one is not more important than the other. So there could be no reason on that basis for representing one figure as bigger than the other.

Vessantara: I must say I led our group astray a bit on that.

S: Pardon?

[3]

Vessantara: I led our group astray a bit on that, on what you've just said, because I've heard somewhere, from some source or another, I can't remember which, purporting to emanate from you, that the female figure was slightly smaller, and that, not that on the level of Enlightenment that Compassion was more important than Wisdom which was obviously incorrect, but perhaps suggesting that on a lower level, in terms of your development, the feminine had to be assimilated into the masculine, if you see what I mean?

S: That is certainly true, that is certainly true, because you could certainly view the smaller figure in that way but that would only be a sort of accommodation to the psychological level of understanding. On the so to speak metaphysical level even if the female figure was smaller than the male figure you couldn't possibly regard that, or interpret that, as meaning that Wisdom was less important than compassion. But if you, if you forget, for the time being, that the one figure represents Wisdom and the other Compassion, if you regard them merely as male and female figures, representing Masculine and Feminine principals and you bring the whole level down to, the whole thing down to the human, psychological level, then what you said would well be correct, but then you had deviated from the metaphysical level, you are definitely considering the symbolism, the psychological level, as illustration rather symbol. In a way it would be justifiable, in a way it would not be - you'd have to know what you were doing. That you had come down in level, that you were no longer on the Absolute Buddha level, you were on the level of ordinary human, psychological and even spiritual experience, on [4] which level the feminine, the female had to be integrated with the masculine, the male, rather than vice-versa.

Subhuti: So it more implies the Angel being slightly more masculine than feminine.

S: Indeed, yes yes.

(Pause)

Again, it's quite important to be clear as to what level one is concerned with, hm?

(Pause)

So, it wasn't such a small question after all. (Pause.)

Is that the only question that emerged from Subhuti's group?

Voice: It was really, yes.

S: So you covered the rest of the ground pretty quietly?

Voices: Yes, Yes.

S: ... and pretty conclusively, hm?

Subhuti: Just looking at the symbols really.

S: Ah, good. Turning over the pages of a picture book mentally if not literally. Well what about Vessantara's group?

Vessantara: Much the same in ours, really. There was a purely factual question which I couldn't remember which people could look [5] up. It's just what the word Tantra literally means, what it's derived from.

S: Ah, does anyone have any ideas about this?

Voice: It's to do with weaving?

S: Yes, it's an, not dissimilar from the etymology of Sutra. Sutra means thread. In the Upanishads for instance, there's the concept of the Sutratman, the threadself. We won't go into that now, but ah, Sutra, as the term for a discourse of the Buddha seems to indicate a common thread running through a number of different topics, stringing them together, into, so to speak, a fairly lengthy discourse. In Sanskrit Sutra became that type of literary document, that type of scripture. Tantra does mean something woven, you may remember there is a Mahasiddha called Tanti. Tanti means the Weaver. So a Tantra is something woven, something compiled, something put together. It wasn't originally associated as a literary term with the Teaching of the Vajrayana. In Sanskrit literature there are a number of works of different kinds including works on mathematics which are called Tantras. Here it simply means a compilation, something put together, something woven. Afterwards, the meaning of the term in the Vajrayana became much more specialized. As for instance, in the West, Bible simply originally meant a book, but now of course the usage has become specialized and in English, bible means the Bible, a particular collection of documents, a particular book with a capital 'B'.

(Pause.)

Vessantara: Brian has a question.

[6]

Brian: That was in connection with the wrathful forms of the Buddha. We started discussing the Bardo Thodol and what actually happens during the Bardo and from the progression of the peaceful deities you go on to the wrathful deities, and it seemed to me that the experience of seeing the wrathful deities would be even more terrifying than the peaceful deities and would tend to make you, you know, run away from them.

S: Well the fact that the wrathful deities are seen as wrathful suggests that; because the sequence of the days and the visions of the Bardo is suggestive of a progressive alienation from reality. So even though that alienation is progressive you could say that it takes place by way of certain great phases. Initially of course there is the vision, if one calls it that, the experience of the light of Absolute Reality itself, which one is of course normally unable to assimilate. Then of course, down the various visions of the peaceful deities and after them the wrathful deities. So what is the point of that distinction? Why does one see, leaving aside the light of Absolute Reality, why does one see first of all peaceful deities and then after that wrathful deities or rather why do the peaceful Buddhas appear subsequently as Wrathful Deities? The reason is that one's resistance, one's ego-resistance or ego-rejection of Ultimate Reality is becoming consolidated. Do you see what I mean? - and the more you are alienated from Reality, the more resistance you put up to Reality, the more threatening is the aspect that Reality for you assumes. Therefore the very peaceful Buddhas themselves you start seeing as wrathful. Reality appears as threatening. Enlightenment appears as threatening. The Spiritual Life [7] appears as threatening. So therefore, corresponding to the resistance to Reality which your ego, so to speak, is putting up, the Buddhas assume these wrathful forms. So this indicates that you've become a bit more alienated from Reality. You've moved farther away, you know, from the light of Absolute Reality. You're on your way down, a bit more, a bit farther. So we can find analogies to this sort of thing, you know, in our own experience on a comparatively, you know, ordinary level. I mean, people do sometimes feel, people who've come into contact with the FWBO, people who do come into contact with the Order, with the Order Members, they do start sometimes feeling the whole thing as a bit threatening. So what is it that's being threatened? What is it that feels threatened? It is their ego, to use just a sort of shorthand expression, in the sense of the fundamental, the very deep and basic resistance that their whole being puts up to the idea of change and development. If the Friends, if the Order, if individual Order Members appear to be insisting that you must change they will appear as threatening. At best, of course, it's challenging, but at worst it's threatening and you may even start feeling that they're inimical to you, hostile to you, that they're even enemies and you may start developing very negative and hostile feelings towards them. I think some people do go through this, at least momentarily.

(Pause)

So this represents a sort of transition from peaceful Buddhas to wrathful Buddhas. First of all you see the Order and the individual Order Members as peaceful - 'Oh they're so nice, they're so sweet, they're so lovely.' - but when you get to know them more closely, they start making actual demands of a positive [8] nature - that you should change - then it's a different story. They don't seem so nice or so gentle or so kindly. You start feeling that they're forcing you to do what you don't want to do. They're interfering with your life, they're making demands. You start feeling a bit negative towards them. Of course, one might say there is a limitation to the, you know, comparison because when you see the Order Members originally as peaceful, you're not really seeing them as peaceful, you're merely seeing them as nice which is another

matter but after a while, yes, you do start genuinely seeing them as, not exactly wrathful, but as a bit threatening and you sort of move away, perhaps, accordingly. So therefore on the level of our quite ordinary experience as we are, you know, concerned with or are involved with the friends and Order Members, Kalyana Mitras, we can see the same sort of thing happening as happens on a much grander and more terrifying scale in the Bardo after death, hm.

(Pause)

If you're even afraid of your Kalyana Mitra how much more afraid are you going to be of those Buddhas and Bodhisattvas? (Laughter)

If you put up resistance even to the modest suggestions of your Kalyana Mitra how much greater resistance are you going to put up to the very uncompromising demands of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas? (Pause)

Malcolm Webb: Would some people respond in a better way to these forms, to Webb those wrathful forms, would they be more accessible to some people as a form?

S: There is no doubt that, some people are definitely attracted by wrathful forms, so what is happening here? Because if the forms [9] are wrathful, because of the resistance put up to the ideal of Buddhahood by the ego, why should one be attracted to them?

The fact that you see them as wrathful suggests that you want to withdraw from them, to flee from them even, but you can, apparently be attracted by the wrathful form. That seems contradictory. So what is happening here? It seems that when you are attracted by wrathful forms you are in fact projecting on to those forms your own quite mundane anger and even hatred. They provide you, as it were, with an outlet for those things. At least, with an experience of those emotions, almost as a justification for them. So this is a rather different sort of experience from what you get in the Bardo State when the, the Buddhas assume that wrathful form in response to your, or in accordance with your, resistance to them.

Mike Scherk: It does seem to link up with Blake's Diabols (? ?) and births ( ? ? ? ) again it's in the sense that if you refuse to see something as a god you see it as a devil.

(Pause)

S: It depends, I wouldn't like to generalize about that because there are no doubt some things which aren't gods, and have to be seen as not gods, - Asuras and Maras. But there is a sort of correspondence between the wrath which the Buddhas appear to manifest, simply as a result of the resistance that your ego puts up to them and the purely mundane wrath we, you so to speak, project on to those wrathful Buddha figures. But in a way, that doesn't matter, because at least you have formed a connection with them because you've formed a connection with them, because you've been attracted by those wrathful figures. Well anyway, [10] you know they are wrathful Buddha figures, you know that, and you are concerned with Buddha figures even though the aspect of wrath in its quite superficial psychological sense may be uppermost. So in the long run at least, no harm is done especially if the whole operation, the whole process of attraction takes place within a traditional context.



(Pause .)

John [Dave?] Rice: You're saying that projection, as it were of anger and aggression - it doesn't matter?

S: Well, it doesn't matter in the sense that it provides you with a means of access to that particular Buddha figure as in fact, it actually is. It's like for instance, you might become, again to put the thing on a very ordinary sort of basis, ( ? ? ? ) you might become friends with an Order Member as, not even a friend with a capital 'F' perhaps, you just make friends with him on the basis of some quite ordinary common interest but even though you've made contact in that way, well, you've made contact with an Order Member and sooner or later the commitment etc. which that particular persons being an Order Member represents will begin to manifest it, manifest itself, in his relationship with you and you will come into contact with him as such, if you are at all open. In the same way it doesn't matter whether it is, in fact, psychological wrath which is your means of access to that particular Buddha-figure, it doesn't matter if you see his wrath with a capital 'W' - wrath with a small w'. There is a bridge provided.

(Pause.)

[11]

Malcolm: It's not an excuse to become wrathful oneself. (laughter)

S: Well only wrathful with a capital 'W'. (laughter)

Clive Pomfret: If one has repressed anger or um, can you talk in that way? Repressed anger or repressed energy which is angry - then, in a sense, misusing the Wrathful deity would dissolve, would bring, draw out that anger and then at a later time maybe you could relate to the Buddha figure it represents in a more general way.

S: Right, yeah!

Clive: So it might be necessary if, you know, to use, misuse for a while.

S: I don't see that we need to bring in the concept of necessary. For some people that might happen to be a means of access, you know, for others not. There's no need to think of it as either necessary or not necessary. Otherwise if you say it's necessary, well you suggest it's sort of justified or even it's a thing one ought to do. You make it almost mandatory. I think one must be wary of giving that sort of impression to people. Beware of giving any suggestion that anger, greed etc., are in any way actually justified or even good things in themselves.

Alan Angel: So, one would have to be quite careful not to, in a way, force the beginner and not to use one's little wrath.

S: Yes, yes, not assume that every beginner that comes along is [12] chock-a-block with repressed anger and hatred and so on, therefore direct his attention to wrathful deities. He may not be, you know, chock-a-block with anger and hatred in that sort of way at all. Maybe there's a little bit of something unexpressed, nothing very much, nothing he can't work out in a quite ordinary sort of way. But here again I seem to sense the predominance of these more

encounter group modes of thought.

(Pause .)

Alan Angel: I wasn't approaching it in that way, I was thinking more in, just in terms of being quite natural and just basing one's communication on friendship and out of that anything else could arise.

S: Right, yes, right.

Of course, a little while ago I was speaking of demands made by Order Members for instance, I use Order Members just as an example which is known to everybody, demands made by Order Members giving rise to resistance from the, let's say the non order-member's ego . Though the same sort of thing can often happen between order members themselves. But none the less, in a sense you're all, all except four of you, prospective Order Members. I make the point that one has to be quite careful about exercising these sort of demands or making these sort of demands. They can be, as it were, unreasonable, and one should be very careful not to make unreasonable demands of someone or even arbitrary demands or demands which are not arising out of the actual spiritual situation between two people but maybe simply out of your own ideas, fancies and even your own desires and then accusing the other person of putting up ego-resistance to you. [13] You have to be very careful about that. Do you see what I mean? The moment someone doesn't agree with you don't at once say, 'Oh this is just your ego resisting,' on the presumption you represent a sort of state of pure, you know, non-ego. (quiet laughter)

Sometimes there may be a sort of clash between the relatively refined and the relatively gross ego, it may be simply that. But I'm sure you all understand the sort of thing I'm talking about. So even though, certainly, yes, there is such a thing as ego resistance to the demand to grow don't assume that you necessarily, as an Order Member, in your dealings with other people are always simply making a demand to grow, and that the other persons refusal to agree with you is always a resistance that their ego is putting up to that demand of yours that they should grow. One needs to scrutinize oneself and one's motives quite carefully and be very honest in these sort of situations.

Though the chances are if you are an individual, Order Member or otherwise, are genuinely making an effort to grow and you're in company with someone who's not, the chances are that that person, if you're at all closely associated, will experience your effort to grow, or your exemplification of the process of growth, even without any overt demands, as something a little threatening or at least creating a little uneasiness. We find that in our ordinary contacts with people, apparently the fact that you are a vegetarian will tend to upset non-vegetarians a little bit and so on. The fact that perhaps you meditate regularly may upset somebody, who perhaps has heard about Meditation and perhaps really feels that he or she ought to be meditating but isn't actually doing so. And the proximity of a meditator may be experienced as giving rise to some discomfort.

[14]

Dave Rice: That's extra-ordinary, it seems to me anyway. The play of the peaceful and the wrathful deities as beautifully symbolized in the Bardo Thodol is going on all the time in most life situations.

S: Well, going on, one might, say, on different levels. It isn't obviously the same thing, but the general principle is the same.

Dave Rice: Yeah, never seen in that way before.

S: Though in a quite different context, the same sort of principle emerges to a somewhat different form, because I remember seeing, when I was a boy, a series of quite interesting engravings. I think there must have been four of them. I saw them in the waiting room of the doctor that I used to be taken along to as a child. I've a suspicion that these engravings, these four engravings hanging in the waiting rooms of quite a number of doctor's or did in the old days because they represented the doctor and his patient. And the doctor was represented in the first two or perhaps even three engravings, they must have been by some Renaissance Italian Artist, as a sort of Angel of Light, really beautiful, and here was the patient or sick person, or sick person's relations coming along, you know, to the doctor, this Angel of Light, and begging for his help and protection, begging that he would cure them or their near and dear ones. So you had this very affecting sort of a picture or series of pictures, series of engravings, but then there was the last one. In that one the doctor appears as a sort of devil with horrible bat-like wings and this is when he was [15] presenting his bill (laughter) - he'd cured the particular person, he's now seen in a quite different sort of way - (laughter) do you see what I mean? So it can be like that, you know, in our relations with people. So long as they are going along with us, so long as they're doing what is pleasing to us, we can see them as Angels of Light, but when they start going against us, even in our own interests, or when perhaps they start making demands, you know, upon us either demands that we should grow or simply reciprocate in ordinary friendly human way to the demands that we made upon them then we start seeing them in a quite different way. I'm sure you can recognize that you yourself do this from time to time if you look back on your own past experience with other people.

(Long Pause.)

I mean, I'm sure a number of people do know that it can happen, even in your relationships with your closest friends if suddenly they sort of cross your path, they get in the way of the fulfilment of your desires, especially of the wrong, worldly mundane desires, for a moment you may experience a sort of flash of pure hatred, you know, towards that person, maybe your husband or wife, your best friend or Kalyana Mitra or what not. For an instant you can experience this sort of flash of pure hatred, you probably just allow it to come and go, you don't usually sort of think about it very much, if anything you just push it out of the way as quickly as possible, just forget about it because it's so incompatible with your feelings or your acknowledged conscious feelings towards that particular person, but it's there, it comes and it goes on certain occasions when he or she is thwarting you. Has anyone ever noticed this? (Loud murmurs of agreement and laughter)

So that shows the extent to which that relationship, to use that [16] term, is based on attachment, that is to say it's a relationship in which well, well based on the factor of the satisfaction of desires, rather than the fulfilment of needs of growth.

Malcolm: Where there's a need of growth, one wouldn't experience conflict, is that what you're saying. If it's genuine need.

S: Well no relationships, at the stage at which most people here have reached, can be pure or unmixed. There'll be some purely selfish demands and also there'll be some expectations of the nature of growth and so on. So you may be quite mixed in your feelings sometimes towards people.

Malcolm: I notice when there's something I want to do that's not in the general interest of the community, just in my own interest, I experience that sort of conflict then. If it's in the interest of others, although or not just myself, there's no conflict then.

S: Well then, of course, you mustn't have a situation where everybody is sacrificing his interest to everybody else's or to the interests of the group and therefore nobody's interests are being fulfilled or not, do you see what I mean? Everybody's giving up for everybody else, so nobody is experiencing any actual fulfilment. So we have to be careful not to see the community as a sort of group in the abstract, for the sake of which you have to make sacrifices. I mean, I think someone who say, belongs to a community need have no hesitation in ... (pause) well demanding even, the fulfilment of certain needs, genuine needs, [17] of his own, which are not needs of other members of the group. But of course one will have to stop and think if the needs which you want to satisfy are of such a nature as to conflict with, or even do harm to, the needs of the other people in the group and that's quite a different situation. But you shouldn't be all expected to have the same needs, they may differ even though the general principle of individual development is the same for all.

(pause)

I mean you may be an artist living in a community of non-artists, you may need paints and canvases and if the community can stretch to providing you with those you shouldn't hesitate to demand them, and they no doubt, if it's a positive community, will be happy to let you have them. Somebody may need a bicycle to go to work at the co-op, others may not need one, maybe because they're not working in a co-op or they've got motor cars (chuckle) etc.

(Pause.)

But I think also to go back to one of the things that I was saying, I think one must expect that one's, what I call one's ego, for want of a better term, - that is a separate principle really but one's ego, one must expect that one's ego will put up a lot of resistance because change means change. At first the ego or you are just sort of tinkering around with the appearances of change and development, but after a while you start coming into contact with the real thing in one way or another and then you start putting, or the ego starts putting up real resistance, so you must expect to encounter that sort of situation in one way or another. It isn't going to be all easy, all the way, so that everything is enjoyable, everything you do, everything that you are, well, everything that is demanded of you is enjoyable, - no, [18] there's going to be quite a few occasions in which you experience resistance. I mean that is part of the very nature of the higher evolutionary process. You will not always want to do what in principle you want to do.

(Pause)

Of course you want to meditate every morning, but you don't necessarily therefore want to get up every morning.

(Long Pause)

How far did you get with the... ?

Subhuti: We've finished that section, we finished the Buddha Section.

S: Ah and how did you get on to the Bardo? What was the connection?

Vessantara: Well we were talking about the peaceful and the wrathful forms of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

S: Well, I think it won't be very easy from a purely iconographical point of view, for us to represent wrathful Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the West because the way in which they're depicted in the east is very much bound up with the, not only cultural, but the ethnic traditions, of those parts of the world. For instance the Chinese Buddhist will have a great feeling for Dragons. Well, we won't have much of a feeling for Dragons because Dragons are not part of our you know, part of our tradition in the same way.

Vessantara: I find that there's some alien qualities that, you know, the Tibetan representations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, actually is quite stimulating. It makes them more effective in a way.

[19]

Subhuti: Do you think that the Christian Demon and Devils would be quite an effective way of representing them?

S: I think that that is again too different in principle, because the Demons and Devils are not of course wrathful appearances of Angels, that is never suggested as far as I know. I suppose you're thinking of just the appearance but the expression of the devils is really different from the expression of wrathful Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and Guardian deities.

Subhuti: It just seems likely that for a Westerner the most, that's the most awful thing you can imagine in a way, those demonic figures. You'd see reality that way if you're alienated from it.

S: Presumably you would, at least, it seems logical to suppose that, but at the same time, the Indian and Tibetan representations of wrathful deities, don't have that sort of flavour to them I would say, I mean the flavour they have is one, as it were, of a sort of terrifying sublimity, not of a malicious evil.

Voices: Yes, Yes.

Devapriya: The Minotaur guarding the labyrinth, perhaps?

Vessantara: Christian Demons and devils can be too much like Maras.

S: Yes, yes.

Mike Scherk: One could use representations of Jesus as a substitute for Mara (Bhante chuckles)

[20]

Vessantara: To what extent are we likely to want to represent these wrathful beings in the West...?

S: Perhaps we're considering it really the wrong way round, because you don't represent and then see them, someone's got to see them first and then either represent them himself or cause somebody else to represent them in accordance with his instructions. This is what happened of course in India and Tibet and other places. You had the vision first, or somebody had the vision and then you had the representation of the vision, so someone's got to see these things:

Malcolm: It seems very useful, a useful way of interpreting what you said, that a person might come up against, in the Friends, you know, it might be a useful way of interpreting that.

S: "My Kalyana Mitra: before and after" - (laughter) - before and after he asked me to join the co-op for instance, or whatever - (laughter) - or before he asked me to, before and after he asked me to leave my wife and family and good steady job. (chuckles).

Alan Angel: I was quite interested in the Vidyadharas, the sort of intermediate peaceful and wrathful forms, it doesn't seem that there's much said about them, anywhere.

S: They're usually explained as Tantric initiates. The term Vidyadhara is definitely a Vajrayanic term. Vidya of course means knowledge in the more spiritual sense, even in the Transcendental sense, and Dhara means one who bears, so it's the Bearer of Knowledge or it's the Transmitter of the Sacred [21] Tradition. Vidyadhara has got some sort of connotation of Guru, also Tantric Guru or Tantric initiate. Now, one could, I sort of detect here little echoes of Gnosticism, well, very faint and distant. One perhaps, because the Vidyadhara is the Gnostic, if you, you know, if you regard Vajrayana as a sort of Gnostic system and of course, you, he is the Bearer of the Gnosis. I don't know whether it is a proper Greek word but he is the Gnosisphros, you could say, probably there is a proper Greek word of this type. So that's the sort of figure he represents. He's the initiate with a capital 'I', the hierophant, the Revealer of the Mysteries, you know, the holder or the Transmitter of the Secret Wisdom and so on and so forth.

John Rice: Bhante, you mentioned that it would be difficult to represent those wrathful forms. How about some of the symbols, such as the vajra and the bell and the lotus? Symbols that are associated with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

S: Yes, I think we'll have to assimilate them and transform them gradually. I think the lotus doesn't offer much difficulty. It is a flower and it's not unlike the water lily, you could say, or even a rose and we have in the West a symbolism of the rose, which has been developed quite extensively. The vajra? Well it's a thunderbolt. It could be again, I have a little theory here: if you look back to Indian art and sculpture you find that there are early representations of Indra in which he's depicted holding this thunderbolt. It's just a sort of thunderbolt, it's Indra, the Hindu God, the God of Storms, and Thunder and Lightning, he is holding a thunderbolt and this is depicted very similarly to the, you know, the Tibetan or Indo-Tibetan Vajra, the Dorje, and it would seem that this sort of [22] figure of Indra developed under semi-Hellenistic auspices, because it is known that there was a sort of Hellenistic, or even Romanic, influence on the Indian Buddhist art of the North West, in the Gandharan area, and we do find in fact that in Greek, in Hellenic sculpture, Zeus is represented with, as holding or wielding a

thunderbolt very similar in style from that which Indra is depicted holding. So perhaps we have to get back from the Dorje to the Vajra, from the Vajra of say Vajrayana to Indra's Vajra, adopt that sort of symbol. It is quite interesting that the Japanese vajra in Japanese Vajrayana, that is to say, the Shingon, Shu Shingon School, is of a rather different type from the Tibetan, though still based on the Indian original. It's much longer in proportion to its width and as such it is much, it resembles much more, or bears a much closer resemblance to the Hellenic, the Greek thunderbolt. So I think we have to sort of follow things through in this sort of way, perhaps... where we can.

(Long Pause.)

But of course, it maybe that we're bothering unnecessarily, maybe in the course of the next few generations, a sort of world culture will be established and everybody feels equally at home in the, or with the, symbols of different cultural traditions. It maybe that that happens, that just as we're now, you know, quite familiar with the, at home with rice and curry, we'll be quite at home with Indian and Tibetan, Chinese and Japanese symbols, recognizing in all of them a sort of common pattern.

Malcolm: They do seem to be getting introduced, though, into films and things. This Excalibur film was introduced, Merlin introduced the Dragon to the young King Arthur saying that everything was the Dragon. I noticed that was quite...

[23]

S: But the Dragon appears in Western myth and legend, especially in the northern ones. It's rather different from the Chinese Dragon. The Chinese Dragon, corresponding to the Indian Naga, is an entirely beneficent creature, symbolizing the Yang principle, not evil. Whereas the dragon in the West is almost entirely evil.

Malcolm: No, this dragon actually symbolized the power, the power and the forces, you know, that everything was contained in. So it was a real improvement.

Dave Rice: But in fact, unless you mastered it in that film it was malevolent.

Malcolm: Sorry?

Dave Rice: I think that was the distinction that was made in the film: that it was, it did have this tremendous evil aspect to it until it was mastered. Merlin had mastered it, to him it wasn't evil, it was a power, an energy, which he had some measure of control over. But to everybody else it was a symbol of evil.

S: Yes, well in medieval myth and legend where the Dragon appears as in, I think, Greek myth and legend, the Dragon is always killed and that's that.

Voice: Yeah, quite.

A.A.: I thought that was a sort of Christian twist to the story, to the myth, that the dragon was then turned to be an evil figure, therefore needing to be killed.

[24]

S: It does seem that even, way back, in the times of the Greeks, in the case of Greek mythology, sort of Dragon-like figures - we can't I think, speak probably of the dragon proper - were considered as things to be, to be slain, and sometimes their influence lived on in quite a harmful sort of way, though maybe under control. For instance, there's the myth of Perseus killing the, I don't know whether it's a dragon in the technical sense, but it's some kind of monster coming from the sea. And what happens to it? That monster is just killed, isn't it? But what does he kill it with? He kills it by unveiling the head of Medusa. And who is Medusa? Well, she's another sort of monster. So you know, Perseus can make use of her head in that way to turn things to stone, including that dragon. But it's as though part of that dangerous power represented by Medusa the Gorgon has been appropriated by the hero and he's using it. So in a way it's sort of integrated but not really perhaps. One doesn't get that impression. In any case he eventually hands it over to Pallas Athena, because she's the only one who can really handle it. So she wears it on her - what's it called? ...

Subhuti: Aegis.

S: Aegis, yes.

(Pause)

S: Though I do remember that in the myth of St. George and the dragon there are some pictorial representations of this legend which, you know, don't quite, don't accord with the, the literary version which is allegedly being illustrated. I do [25] remember, I don't know by whom, paintings by a particular Italian Renaissance artist where the dragon is being led back, as it were, home. That is to say, I remember, paintings in which St. George is sort of leading the maiden whom he has rescued, and she is leading the dragon, now duly tamed, by a long silken ribbon and he's being led back into the city, yeah. So this suggests, or the painter suggests here, the dragon has been tamed, those energies have been brought under control, though, in the story as far as I remember it as literature, the dragon is definitely slain. But perhaps the painter just felt or saw things differently, without perhaps realizing what he was doing, or perhaps realizing what he was doing. Though it didn't represent the dragon as just a big untidy heap after having been killed in the distance. But is actually led by Una, no not by Una, by the princess, whoever she was, on with, you know, a long silken ribbon. Sometimes artists have these sort of intuitions, and change things or make modifications in the story that they are supposed to be illustrating, according to their own insights.

(Pause)

M.S: There are a few contemporary representations of dragons in film and in novels, science fiction novels, where the dragon is very much a beneficent force, and they've been incredibly popular and I, I mean, it's like a symbol for me, I've never understood why the dragon in "The Hobbit" was portrayed in classic Western ( ? ) as extremely greedy, like almost greed embodied and very destructive and unrelenting hate which just doesn't, I mean in my case, it certainly does not bring forth that image and it seems that in obviously lots of people it doesn't and they respond to positive representations of [26] the dragon.

S: I really wonder about that. To me it seems almost as though people are pretending that the dragon isn't so bad after all, as a means of evading, or avoiding having to face up to the dragon, or he's a nice old dragon really, you know.



Voices: Yes, Yes:

Subhuti: You remember that invariably in child's, in children's stories. You get this, the nice dragon and it's sort of tamed, domesticated...

S: ... yes

Subhuti: ... I always used to hate that.

(mild laughter)

Malcolm: It does sound like an ally though (laughter) if it's tamed - a really powerful ally, a food friend to have.

S: You mustn't assume that you've tamed the dragon. It isn't so easy to tame dragons.  
(Chuckles from all)

A.A: Going back to what we were talking about some days ago with regards to the Shadow. I think sometimes we, we, the symbol of the dragon we project our shadow on to and fight and it just perpetuates the sort of split.

S: Yes, yes, you could make friends with the dragon. But don't as it were, sentimentalise him first and then make friends with [27] No, you must make friends with the real actual, terrifying dragon

(Pause)

Dave Rice: I'm curious. Could you say something about the origin of the wrathful deities in Tibet, and how, in what way they were transformed?

S: Well, the origin of the wrathful deity, you know, and wrathful Buddhas, whether in Tibet or anywhere else is clear. It's in people's' experience. It's in their, for want of a better term, their visionary experience. Originally, certain people actually saw these things, they experienced things in this way. You find this very clearly when you examine the Tantric text called a Sadhana; there's a whole literature, a whole Sadhana literature. A Sadhana simply gives a description of a particular Buddha or Bodhisattva. Later on, it extended to include wrathful Buddhas and wrathful Bodhisattvas and so on. It gives a description, the form, the colour, the attributes, the number, in the case of the later Tantric developments, number of arms, number of arms, number of heads, number of eyes and so on and then the mantra and a few simple instructions as to how to meditate on that particular, or how to invoke that form. But, the origin was always the same. That some particular yogi even some particular siddha, in the course of his spiritual life, in the course of his spiritual practice, in the course of his meditation, actually saw that particular form, that particular figure, actually had that experience, and recorded it, for the benefit of his disciples. He either just told them about it and they recorded it, or himself actually, you know, wrote a description of it and then passed it on to them. So this is the [28] origin of you know, these sort of experiences.

Dave Rice: Doesn't it go back to before the Tantric yogis and 'mystics'? Doesn't it go back to the Bon religion, or the people of Tibet before Padmasambhava arrived in Tibet?

S: Well, this is to take a sort of literal, historical view which I personally don't take. Of course, if you want to represent something, you'll represent it in the terms with which you are familiar, but none the less, what you see is your own vision. Suppose for instance, you say, as a Western Buddhist, you have a vision, you see something, you experience something, but what you see may have sort of certain features let's say, of the Angel in Western Art. That does not mean that your vision, has been borrowed, from some external source. You are just making use of you know certain elements, certain features, which you've gathered, in your experience, to as it were body forth to yourself what you're seeing or trying to see, do you see what I'm getting at? It isn't a question of, of historical influence in the ordinary sense. In the same way, for instance, in the time of the Buddha himself, people who sort of 'saw' threatening figures, saw them in terms of what we, or the text calls, yakshas. But they were familiar with the idea of such figures; later it changed.

Dave Rice: So they, the influence has always been ...

S: Pardon?

Dave Rice: ... the influence has always been there?

[29]

S: It's a language which you use, rather than an influence to which you're subject. Though of course, the language of course conditions the nature of the experience to some extent, imposes certain limitations on, or permits a certain freedom of expression.

Dave Rice: Presumably the Shadow, if you like, for want of a better term, or this malevolent force, has always been here. It's just that through different cultures and different languages has sprung up to understand ...

S: And depict it in different ways. You recognize this in different branches of literature in different cultures, in different arts, you recognize a recurrence of certain motifs. You can see, for instance, well, the Shadow, reappearing in different forms. So if you encounter your own shadow, if you want to body it forth and give it visible form, this may not necessarily be a conscious, deliberate process, you will take whatever material lies ready to hand in your particular cultural tradition.

Dave Rice: That throws quite a different light on my understanding of what happened in the case of Tibet because whatever sources of reference I've come across gives one the impression of a literal interpretation. That Padmasambhava quite literally overpowered these, these deities or entities and transformed them into the Guardians of the Dharma.

But looking at it in the light that you're mentioning it's not quite as literal as that, it's more that they are seen or as they can be a force of energy that's useful rather than superstitiously something that's evil.

[30]

S: Of course one can at the same time take that story of Padmasambhava quite literally, it's true on that level too. But on the other hand we can make it more accessible to ourselves by, you know, just understanding it in the way that I've been mentioning

(Pause)

But what we have to reject altogether is the old-fashioned historian's view of Tibetan Buddhism being 'influenced' by Bon, or certain deities being 'borrowed' from the Bon by the Tibetan Buddhists in a purely external, almost mechanical sort of way. They're very fond of talking in terms of 'borrowing', it's almost a key word for them. That's very misleading.

Malcolm: It must be patronizing Christian writers.

S: Well, it suggests a sort of deliberate conscious process which was far from being the case. I mean people are undergoing certain experiences, they're trying to objectify those experiences to themselves. They're trying to give concrete form, this is what is happening, they're not thinking about Bon or about Buddhism, or borrowing from this, borrowing from that.

(Pause)

So to come back to the point of departure, you know, it will no doubt happen that people within the FWBO will have sort of visionary experiences and will want to actually depict them concretely rather in paintings or you know, some other form either themselves or with others who are skilled in that particular way. I mean in that manner a sort of tradition may well develop with regard to wrathful deities as well as with regard to peaceful ones. I mean we mustn't forget that the, the [31] basis of Buddhist Art in this sort of way, the basis of the representations in Thangkas and even in three-dimensional forms and images, is visionary in Buddhism. Very much like Blake's Art, you know Blake depicted things which he actually saw, whether it was Urizen or whether it was the ghost of a flea or whether it was Ore busting his bonds or whatever. He saw these things. These were actual visionary experiences and he happened to have the, the artistic gifts necessary to, to depict them in form and colour. So this is just what happened in the case of the old Buddhist Yogis where visions were the sources of Buddhist Iconography; they all had glimpses of the, you could say, the Sambhogakaya. So the same with Blake, you know, he had glimpses of his own imaginal world.

John Rice: I noticed like, I picked up a book before I came away. It had some Tibetan paintings in it, images and things, and I noticed that one had a whole arrangement of the associated symbols and a horse and the rider was actually missing and I read that, that the meditator was meant to meditate on this and actually produce the rider from his own visionary experience, into the picture. It seemed quite vivid, projecting.

S: Ah yes, yes. Of course one must also recognize that in the course of generations the original vision may get lost or the feeling for the vision may get lost. For instance, if you take Blake, take for example Blake, since that has been mentioned. Well, for instance there's, well all right, his well known painting of 'Glad Day' - there's several versions. All right supposing that somebody is quite impressed by this painting of 'Glad Day' which no doubt represents a visionary experience on the part of Blake. O.K. so he reproduces, maybe he wants [32] to use it for a design for the dust jacket of a book. So all right, it's reproduced, all right supposing someone copies that again, for some other purpose, maybe an advertisement for soap because if you use so-and-so's soap, well it gives you a glad day!

(laughter)

So it's copied, so it becomes a bit vulgarized and you get further and further away from Blake's original vision, do you see the sort of thing I mean? In the same way, some ancient Indian yogi had a vision, say, of Amitabha that might have been really very vivid, well if it was a vision it undoubtedly was, and he communicated something of that to a disciple. He was able to experience the same vision and he communicated it to his disciple and eventually an artist depicted it. So maybe the first artist who depicted it was also a yogi and had the vision and then represented it in pictorial terms. Perhaps he was a very good artist so something of the vision really came across, through the painting. Maybe his disciple did likewise, but suppose his disciple simply copied the master's painting without ever having had any vision, and supposing his disciple simply copied his painting, maybe for 10 or 12 generations, then you just get a stereo type, you just get a sort of rule that well, the figure must be so big, such and such proportion, such and such colour, and all the feeling has gone out of it. It just becomes, as I said, a stereotype, and a lot of Tibetan Buddhist Art is of that quality. One mustn't refuse to recognize that fact and you must learn to distinguish between, I mean that Tibetan Buddhist Art, those Thangkas which really have some feeling to them, which really make you feel, 'Well there's a vision behind it' and those that don't. Those that are simply faithful to the iconographical tradition in a purely technical sort [33] of way and the Artist who has got a bit of skill, do you see what I mean? There's a great deal of difference between these two things. Unfortunately, quite a lot of the Buddha figures that are around and the Thangkas that are around and copies of Thangkas don't really communicate anything of the original Vision. The Vision took place too long ago. Its been lost in the course of centuries in many cases, not always. So one has got to be able to discriminate a bit between Buddhist works of art in this sort of way, from this point of view. Those that really do communicate something visionary and those that don't, and our own Buddhist Art, especially Art of the nature of say Thangkas, representations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and images, should communicate something of a visionary experience. The Artists should be meditators if they're going to produce that sort of Art. They must do the practices of those particular Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and have some real feeling for what they represent. Not just be good at Art and good at copying Tibetan-type material, do you see what I'm getting at? And we ourselves have to be more discriminating with regard to works of Eastern Buddhist Art, not simply gasp with admiration simply because it happens to be Tibetan, happens to be Japanese. Do we feel anything when we look at it? Does it really communicate anything to us? Is there really a visionary touch in it or a visionary gleam? If not, well, it's interesting but from the spiritual, the truly traditional, point of view it isn't really worth much. And it's amazing the amount of bad Buddhist Art there is around the East, especially in India, especially the modern stuff, it's awful. It kills any sort of feeling, that you may, you know, have already. It's so terrible, so pathetic, it's so sentimental. You know, [34] paintings of the Buddha on calendars looking like some simpering Indian film star. (Mild laughter) Quite dreadful. Such Buddha pictures should be banished! I had quite a lot to say about them when I was in India. It's very difficult though to improve on them.

M.S: What about, you know, there's some figures which, say, have not been done with inspiration but, perhaps they don't display gross bad taste. Quite simple and direct but it's as if one's own faith or one's own degree of vision that one has, sort of bounces off and comes back. So you can see them and it's like a focus for something coming out of you, you know, it's not, you're not picking up the transmission of someone else's vision.

Do such images then have any value?

S: I'm not quite sure what you mean, because if you're at all sensitive aesthetically, if an image is ugly you can't help recognizing that it's ugly and being a bit put off it for that reason. So therefore it doesn't seem a very suitable object from which to bounce back, so to speak, your own vision ...

M.S: I didn't mean necessarily. I didn't mean one's that were necessarily ugly but rather, they could be quite pleasing, done by a skilled craftsman, one who maybe had a feeling for the Buddha, but one who hadn't had actually any experience, visionary experience, on that level.

S: I think it would be definitely more inspiring you know, to have an image of the other kind.

(murmurs of agreement)

Alan Angel: What's been said seems to emphasize the importance of transmission [35] of those qualities and those visions and also ...

S: Well, not simply transmission but sort of re-creation, as it were, from generation to generation. It's not a sort of passive handing down. At each generation each disciple has to recreate for himself. It's not something that the Master can just hand to him like some precious heirloom.

Alan Angel: No - that's why I said transmission and practice.

S: Yes, yes.

Vessantara: So if an artist was going to be working on a painting of, say, a wrathful deity, what qualities would he be actually be trying to contact? Because if you start talking about it in terms of contacting your Shadow or bringing up your own sort of psychological forces it seems to ... (unclear)

S: Well, energy and inspiration and exhilaration and sublimity and all those sorts of emotions. He should feel really carried away when he's painting it - not exactly in a wrathful mood, but in a very elevated mood, in a very dynamic mood, a very powerful, creative mood. A very noble mood. (Pause) Well, get to work! (Laughter)

It clearly presupposes an entirely new sort of approach to the arts, doesn't it? I mean a different approach to the arts from what we're accustomed to - at least in so far as they find this sort of expression.

Anyway, it does seem that it's time for lunch even though the bell hasn't - oh, there we are.

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S: So which of you is going to produce the questions that have emerged, if any.

Subhuti: Start with a... distinction. Can you distinguish emotional aspects and volitional aspects.

S: Well, in modern psychology of course emotion and volition, or will, are sharply

distinguished. Modern psychology usually operates with a threefold distinction between will, emotion and thought. Jung adds intuition, he operates with those four terms.

But nonetheless the question arises: what is the difference between feeling and will? There is a difference even though it might not be very easy to express. There is also clearly a similarity because will is will, yes, will is energy, obviously willing something involves energy, but emotion, the very root of the word suggests movement and that also suggests energy, so what is the difference?

A definition of will which I have personally found quite useful, or definition of volition, from the standpoint of Western psychology is, 'the sum total of energy available to the conscious subject' .

V: Can you say that again?

S: 'The sum total of energy available to the conscious subject'. The energy on which will draws, or the energy which is will, that form of energy which is will, is not the whole of the energy which is you, it is the sum total of the energy available to the conscious subject. So that will is essentially you, the conscious subject, willing, that is to say it is the amount of energy which, as it were, flows through the aperture of 'you', the 'I', the conscious subject. There are other energies, in Freudian and Jungian terminology there is the energy which is temporarily locked up in the subconscious mind, there is the energy which is locked up in the unconscious mind as well. But the will is the sum total of that energy of your being which is available to the conscious subject: you as a self conscious, willing, striving individual. That is will.

What is emotion then? Emotion is that which is 'feeling toned', emotion is that which so to speak feels, 'this is good'; 'this is bad'; 'I like this'; 'I don't like that! 'That is pleasant, 'that is unpleasant'. The emotional is everything that is toned in that sort of affective way. Emotion therefore implies value judgement, though it may not be expressed in conceptual terms.

So this, broadly speaking, is the distinction between will on the one hand and emotion on the other. And obviously the two, though distinct, are very often linked. Sometimes it isn't easy to sort out the one from the other.

The Pali term for emotion or feeling is vedana, you could say vedana is twofold, just as feeling is twofold. There is feeling as pleasurable or painful sensation and there is feeling as emotion. And it does seem that emotions are more complex forms of feeling. There is of course a hierarchy also among the emotions themselves, some are more and some are less refined.

Ratnaguna: Could you say a bit about what emotion is then?

S: Well I have already said something, I have said that emotion is whatever is feeling toned. And feeling means the awareness that something is pleasant or painful or that you like something or that something is good or something is bad, [2] as a value judgement. All this is feeling, all this is emotion.

Ratnaguna: I thought you were just drawing a distinction between feeling and emotion there,

a fine distinction.

S: Just now I have drawn a distinction between the finer feelings and what one might call the less refined feelings. The less refined feelings, one might say, are those which are more connected with the senses and with one's affirmation of oneself as a self, as an ego, as an 'I'. Whereas the more refined feelings are those which are dissociated to some extent from one's experience of oneself as a self or as an ego.

But I think, in trying to understand what is emotion, what is will, what is this kind of emotion, what is that, one must always consult one's own experience. Because one does experience will, one does experience emotion, one does experience less refined, one does experience more refined emotion. So all that one really needs to do is just to look at one's own experience and ask oneself, 'well what is happening, what is going on, what is the nature of my experience?' You should be able to work it out for yourself because everybody has feelings, everybody has emotions, everybody experiences acts of volition, it shouldn't really be necessary to ask anybody else or to consult a book or a dictionary, you just consult the dictionary of your own experience.

Rudiger J: We came over this distinction in the context of the volitional, emotional, plus cognitive aspects of Bodhi. Would it be right to say though that the volitional aspect of Bodhi is the determination to use all the energy available in a creative way. Wouldn't this be ... ?

S: Well yes and no. When one speaks of volition in the highest sense as an aspect of Bodhi one is referring to what one might call the 'energetic' aspect of Bodhi. But one mustn't forget that if one defines will or volition as 'a sum total of energy available to a conscious subject', one can't really apply that to Bodhi, one can't really apply that to the Bodhi level.

On the one hand in Bodhi, in Enlightenment, there is no distinction of conscious and unconscious anyway and there is no subject as apposed to an object. So what happens to your volition? There is instead, one might say, an uninterrupted flow of energy which transcends the distinction between subject and object as well as the distinction between conscious and unconscious.

You can't really, in effect, speak of the Buddha as 'willing'. One can speak of the Buddha as acting, because that is what he appears to do, but he doesn't act because he wills. One can only express the essence of the matter by speaking of the Buddha, or any other Enlightened being, as functioning spontaneously. There is not that dichotomy between conscious and unconscious. The energy is totally present all the time to the unified consciousness which is neither conscious nor unconscious, but superconscious and simply responds to the needs of sentient beings. This is how the Mahayana Sutras usually express it.

So, will, in the unenlightened person, corresponds to that spontaneous, totally integrated energy manifested by the Enlightened person. But one can't really speak of the Enlightened person as exercising a will in the human sense, except very, very remotely and analogically indeed.

Was there anything after that?

Subhuti: Yes, does Bodhi correspond to prajna, or is Bodhi only full Enlightenment?

S: Bodhi, in a sense, corresponds to prajna; both are transcendental. Prajna is definitely a sort of cognitive aspect. Bodhi in a way is, but Bodhi stands much more for the state of total Enlightenment, whereas prajna is more subjective, it is more of a faculty. It is that knowledge, that wisdom, by means of which you realize that totally Enlightened state of Bodhi. So it isn't completely synonymous with it.

Yes, Bodhi, you might say refers to a state of totally illumined being. Bodhi refers to the illumined being of the Enlightened individual. Whereas prajna is that Enlightened beings Enlightened intellect, one might say. In other words, Bodhi refers to a state of the total being, prajna refers more to a state of the cognitive faculty. Bodhi is the transcendentalized individual, prajna is that individuals transcendentalized knowing, so far as one can at that level distinguish between a being and a knowing. Do you see what I mean?

If you want to refer to an Enlightened person, you refer to Bodhi, you speak in terms of Bodhi. If you want to speak in terms of an Enlightened knowledge, you speak in terms of prajna. Bodhi is, as it were, more total, hence one has Bodhicitta, Bodhisattva, Bodhicarya.

Subhuti: The next question is concerned with the Trikaya doctrine. If you experience the Sambhogakaya, do you experience insight? I suppose that's the best way of putting it. It's not just a construct of your own imagination.

S: No, not a just construct of your own imagination. One could say that it is a question of how you experience the Sambhogakaya. I did mention the other day that you could experience a visual form on a higher, as it were, visionary level but not have any insight into that. So it would be a samadhi type experience, but to that samadhi type experience you could conjoin insight and then it would become a prajna type experience as well. You would have samadhi and prajna both.

So it is largely a matter of definition. You could say that, just as on the human and historical level you could see the Buddha without recognizing the Buddha as Buddha, without any insight. In the same way, through a purely visionary faculty in the supernormal sense, you could see the Sambhogakaya or aspect of the Sambhogakaya, but without any understanding, without any insight. You would not then be seeing the Dharmakaya.

Subhuti: As you would in the Bardo.

S: Yes, one could say that, yes. It would certainly be an immensely heightened experience, it would be a very inspiring experience. It might be a very impressive experience, but that element of prajna or insight would not necessarily be there, though the visionary experience could well be the basis for it.

Dave Rice: The context within which that question arose was that it was suggested that if insight did arise with a vision of Sambhogakaya then it would be insight with a small 'i'

S: Well, Insight, that is to say Insight with a capital 'I' can develop with regard to any conditioned object whatsoever. It's more likely perhaps to develop in connection with the [4] Sambhogakaya, - let's say the vision of an aspect of the Sambhogakaya - just because the



vision by virtue of its very nature will arouse your positive feeling to such a very great extent and perhaps catapult you into a sort of Dhyanic state which could be then a much more effective basis for development of Insight. But actually you can develop Insight with regard to any object that is conditioned. Your Insight can arise in dependence upon a matchbox if you really consider that that matchbox is a conditioned entity. And because it came into existence it must therefore go out of existence, that all conditioned things are transitory. Contemplating the matchbox in that way you can develop Insight. But you won't, probably, have very, very strong feelings about the matchbox so you won't, very likely, develop a very powerful concentration in connection with it.

But if you have a Sambhogakaya-type experience, that is to say a purely visionary experience, you actually see a Bodhisattva, all your higher, all your more refined, emotions will be aroused and unified. All your energies will be brought together and all those energies will be behind the Insight, therefore the Insight is much more likely to arise, that is to say in the form of Insight with a capital 'I'.

Mike Scherk: Bhante, how does this link with the terms you mentioned a few days ago, samayasattva and jnanasattva (?) Does that correspond exactly to the ...

S: Yes, you could say, very broadly speaking that samayasattva is the visionary experience that you have of a particular Buddha or Bodhisattva basing yourself upon traditional iconography, but which is devoid of any element of understanding or insight. But which is a necessary preparatory base for the development of that understanding and insight, which is called jnanasattva. That is to say the Buddha or Bodhisattva or whatever it may be as it exists quite independently of the traditional icon. As it exists as an actual, one might say real, aspect of the Dharmakaya. Again one has to be careful of not being misled by words. Because I said: aspect of the Dharmakaya, of course all these forms are aspects of the Sambhogakaya but nonetheless the Sambhogakaya is the Sambhogakaya of the Buddha, the Dharmakaya is the Dharmakaya of the Buddha. So there is at the same time a sort of inner relationship between them.

You could say when you realize the Sambhogakaya in its depth, that is the Dharmakaya. It is not that the Dharmakaya is literally a separate body that as a translation of kaya is highly misleading anyway. If you go more deeply into the historical Buddha you encounter the Sambhogakaya, go still more deeply into that you encounter the Dharmakaya. That's one way of looking at it, at least. The three 'bodies' are not three bodies standing side by side or one on top of the other, they are more like different dimensions of the Buddha-nature, or Buddha personality.

Subhuti: Is the samayasattva an experience of the Sambhogakaya?

S: This is again, to some extent, a matter of the use of words. Yes and no. Because one can have a purely visionary experience which as I have said has got no Insight content at all but which can become the basis of Insight. But the Sambhogakaya itself is inseparably connected with the Dharmakaya. So if you see an aspect of the Dharmakaya only as a sort of visionary form without any Insight, in a sense you don't really see even [5] the Sambhogakaya. It is just a subjective visionary experience Perhaps one should say that one only really begins to see the Sambhogakaya, say the jnanasattva, when there is an element of Insight. Otherwise it is still rupaloka plane.

One is really asking 'is the Sambhogakaya mundane or transcendental?' It's really a difficult question, in a sense the distinction doesn't quite fit. Is the Nirmanakaya mundane or transcendental?, well you can't really separate the Nirmanakaya from the Sambhogakaya or the Sambhogakaya from the Dharmakaya. So in a sense all three are transcendental. If you only see the physical personality of the Buddha, in a way you don't see the Buddha at all, not as Buddha.

But it is just a question of thinking in terms of, just understanding the Buddha just more and more deeply, at deeper and deeper levels. Unless one sees the Buddha as an essentially transcendental being one doesn't see or understand him at all. One can also think of the Nirmanakaya and the Sambhogakaya as two veils over the Dharmakaya. The Sambhogakaya veil is, of course, thinner, more diaphanous than the Nirmanakaya veil, perhaps it is more brilliantly coloured. So you could say that the veil itself, this is only a manner of speaking, is mundane but what shows through the veil is transcendental. So is the total experience either mundane or transcendental? Is the Sambhogakaya itself either mundane or transcendental? In a way it is both.

You can look at it from another point of view also, that the form-less is not necessarily closer to the absolute, let's say, to reality, than that which has form. In a manner of speaking you could say that the Dharmakaya is Buddhahood without form whereas the Sambhogakaya is with form, that is archetypal form, and the two are non-different.

Anyway, where did you go from there? I suppose you could only come down. The Trikaya in some ways is the trickiest of all topics in Buddhist thought, in Mahayana thought. It is quite amorphous, it is not really systematically treated anywhere, we have to take a bit from here and a bit from there. But it seems, it seems in some ways, I think I have said somewhere, it seems to be the basic Mahayana doctrine, really, in the sense that, if you understand the Trikaya doctrine you understand the whole of Mahayana thought. That from the Trikaya doctrine there are threads, so to speak, going to all the other teachings of the Mahayana. It is the sort of nexus, the centre at which so many threads meet, intersect, and so on.

Subhuti: Could you put the Trikaya doctrine, and the Sambhogakaya particularly, in the context of what we have been talking about as regards imagination. Is the Sambhogakaya the transcendental seen with the eye of the imagination?

S: Well you could say that the transcendental can only be seen with the eye of the imagination, not to mention that one could say that the imagination is that visionary faculty which does perceive the archetypal form. And that the Sambhogakaya represents those archetypal forms, the whole body of those archetypal forms at the very highest possible level. So you can perceive the Sambhogakaya only with the Imagination with a capital 'I'.

That does leave of course the question of, what about the imagination in relation to the Dharmakaya and that of course raises the question of the distinction between Sambhogakaya and Dharmakaya. It is not a question of another body added on, it is an additional dimension. It isn't a question of another [6] faculty above the imagination, perhaps another dimension of imagination itself. I think though, that just as in the same way in the Pali texts one has a Rupaloka, a realm of archetypal forms or Images with a capital 'I', so in the Mahayana you have the Sambhogakaya world and access to both is through a higher visionary faculty which can be called the imagination.

So as far as we can see that is definitely the next big step ahead. What lies beyond that, in the way of the Arupaloka and Nirvana or the Dharmakaya, I think we can leave for the present, because for the present we cannot but see them as further stages or additional bodies which really means to distort them. So the immediate task seems to be to develop a visionary, imaginal faculty which gives us access to a higher supra-historical reality. There isn't really much point in trying to understand or trying to discuss the supra-historical reality with the help of a mental faculty which is far below the level of the imagination. In other words the main thing is to develop the imagination, or to develop Vision. Perhaps one thinks of it as Vision more in connection with meditation and imagination in connection with the creative arts. But it is essentially the same faculty.

The image is the means of integrating between the conscious and the unconscious. The image is the bridge,- and that's another image. I think this point did emerge earlier on when we were talking about literal-mindedness in the effort to understand say the Mahayana scriptures, images, myth and so on. What one needs to develop is an entirely different faculty. One can't really hope to understand, if that is indeed the word at all, the Mahayana sutras and their myths with any faculty other than the Imagination, with a capital 'I'. It is a waste of time trying to set to work on those things simply with the ordinary rational mind. Probably much better occupied looking at picture books or even visiting art galleries, not galleries of modern art of course.

So what followed from all that? Or do we start again with the other group?

Vessantara: We first wanted to know whether Ratnasambhava and Amoghasiddhi appeared at all in Mahayana texts or whether they are purely a Vajrayana development?

S: I don't really remember. Yes, I think, they do, because don't they appear, doesn't Ratnasambhava appear under a slightly different name in the Sutra of Golden Light?

Vessantara: What as Ratnakara?

S: No, not as Ratnakara. Because there is a mandala of the five Buddhas, or at least four of them, leaving aside the central one, in an early chapter of the Sutra of Golden Light, isn't there? So yes, they do appear here and there but it is in the Vajrayana, in the Tantras, that the five Buddha family idea is taken up and given, one might say systematic development? Scholars do say that this took place first of all in the Guhayasamaja Tantra which is generally considered the oldest of the Tantras, as a literary document.

I've traced the development of the five family system from the three family system and the two family system, haven't I. Where is it, in the Survey?

V: In the Mitrata Omnibus.

[7]

Subhuti: In the Tantra series.

S: Ahh, yes, I went into it more elaborately there. Who's familiar with that Tantric series? What is it called?

V: "Creative symbols of the Tantric Path to Enlightenment."

S: Who's familiar with that series? How many people have actually listened to that series at some time or other? So some of you have got some homework to do as soon as you get back to your centres.

It does seem that historically speaking the families of Amitabha, of Vairochana, of Akshobhya have been much more important in the spiritual life and practice of Mahayana Buddhists, Vajrayana Buddhists, than have the spiritual families of Amoghasiddhi and Ratnasambhava. Even though there are certain members of both those two latter families which have figured very prominently. The Green Tara, for instance, strictly speaking belongs to Amoghasiddhi's family. Jambala the so called God or Bodhisattva of wealth belongs to Ratnasambhava's family. They are both quite prominent. But the families as a whole do not figure so prominently.

There seems to be a reason for that, because I think, as I mentioned originally, when there was the three Buddha family idea you started off with one Buddha family really, which was just the Buddha himself. Then you had a sort of iconographical development in which flanking the Buddha, flanking the Tathagata, appeared two other Buddhas. And they seemed to 'personify' (inverted commas) two distinct, so to speak, split-off aspects of the total Enlightenment experience. One the more, as it were, emotional and two the, as it were, more intellectual. That is to say with Amitabha representing the more emotional aspect of Enlightenment, the aspect of warmth, so to speak. Akshobhya representing the aspect of wisdom and penetration and cutting through.

Obviously that distinction was important just because in the unenlightened human being the distinction between reason and emotion is very important. It's a distinction or division with which we are deeply concerned; it is part of our human problem, almost. So therefore the Buddha figures were split up in that sort of way. By splitting the Buddha figure you make more and more evident, so to speak, more and more explicit the total content of the Enlightenment experience. So the fact that it is an experience of wisdom and emotion thoroughly integrated, thoroughly unified at the highest possible level, that is very important for us. Because we are beings in whom reason and emotion are deeply divided.

So if Amitabha represents emotion and if Akshobhya represents wisdom then what do Amoghasiddhi and Ratnasambhava represent? Amoghasiddhi clearly represents action in some form and Ratnasambhava represents, what would you say? Just let your imaginations run wild a bit.

V: Beauty?

S: Beauty, yes.

V: It's down in the Mitrata Omnibus.

S: Is it, oh (laughter). So someone did a little bit of homework this morning.

[8]

So emotion and reason are antithetical and action and beauty are antithetical, one could say.

Do you see what I mean?

V: What's antithetical?

S: Antithetical means sort of opposite. Action has a definite end in view but beauty is complete in itself. You could even say if you wanted to that beauty pertains to the larger mandala and action pertains to the smaller mandala, the mandala within which there is a distinction between ends and means. But perhaps we shouldn't go into that just now, it was just to illustrate the point.

So, because the whole question of reason versus emotion is so important for the individual, the unenlightened individual, so therefore, that distinction, or that division was projected on to the screen of Buddhahood and there appeared flanking the undivided Buddha figure two Buddha figures representing especially emotion in the one case, Enlightened emotion, and intellect in the other, Enlightened intellect. i.e. Amitabha and Akshobhya. So you had in a row, going from left to right, Amitabha, Vairochana who is the head of the Buddha family and Akshobhya. Amitabha being of course the head of the Padma family and Akshobhya being the head of the Vajra family. Clearly a lotus is a suitable symbol for the emotions and the vajra is the suitable symbol for the intellect. And in the middle is Vairochana balancing the two. In later Tantric systems sometimes the position is confused because Akshobhya moves into the centre of the mandala. He represents the undivided Buddha nature and Vairochana moves to the East and then of course he represents a personification, so to speak, a divided aspect, that is to say the aspect of wisdom. Though usually he is in the centre of the Mandala, though any Buddha can be in the centre of the Mandala, any Bodhisattva.

Vessantara: We were talking about the symbolism of the Padma family. In the omnibus you talked about the lotus being passive and receptive and that led us into a short discussion about in what sense, if any, passivity could be a positive quality of the spiritual life.

S: Isn't it entirely a question of definition?

Vessantara: Well this is, yes, in the sense ...

S: Here again one must be careful not to let the rational mind come too much into play. All right there is a certain quality, which you experience, all right you choose to call it passivity. Another quality which you experience you choose to call it receptivity. If you like you can reverse the terms and what is usually called receptivity you can call passivity and vice versa. One must be very careful not to get lost in arguments or even discussions which are simply matters of words.

Again you would be much better occupied flipping through your picture books. It did occur to me the other day that perhaps in the movement as a whole we really need to stress the visual aspect much more than we do. Perhaps encourage the painting of many more murals and various kinds all over the place. Do you see what I mean? It is not enough just to have one in the reception room at the LBC and another outside in the courtyard. That's all at present, apart from some they might be doing up in Glasgow, but perhaps we should go in for that sort of thing much more - the visual, the image as a means of communication. [9] Not rely so much on words.

Alan Angel: That you could say would be a marriage of the action and the beauty rather than us just going to look at other people's beauty. To actually...

S: Yes. It isn't just a question of so to speak passively enjoying, though I doubt whether you can really passively enjoy a work of art. You have to use your imagination, which is an act of experience. But certainly we should also ourselves be involved in the process of creating. Not just contemplating other people's creations, however inspiring we may find them.

I have recently been reading about the ideas of Herbert Read, I suppose some of you have heard of him. He was of the opinion that if only art could be introduced into education and people's imaginations really stimulated it would solve all world problems. He was a little less confident towards the end of his life when the nuclear bomb emerged on the horizon but there is great truth in what he says. It is the development of the imagination which is really all-important.

Vessantara: In the Steiner system of education don't they give children ..., fairly early on in their education then feed them lots and lots of myths and stories?

S: Yes. I think this is quite important, not only for children but for everybody, myths and stories are very important. I can remember when I was a child, fairy tales played a very important part in my life and I can remember, when I must have been 6, 7, 8, because it was before I was confined to bed as an invalid, I used to go along to the public library, I joined the children's section, I think I was too young even to join the children's section but anyway I did. I got out that whole series of fairy tale books edited by Andrew Lang who was quite a distinguished, what does one call them, not mythologist, well he was a sort of anthropologist at the end of the last century. And they had names like the gold fairy book and the silver fairy book and the blue fairy book and the red fairy book - there were ten or twelve of them. I have never seen any of them since.

V: They are still...

S: They are still available? I read through these again and again. Then I graduated, even at that tender age, on to something about ancient Egypt. It was just published - this might have been a couple of years later -, a book called 'Winged Pharaoh', by Joan Grant which purported to be her reminiscences of life as an Egyptian princess: Her Various initiations and all that. But again, the visual, the imaginative and mythological element was very strongly present.

(End side one)

... before eight. I had my first contact with classical Greek mythology or at least classical Greek legend, one might say. I got hold of a retelling of the story of the Iliad, it was called the Story of the Iliad. And I remember very clearly what really interested me was not the heroes, I am sorry to say, but the Gods and Goddesses, these interested me much more than anything else. So I think that it is very, well necessary, as perhaps the most essential part of one's education to be in contact with this sort of material, either [10] through myth and legend in the literary form or in a visual form, or with some kind of visionary art.

David Luce: Steiner actually talks of the imaginative faculty in somewhat the way that we're using it now, developing that before the rational faculty. Art and music are very heavily

emphasized in the early years.

Dave Rice: The day before I left Sydney to come over here I went to an open day in a Steiner school and every classroom I went into from five years up to twelve years was just a mass of colour. It was really rich and vibrant, I was really struck by that, it was far more so than in an ordinary school.

S: Colour features, or figures, very prominently, obviously in the visual arts, especially in painting and in visionary experience. And there are all sorts of theories regarding the psychology of colours and so on, there are these Lucher tests and so on. In the Vajrayana, in the Tantra, there is this symbolism of colours. I think we have to be very careful not to intellectualise all this but there is no doubt that colour has a very powerful emotional impact and colour is, in a sense, nourishing. That if you don't encounter sufficient colour you are impoverished, if in your environment there isn't sufficient colour. If your environment is predominantly grey and brown and black that certainly has an effect on you.

It is certainly interesting that in the course of the last few years there has been some change in the colours worn by people in the friends; they used to be relatively colourless. I remember even when we had our first batch of ordinations, the people being ordained, that is to say the men, they all agreed among themselves to wear dark suits. That's significant, isn't it? I don't think any one of them would have been seen dead in a pair of red or green trousers, no. Or even a bright red or bright green tie. I also noticed that the colours in which people appear, though they admittedly do appear in colours, are often very crude colours, very harsh colours, rather harsh yellows and reds. This may not be altogether their fault, because obviously one has to take what is available. There are no subtle delicate colours, more often than not, not even among the ladies where one might expect, perhaps, to find them. But nonetheless this efflorescence of colour is psychologically and even spiritually quite significant.

I was also reminded, just a minute or two ago, of what sometimes happens in India among Hindus. The Hindu mother will point out to the infant, long before it could speak, the figures or pictures of Gods and Goddesses and familiarize the infant with those figures. And even, going back a stage further, while the woman is pregnant, before she even gives birth, she is encouraged to look a lot at pictures of Gods and Goddesses. So in a traditional culture, in a traditional civilization, one has all these things. (Long pause)

Anything further? I was just thinking back, a few minutes ago, to a retreat which we had at Keffolds in the comparatively early days, I doubt if any of you were on it, I think not even Subhuti. I remembered it because what happened was I was talking one afternoon about the Tibetan wheel of life, I think I have spoken of this before, this particular incident. I was talking about the Tibetan Wheel of life and for some reason or other it occurred to me just, not simply to talk about it but actually to draw it for peoples benefit. So we did manage to find a blackboard and I think some chalks [11] so I drew it. Not only that but I encouraged also the people present, there must have been about twenty of them or so, to copy the wheel of life from my version of it on the blackboard and my comments and explanations. So about twenty odd people spent practically the whole afternoon very happily sketching their own wheels of life. And I noticed that they all got very absorbed in it, it was quite a different sort of atmosphere from what it would have been had they merely been sitting there listening to my explanations and making notes. Perhaps there is something to be said for encouraging this sort of thing. People producing their own pictures or their own images rather than just relying

entirely on verbalization.

I think I did at the time intend to follow this up but not very long after this I left London and it never did get followed up. I thought it might be a good idea, in fact I have mentioned it from time to time since, to have a sort of visually oriented retreat where one spends some time in the afternoon getting people to draw or to depict for themselves some of these forms, some of these symbols, instead of eternally talking about them. Get everybody and just painting away.

There has even been talk of just having sort of painting classes, in the context of retreats. Again this is something we have never got around to, perhaps because we haven't had the people with the necessary knowledge and experience to be able to do these sort of things. It is not exactly art as therapy, one doesn't really want to go into that, but it is art in the creative sense, or at least in the originitive sense, in the interest of the spiritual life. I think I did suggest, although it was only a verbal suggestion we never actually got around to doing it, that you could actually draw or paint your own mandala. Be quite honest about it and putting in the middle of your mandala whatever you really felt in fact, in practice, was the most important thing in your life. Arranging all the other things around that, the more important they were the nearer they would be to the centre, the less important the nearer they would be to the circumference, but you would have to be perfectly honest. Not automatically put the Buddha in the middle, even though that wasn't really the way you felt. You have to ask yourself what really was the most important thing, maybe it was money or success or sex or development or whatever.

Perhaps sometimes we should do things more in this sort of way, there is plenty of room for experiment, intelligent experiment.

Rudiger J: You mentioned the other day that there is quite a difference between visual art and poetry on one side and music on the other. Could you...

S: Music, of course, doesn't represent anything, except of course programmed music, which is considered by most musicians a bit of an aberration. Of course you could say that some modern art, say abstract, doesn't express anything but that is a comparatively recent development. It's figurative art, representational art which is, so to speak, standard or normal. So because poetry and the visual arts have much more of an intelligible meaning, they are differentiated from music, which doesn't have an intelligible meaning in that sort of way.

I think it is quite significant, say, that some of Bach's music was originally written for a sacred performance [12] and he just took the tune and adapted it for a secular performance, as if to say there was nothing essentially spiritual in the music. If you hear it as part of a mass you are very uplifted, it's a mass and it is celebrating God and the saints and all the rest of it. But then Bach can take that same tune, which is giving you such wonderful spiritual emotion and he can use it in a purely secular context where there is nothing of God or the angels and the saints at all. So it is as though music is different, in that sort of way. I must say that quite recently something struck me quite forcibly when I was reading a recent book, it was Zen Comes West. I think it was Zen Comes West, no, Dawn of Zen in the West.

V: Zen Dawn in the West.

S: Zen Dawn in the West, edited by Philip Kapleau. Did anybody read that? (V: Yes) Was



there anything in it that struck you about music?

V: About music, no.

S: Do you remember Kapleau's autobiography, the autobiography was very, very interesting, I personally found it very interesting, more interesting than most of the other things in the book.

Do you remember his autobiography?

V: Not really.

S: What was he before he got into Zen?

V: He was a court stenographer.

S: He was a court stenographer, and where did that work take him?

V: It took him to Nuremberg.

S: And what struck him when he was recording those trials. (V: Ahh) Now we are getting closer.

Andy Friends: That the executioners doing the mass killings at the concentration camps were listening to Bach in the evenings.

S: Yes, they listened to Bach in the evenings. And that struck Kapleau, what did Kapleau think? He thought 'culture is not enough'. And that set him on the path of Zen, ultimately. culture is not enough.

Perhaps he should have said that music is not enough. But perhaps you can say, yes, culture is not enough, you need actually, as the bridge into the spiritual life, into the transcendental, something of an intelligible nature. Do you see what I mean? It is as though reality can be, I won't say communicated, but suggested most effectively, despite all its limitations, through the medium of concepts. That the image, even though more adequate than the sound, even the image fails in the long run. Do you see what I mean? And this is why the intellect, again with all its limitations, is so important in the spiritual life.

Perhaps not the intellect in the narrow modern sense, not just the rational mind, but the illumined concept, one might say. One might even say, if one liked, the intuition, but I don't like that word. So it's as though to the experience of the [13] image you have to join the experience of what I have called the illumined concept to give you access to ultimate reality. So I think, therefore, that music, however great, can be dissociated from any content, especially any, what I call intelligible content. I am refraining, I am avoiding using the word conceptual, I think it is too narrow. But music can be dissociated from any intelligible content. Whereas in the case of the visual arts and especially in the case of poetry there is an intelligible content. You could even say that poetry should suffice for the spiritual life because there is an intelligible element in it, but not the visual arts and not music. They could reinforce it but they are not self-sufficient.

You couldn't gain Enlightenment through music, you couldn't gain Enlightenment through the visual arts though they might help considerably. But you could gain Enlightenment with the help solely of poetry, assuming of course that the poetry contained an element of the intelligible to the highest possible degree.

Murray Wright: How does that tie in with these stories of Buddhas, say in other realms, who teach purely through the smell of incense or something like that?

S: Well that is another realm.

Murray Wright: So you are just speaking specifically in terms of the human framework?

S: Yes, and how things might be in other worlds where things are completely differently constituted, we can't really say. Perhaps in some other worlds perfumes, even sounds become intelligible, have an intelligible content. But they don't so far as we are concerned.

Alan Angel: Indian music went some way towards that, I feel. With their system of rags there's certain tonic scales which correspond roughly with certain sets of emotions.

S: But again it is emotions. You need, for the complete Enlightenment experience, emotion to be blended with the illumined intellect. So yes, Indian music does give you an experience of wonderful moods, the rags and raginis. It is just like Bach, again, in a way, but where is the intelligible element? That doesn't seem to come in. It can be associated externally, but that is another matter.

I mean for instance the music of Bach can be set to words, or the words can be set to music and the two together can certainly function as a means to Enlightenment depending on the nature of the words. But it's as though you can associate almost any music with those words, within reason, and you can take those words away and substitute another set of words. You could, say - let's have an example - you could have a very beautiful tune set to words which meant, 'Oh man, think only of Enlightenment', and you can be deeply moved and aspire to Enlightenment because of that. The same melody, the same music could be set to words meaning, 'Oh man, eat drink and be merry for tomorrow you die' and it could put you in that sort of mood, the same melody.

Music in that way is very strange, it could suggest almost anything to you. We could sit here and all listen to the same piece of music. Some of you could start thinking about your girlfriends and get into a sentimental mood, others might start [14] thinking of meditation, others might start thinking of the sea. Others might start thinking of the falling of the leaves, others might think that the music really represented dawn and sunrise. Somebody else might think it represented the midnight sky. Music is infinitely suggestive, it is sort of Protean. It doesn't have any intelligible content of its own, it's as though it can be associated with or even stimulate or evoke any particular intelligible content that you please.

Music is the sphinx without a secret. (laughter)

Alan Angel: I think why I bought it up, the idea of rags, was because the Indians seem to have an integrated system of philosophy, mythology, of dance and music.

S: This is true. Music is very important in Indian spiritual life because it arouses emotion, especially the devotional feelings and then those can be directed to whoever or whatever represents the goal of the spiritual life in that particular tradition. It is very effective.

But, you can easily fall away. I have talked with some of my friends in India, especially my young Nepali friends and some of them who have told me that they can go along to a big Hindu puja, some big festival, where there is lots of puja and arati (?) there's raising of lights and ringing of bells and very inspiring devotional music in praise of Ram and Krishna and their devotional feelings really come welling up, they are really carried away worshipping Krishna and worshipping Ram.

But as soon as it is all over they start feeling very sexual and they want to find some woman as quickly as possible. That's the sort of reaction, so to speak. The emotion isn't, there is nothing to hold the emotion up there and really direct it to the transcendental. The music itself can't do that.

Mike Scherk: I think there is another aspect though, Bhante, which is that music in some ways is a more extreme range of ways of proceeding, in the sense that there is a more extreme gap between someone who just puts music on a machine and plays it and just sits there and doesn't make any effort and is passive in the most literal sense, through to someone who really pours his energy into it and really listens. And the effect can be completely different.

Because I had heard that Kapleau tale, somebody else had repeated and it reminded me of going to the opera in Hamburg which I did only twice, the Mozart operas, and came out really depressed both times though it was good performances because, what had struck me overwhelmingly was that it was a German bourgeois occasion in the worst possible sense of the word. And I am sure everybody knows what I mean, that people were there.., it was a social and cultural ritual and had nothing to do with the music really. And I associated that with what Kapleau was saying, that they probably went home and they switched on a record, radio of Bach or whatever it was, but I find it very difficult to believe that they really listened and really opened in any way to it.

S: As far as I remember the account suggests that. That they appreciated Bach, but obviously it is open to one to question whether they had any real appreciation of Bach, but in a way that begs the question.

Mike: I think some of the things that Mozart said about other composers and himself, especially if you compare [15] what about he said about composers like Gluck whom he despised or one of the Bach sons or Haydon whom he really admired, he speaks as if there are these objective criterion which, in a sense, I feel you are denying about music. But he was talking, I suppose, about whether it was good music or bad and his dismissive comment of Gluck was that he had no taste; bang, that was it. As if there was somehow something a bit more objective.

S: Well obviously music as performed exists as an object but what I am saying is, in a way, one might say Schopenhauer's view of music as the extreme of subjectivity. In a way the most romantic of all the arts.

Dave Rice: Would it not be possible for a person listening to an inspired piece of classical

music to have some kind of intelligible concept or symbology that they place upon the music.

S: Yes you can consciously associate the intelligible with the music and consciously use the music to reinforce your understanding of or commitment to that intelligible element, whatever it was, you can certainly do that.

Dave Rice: So what you were saying is that music in and of itself cannot bring you to Enlightenment.

S: This is how it appears to me, to the extent that I have given the matter thought so far. And it seems to be confirmed by Kapleau's anecdote.

Anyway, this struck quite a note of warning for me, or for the Friends generally, I felt. Especially Kapleau's words, 'culture is not enough'. Even the greatest appreciation of the arts and going along to art galleries and reading poetry, even poetry, perhaps is no substitute for, say, meditation and the attempt to develop Insight and work and all the rest of it. It can certainly help, it is certainly a powerful reinforcement and it is certainly even an indispensable element, but you can't really evolve as an individual, I think, solely on the arts, not on the arts as they are known to us.

If ours was a culture in which the arts and spiritual life were completely unified, that might be another matter, but not on the arts as we have them, I think. So I think, I saw this as a bit of a warning because I felt that perhaps some people within the FWBO were becoming a bit too involved with the arts, or maybe a bit involved in the wrong sort of way. Almost as though that could be a substitute for actual spiritual practice and practice along more traditional lines. As though if you went to the opera occasionally or read a bit of Shelley or Blake, well this could count as your spiritual life, it isn't really enough. Or even a lot of operas and a lot of Blake! It still wouldn't count, though admittedly in Blake there is some intelligible element, as I've called it. But it doesn't go far enough, especially when he goes a bit Christian, at least in terminology.

I also wonder what we are going to do with our ex-untouchable Buddhists Friends as regards culture. Because Indian culture is predominantly Hindu and they want nothing to do with Hinduism. They don't want to listen to classical Indian music because it is all rags and raginis, it is all dedicated to Hindu Gods and Goddesses, they want nothing to do with that. Some of them, under Lokamitra's tutelage I think, have learned to appreciate Bach and Beethoven, believe it or not. Maybe [16] Sagaramati's influence is reinforcing that. But of course the majority of them don't have much time even to listen to these things. There is no question of going to concerts anyway for most of them, of any kind.

But yes, I think some cultural element, I think, is necessary in their lives. I don't know whether we can encourage them, at least the English-knowing ones, to appreciate Shelley and Blake, perhaps we can. The Christian element, say in Blake, doesn't bother them, because it is just so remote. Any more than the Hindu element or connections of Indian classical music just don't bother us.

But it's too close to the bone, as it were for them to...

S: Yes, indeed yes. Quite apart from the fact that most proponents of Indian classical music or

dance are brahmins, or many of them are brahmins and they would certainly not accept, or most of them would not accept, the traditionally minded brahmins would not accept low caste people as students, they would be excluded from all that anyway.

But I do remember a quite interesting experience. There is a certain amount of visual art among them. One or two of them have taken to sculpture and I remember one of the most interesting experiences in my very early days amongst them was seeing somebody's dust sculptures. I don't suppose you have ever heard of dust sculptures, in India there is lots of dust especially around Bombay and in some cases there are thick piles of dust. Around some of these chawls, these very run-down slum tenements. On one of the visits I was shown a great bank of dust where a local ex-untouchable artist had executed dust sculptures and they were really very beautiful, some of them, heads of Buddhas, and so on all in the solid dust. This shows that they have got that gift and it shows itself under those unfavourable conditions. They had no other materials except dust and this particular young man, he used that. There was this whole row of quite beautiful figures, it was in sort of half relief in the dust. They couldn't have lasted but I remember them very, very well.

So perhaps some of them could be encouraged to do Buddha figures and so on. And certainly the Buddha figures you get in India, usually made of plaster, are pretty awful. There is no sensitivity there at all, usually.

But to come back to the main problem that emerges, perhaps culture can't lead you directly to Enlightenment. The arts, especially music can't lead you directly to Enlightenment, but they have a very important place in the spiritual life. Because they provide a means of transition, just as the archetypal level itself provides a means of transition from the level of pure sense experience to the level of the transcendental. Or from the level of the rational to the level of the transcendental. It is very easy to be misled by a rational image, though that is a bit of a contradiction in terms, of the transcendental and think you really know it and have grasped it because you have that conceptual image. No, you are much safer with the real images, because the real images, they really do help you develop your higher and your more refined emotions. And you need to develop those higher more refined emotions if you are to make any progress at all.

So this is where the arts do come in, especially the more traditional arts, arts which do invoke actual images, archetypal images, more powerfully. A lot of modern art, of course, doesn't [17] I was reading recently about an artist, I don't know if anybody has heard about him, but he sounds very interesting, called Cecil Collins. Has anybody heard about him or of him? He teaches in the Central school of Art in London, apparently. He has had a number of exhibitions and his art is full of, one could say, archetypal images including angels, rather strange angels, including wounded angels.

When I was in Helsinki I went to an art gallery and there also there was a very interesting picture of a wounded angel. As far as I know there is no connection between the two artists but this angel had, it had been damaged. Its wings had been damaged and its head had been hurt and it had a bandage round its head, a white bandage and it was being carried on a sort of stretcher. The angel wasn't lying horizontal, it was sitting up on a plank I suppose, carried on two poles by two bearers. And the angel was quite crumpled, its wings were damaged and the caption was "the wounded angel". So clearly this was a sort of symbol and it did come over quite powerfully.

Vessantara: It wasn't being carried by angels ?

S: No, as far as I remember it was by two ordinary beings in, I think not exactly dark suits but darkly clad. The angel was clad in white and had sort of white wings, whitish wings, sort of fair hair. It wasn't a very, in a sense, beautiful painting, it wasn't trying to be sort of pretty pretty. A bit rough, a bit primitive. But I remember the angel had his head bandaged and there was a bit of blood on the bandage and his wings were quite damaged, so one wonders what it means. Who is the angel, the damaged angel?

So in this way art can make you think, there is an intelligible element there and clearly the painter whether he realized it consciously or not was trying to communicate something. That is the way he saw things. It may not even have passed through his rational mind. You could say this is an image of humanity in the twentieth century. Well you can say that, but do you feel something of that sort, perhaps the artist did feel that, but perhaps that though didn't go through his mind. It doesn't need to because he perceives directly in terms of images.

There is a lot of this in the visual arts, you remember, I think it is Burne-Jones' painting of the mermaid pulling the drowned sailor right down into the depths of the sea with a strange slightly gleeful smile on her face, and he is clearly dead. Well what could have been in the artist's mind, so to speak, when he painted that picture, what is it trying to say. Perhaps he didn't even know himself, at least not know in the sense of formulating it to himself in conceptual terms. I'm sure he wasn't trying to put across a message. Sometimes the artist doesn't know why he represents something, because his experience is entirely in visual form, his communication is in visual form it doesn't go through the rational mind, it by-passes the rational mind. But the images produce a very powerful effect. All the more powerful for not passing through the rational mind but it can give all sorts of suggestions to the rational mind and the rational mind can ponder the meaning and develop a sort of Insight, you could say. At least a deeper understanding through contemplating those images.

Some art, perhaps you could say the best art, does this kind of thing and fulfils that sort of function. One can think of lots of pictures. There is Tobias and the Angel, well there a sort of explanation lies, in a way, too readily to hand. I think one needs examples that are a bit more recondite, the [18] meaning of which one has to puzzle over a bit. Which are a bit mysterious, it shouldn't be too obvious. You shouldn't be able to say; there is the angel leading little Tobias by the hand, oh yes that's your Kalyana Mitra leading you along. No, that's a bit too easy.

Clive Pomfret: There's Autumn Feast, Salvador Dali.

S: Autumn Feast, what does that show?

Clive Pomfret: There's two sort of forms one smooth and one quite rough. So you begin to identify one with the female and one with the male. They are both tucking into each other.

S: Devouring each other (V: Yes)

Vessantara: With knives and forks. (S: That's right)

Clive Pomfret: One's got a spoon, I think the other has a knife and one is slicing a piece off ...

S: It's not entitled 'The relationship' is it? (laughter) It could be. Yes, I remember that one.

Sometimes the image transcends the particular cultural tradition to which it belongs. You can enjoy Fra Angelico's angels without being bothered by thoughts or associations of a Christian nature. They are lovely multi-coloured wings and all the rest of it, you can just forget about Christianity. Maybe Fra Angelica himself forgot about Christianity when he was painting those angels. In a way the angels were more important than Christianity.

Images are interesting, they do sometimes disturb people a bit. Some of you know, many of you know, that in my study at Sukhavati I have got a reproduction. Holman Hunt's 'The Scapegoat' and I notice that this troubles some of my visitors. They are not quite easy about it, not quite happy with it, some of course don't even notice it at all which is perhaps even worse. But several visitors have said: why have you got there? What does it mean? They are clearly not quite easy with it. As though I ought to have a big, beautiful Buddha picture there or at least a Bodhisattva or something of that sort. So I usually say, 'I like that painting of that old goat' (laughter) I sometimes draw attention to the expression in his eyes and they start wondering what I am getting at. So I say, 'can't you see what that goat is thinking; it is quite clear what he is thinking', they can't make it out what he is thinking but it seems quite obvious.

So it is interesting to see people's reactions to images, it's a feeling reaction, an emotional reaction, which is of course quite in order. But it is quite interesting to see what sort of emotional reaction they have to different pictures, different paintings.

Let's leave it there.

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Question and Answer Session 5

Sangharakshita: All right, who's leading off?

Vessantara: Our group has some questions.

Bob Jones: In a lot of the Pali texts, Bhante, Mara appears to converse with the Buddha in several passages ... in which I've started confusing him in terms of not obviously understanding exactly who or what Mara is, and therefore why he is labelled or even why he attempts to tempt the Unconditioned mind.

S: The Pali texts, as well as the Sanskrit ones, mention four kinds, or four classes, of Mara. This is significant, not to say relevant, inasmuch as it makes it clear that Mara cannot be as it were allegorised away. I'll enumerate these four classes or categories of Mara. These are: first of all Kilesa Mara, called Klesa Mara in Sanskrit. Klesa or Kilesa Mara means Mara in the sense of the defilements; the defilements are called Mara That is to say: all unskilful mental states are called Mara. So here Mara is simply a personification, so to speak, of unskilful mental states - nothing more than that. This is called Klesa Mara or Kilesa Mara.

Then there is Mrityu Mara or Macchu Mara, which means Mara as the personification of death. Mrityu in Sanskrit and macchu in Pali means 'death'.

Voice: How do you spell the Sanskrit?

S: Mrityu is m-r-i-t-y-u, but it's not really 'ri' but r, which is a different letter of the Devanagari alphabet. So it's Mrtyu - or Macchu in Pali - Mara. Two long 'a' s in Mara.

So here Mara is the embodiment of death, that is to say the embodiment or personification of the fact that all conditioned things have an end.

Then there is Khandha Mara or Skandha Mara - khandha is the familiar 'five khandha' or 'five skandha' term - that is to say, Mara as the embodiment of conditioned existence itself, or, if you like, as the personification of conditioned existence itself.

And fourthly and lastly there is Devaputta, or Devaputra, Mara, which means Mara as the son of a god. This is Mara as a mythological entity. So the fact that the fourth category of Mara is Mara as a mythological entity show that that is to be distinguished from Mara [2] simply as a personification of unskilful states or of death or of conditioned existence. In other words, just as in the same way in the universe there are Buddhas and brahmas and devas, there are also Maras, that is to say, actually embodied forces of, so to speak, evil. Do you see what I mean? This is a literal question and a literal reply. In this sense we can quite legitimately take this fourfold classification quite literally - that Buddhism does recognize the existence in the universe of malignant spirits who are trying to obstruct the spiritual progress of other living beings and which of course pay special attention to those beings who have attained, or who are about to attain, higher levels of spiritual development.

So Mara as such, Mara as Devaputra Mara, features quite prominently in the Buddhist scriptures. He appears on quite a number of different occasions. Now this is obviously something which is difficult for the 'rational' - inverted commas - mind to accept. But, nonetheless, this is the standpoint or position of the Buddhist scriptures and Buddhist tradition. For those who are interested in pursuing the subject, there is a book called Mara and the Mythology of Evil' by Trevor Ling, which was his earliest publication and which is quite informative. You can't hope from Trevor Ling for anything of the nature of a philosophical evaluation or spiritual approach, but nonetheless he does put together all the scriptural references to this subject.

Mara, of course, is a kind of deva. That is to say, he inhabits - if that is the right word - the kamaloka. He has no access to dhyanic forms, to the brahmaloka realms. He can only function on the, as it were, material level, the material plane. And, of course, one is born or reborn as a Mara and can decrease from being a Mara.

Clive Pomfret: How is it then that Mara appears to the Buddha on the occasion of his Enlightenment? Did he appear (unclear) ...

S: Well, Mara appears to the Buddha but he doesn't appear to the Buddha on the plane of his Enlightenment, so to speak. He appears on a much lower plane. Just as an ordinary unenlightened human being can appear to the Buddha on the ordinary human level, Mara appears on, one might say, the subtle material level and is perceptible on that level by the Buddha and by others who have what is called the divine vision, divine eye, or clairvoyance.

Michael Scherk: A double question: Is it always possible to distinguish which of these four



Maras is operative, or can it sometimes be mixed? And: What is the evil in the sense of which the fourth Mara is a personification? Is it unskilful actions, or is it something ... ?

S: Well, this raises the whole question of the nature of evil. One uses the word 'evil' - Trevor Ling uses this word 'evil' in the title [3] of his book - but evil in Buddhism is somewhat different from evil in Christianity in the sense that there is no, so to speak, eternal principle of evil or incorrigible principle of evil; incorrigible would be a better word here. It is possible for Mara eventually to set foot on the Path of Enlightenment in a way that, say, in Christianity it's never considered possible - except by very heretical people like Origen - for Satan or the Devil to set his foot on the path of salvation. In fact, it is explicitly affirmed that Mara, or the Maras, will all one day become Enlightened Buddhas. But they are beings who, at least for the time being, are deliberately pursuing the path of what we can only call evil; who are deliberately doing harm to themselves and to others, especially by way of impeding ... (recording fades out) ... being in whom skilful mental states very decidedly predominate.

Michael Scherk: So, in a sense, the definition of evil depends on kusala and akusala?

S: Yes. (recording fades out) ... Thither and thither by his hair, by the Devil, or devils. So It's a quite different sort of conception. The Buddhist conception is more that the Good has no difficulty standing up to the Evil at all; whereas the Christian conception is more that the Good is in constant battle with Evil and is in danger every moment of being overcome. Some people might say that the Buddhist view was rather over-optimistic and that, while it may be true in the case of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and arhants and those approaching those levels that Mara is easily seen through and overcome, it may not be true of ordinary, unenlightened beings to the same extent.

Malcolm Webb: It's not very good for your confidence; (remaining words of sentence unclear)

S: You can, but it requires a very decided effort. I mean, a Buddha can simply shut his eyes and ... (recording fades out)

Voice: Can I ask a question that's often come up with beginners? They want to put things in a nutshell: 'What is Buddhism? Is it a religion? Is it a philosophy?' It's a common old beginners' question. I always get stumped and I have to...

S: Well, why do you get stumped?

Voice: Well, because I feel I have to understand that person's conditioned attitude to religion first. Or do you feel that there is a term you could actually use?

[4]

S: I don't think that there is, if you ask me what I personally think. Because in the East, in India, there's really no term quite corresponding to our 'philosophy', or at all corresponding to the Greek word 'philosophy'. There's no term really corresponding to 'religion'. I mean, dharma doesn't correspond to religion and it certainly doesn't correspond to philosophy.

So perhaps the best thing one can do is to say, well, Buddhism originated in India and there it was known simply as the Dharma. The word 'Dharma' cannot really be translated as

'philosophy'. It can't really be translated as 'religion'. But it's got certain features in common with those things. Like philosophy it is concerned with ultimate reality; like religion it is concerned with actual practice and devotion. But you can't really equate Buddhism either with philosophy or with religion. You have to follow a sort of middle path. (Pause)

I think in dealing with beginners and new people we have to be quite careful not to become impatient, and I think you have to be able to distinguish between genuinely perplexed, muddled people and people who are just trying to be smart and clever. And I think you can very quickly spot the difference between the two. And if somebody is genuinely muddled and just genuinely trying to find out, but is just really confused in his or her thinking, be quite patient with them. But if, of course, someone is just trying to be smart and clever and argue for the sake of argument, well, be a little bit shorter and sharper with him or with her. (Pause) I mean, don't jump on people just because they want to use the word 'God' or the word 'religion'. You have to handle them quite gently to begin with. It doesn't mean you shouldn't be firm and clear, but recognize that they are just using whatever words come to hand, whatever words they know. And they're just trying to express themselves as best they can ... and that they may be completely ignorant of Buddhism. That's perhaps why they've come along, they just want to find out. It may be news to them that in Buddhism there is no personal God. It may be quite a shock to some at first. Or the idea that the Buddha himself is not God. Or that you can not have a God in a religion - this may be quite a new idea. I mean, we get quite used to it - that Buddhism is a non-theistic religion we take it for granted - but for the majority of people, in England at least, the idea that there are religions which are non-theistic is a quite new idea. The idea of God and the idea of religion are for most people inseparable.

Alan Angel: How far do you think it's valid to use, or to believe, to understand, prajna paramita as being a manifestation, a personification, of Reality?

[5]

S: Well, I'd say - if I was asked for my own view - that one has to question this whole idea of 'reality' and 'personification of reality'. It suggests that reality is something sort of abstract, something conceptual, which needs to be personified to make it more accessible. I would altogether deny that. One might even say that reality is not impersonal, certainly from the Vajrayana point of view. It's not a question of personified reality; reality is personal. Not that it's personal as distinct from being impersonal. It's personal and impersonal. You can't categorize it really as being either this, that, or the other. So not that reality is in reality impersonal but you happen to personify it for certain purposes: that isn't really the Mahayana or Vajrayana position. (Pause) But I suggest you don't go into things of that sort with a beginner. (Laughter)

Michael Scherk: In some ways the more difficult beginner questions arise from those beginners who think that they know a lot about Buddhism already; who want to contribute their micchaditthis to the general discussion, or expound at length on them.

S: Well, one has to be quite careful with such people. Let them have their say to some extent but don't allow them to monopolize the discussion. It may require a bit of tact to be able to do this in a friendly way that doesn't provoke a reaction, or which doesn't make them think you're just trying to avoid the discussion. And you can always make it clear that you are very willing to talk with them about that matter afterwards; but very often they are not interested in that.

They want to hold forth in front of a whole lot of people.

Malcolm Webb: I have two questions to ask (words obscure) The first question is: What relation to Enlightenment does the kundalini have? Why this question came up is that once I heard it didn't have any connection at all.

S: Well, kundalini is a term of Hindu Tantric yoga; it's not a Buddhist term. Let's first of all be quite clear about that. The corresponding Buddhist term is 'chandali'. Chandali, or kundalini, literally means 'that which is coiled up'. You can look on it as a symbol, or you can take it more literally than that. It's usually regarded as that power, that energy, that force, which is 'coiled up' - inverted commas - i.e. which is latent in the psycho physical personality of the human being. And Hindu Tantric yoga, as the corresponding Buddhist Tantric yoga, envisages a series of - sometimes it's seven, sometimes five, sometimes four, sometimes three - chakras, or psychic centres, as they're sometimes called, - literally 'wheels' - strung out along the median nerves. And the kundalini is regarded or imagined as ascending the median nerve, up the central canal, and piercing one lotus after another. And, as [6] each lotus is pierced, there is a release of energy on the level which the lotus symbolizes, or is co-ordinated with.

So if one looks at it in this way, well, yes, there is some connection between the kundalini on the one hand, or the chandali, and Enlightenment. The ascent of the kundalini through the chakras, or the ascent of the chandali through the chakras up the avadhuti - as it's called in Buddhism - or susumna - as it's called in Hinduism - does represent the spiritual path itself from a sort of meditative point of view, or in terms of an ascent from lower to higher levels of consciousness. But in this particular system these levels are symbolized by different levels within the psycho-physical organism itself. Because, in the Hindu Tantra - in the Buddhist Tantra too, I think - as in some Western systems, the microcosm is the mirror of the macrocosm. That is to say, just as in the universe there are different levels - the kamaloka, the rupaloka, the arupaloka, and beyond - in the same way in the individual human being there are different levels which can then be regarded as ... (recording fades out) ... chandali can, yes, be assimilated to the bodhicitta. Because again it's a question of something which is germinal to begin with developing through a series of stages. You could say that the imagery of the kundalini and the chandali is dilemmic, and it makes the body, so to speak, its field of operation.

I think the confusion arises when certain movements of energy within the body are actually identified with purely spiritual processes. In the Buddhist Tantric system, in the Vajrayana, actually they distinguish three kundalinis and three lots of centres. There are physical centres, there is the nervous system in the physical sense. For instance, you've got a solar plexus, which is an actual ganglion or network of nerves coming together to a certain point. Well, that's on the level of the physical body. Then, according to the Buddhist system, there is a subtle counterpart of that on the psychic level, as it were, that is to say, the level that is perceived by the divine eye. And then there is a wisdom centre, which has a purely, you might say visionary, even transcendental existence. So what Buddhists are concerned about really is the third, though the first and the second may constitute stepping stones to the third, or may constitute symbols for the third. But what we are really concerned with in Buddhism is wisdom-energy; not nervous energy, and not even subtle energy, but wisdom energy. So there's a rather different point of view. Do you see what I mean? A lot of Hindu yogis go in for kundalini practices and kundalini yoga in the more literal sense and they certainly do produce some extraordinary results in the sense of stirring up energy in different ways in their

own physical bodies and producing even certain physical symptoms.

Dave Rice: There are many comparisons with that and the taking of [7] hallucinogens like LSD. Because it seems to me that LSD stirs up a lot of energies too, but I don't in any way see that it's related to wisdom. It's just stirring up of energies. And I think that the same can be applied to the kundalini.

S: Very likely.

Voice: (words obscure)

S: This so-called kriya yoga is concerned with kundalini: this yoga which is taught by Baba Muktananda for instance - he is very concerned with this. And it does enter into, as an element it does enter into Buddhist Vajrayana practice too. But there is ... (recording fades out)

[Due to power failures there are several substantial omissions in the recording and the entire last part of the discussion went unrecorded.]

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Questions and Answers Session 4

S: Who's leading off with the questions today then?

Subhuti: Dave Rice is going to lead off. (Laughter)

Dave R: Yes, Dave Rice is going to stick his neck out (laughter) and take the bull by the horns as well. But just before I come to the main question, I just would like to know whether you acknowledge that perhaps some of the myths that are related in the Mahayana Sutra and in the Pali Scriptures might actually have been done and did happen as they were related; whether they are actually symbolic - totally symbolic.

S: I'm not sure which myths you are referring to.

Dave R: Well I would like to know for instance the Mahayana Sutras like the "White Lotus Sutra" and the Vimalakirti Nirdeśa, "The Sutra of Golden Light".

S: So what is the question?

Dave R: Well, do you personally believe that they, that the Buddha might have actually demonstrated these visionary experiences as a tool or a means, if you like, for capturing the attention and the faith of his followers?

S: Well, this is the case according to the Pali Texts, because in the Pali Texts there are several references to the Buddha appearing to his disciples in their meditations. So if the Buddha could appear to his disciples in meditation, well, presumably he could present, as it were, to their consciousness other experiences too. There's also in the Pali Texts themselves the story of Nanda and the Buddha taking Nanda up into the Indra Devaloka. So if he could have shown him a devaloka then why not other realms as well? I see nothing inherently

contradictory in that supposition. Whether he actually did, well you know that is another matter. I see no difficulty in principle.

Dave R: Do you see that method or technique if you like as being useful, beneficial to followers, devotees?

S: Well, if it wasn't then the Mahayana Sutras presumably are wasted on people, hm?

Dave R: Yes, well, I would agree with that, which leads me to my next question. Why do you not demonstrate yourself ... (laughter) ... some of these methods and techniques ... at least it's not to beginners ... (more prolonged laughter obscuring speaker) .. and perhaps reduce your [2] message to something like Bhagwan Rajneesh, which is out of the question, but to a more intimate circle of followers, just to see ... (words obscured by laughter)

S: One can say two things here. Who are the intimate circle of followers? And that is also a question; maybe one shouldn't jump to any conclusions. (Laughter) The second point is that, well, one does so demonstrate. Because when we have these series of talks on the scriptures - like the 'White Lotus Sutra', like the 'Sutra of Golden Light', and like the 'Vimalakirti Nirdeśa' - well, this is obviously the mode of approach. For instance, in the case of the Buddha himself, according to tradition at least, the Buddha didn't necessarily show those worlds in, as it were, visual form - but he recounted those worlds, he described those worlds for the benefit of the people whom he was addressing. And that was one mode of communication on his part. So when we talk about, say, the 'Sutra of Golden Light', then we are adopting - admittedly at second hand - the same sort of approach, and if people are receptive - and we do find some are - well, they do get a very definite impression of those scenes or of those happenings which were originally recounted in those particular sutras. It's a quite different sort of approach, quite different sort of experience, from what we get or what we give when there's simply an exposition, say, of conceptual formulations, though sometimes latent there is powerful insight. But the sort of imaginative response that is evoked by the description or by the exposition of these more colourful Mahayana Sutras is of a quite different order. So that isn't lacking.

Dave Rice: No, certainly not, I'd agree. I guess I'm personally a bit of a connoisseur of special effects though. I mean, to me ... I don't think you can get a more intimate circle than what we have here. (Laughter)

S: That's a bit of an assumption at this stage.

Ratnaguna: So what you're asking is: could Bhante show us .. ? (Obscured by laughter)

S: There are two questions. It is not only a question of whether one can show, but also a question of whether one can see ... because even in the Buddha's day there were people who just didn't see what the Buddha was showing, what the [3] Buddha was putting out. So it is also a question of developing oneself that particular kind of faculty. If one develops that faculty, well then there is plenty to see. The Buddha himself has said that the White Lotus Sutra is always being preached on the spiritual Vulture's Peak, one has only to ascend to that particular realm and to see it and hear it for oneself. So it is not so much a question of calling upon the Buddha to demonstrate this or that, so much as oneself cultivating the necessary organ of vision, the necessary imagination. The Mahayana Sutras, for instance, have been

translated, have been translated for many years, but there are still many Buddhists in the West who just don't take them seriously at all, regard them as so much mythology, regard them as so many colourful additions to the "true" teaching of the Buddha and refuse to consider the, they ... (words obscured by banging noise) ... the teaching of the Buddha.

So you need to have the eye to see, and the eye to appreciate these things. So perhaps, you know, perhaps if one developed that more imaginal organ of vision you see things happening all the time. You see everything, everybody doing all sorts of things not just this or that individual.

Clive P: So you're saying it does depend on the person to be receptive?

S: It's more than a question of receptivity, because one mustn't think of any organ as merely passive, eh? It's a sort of positive, active function or faculty which one exercises.

Clive: So it doesn't just depend on the receptivity of the person or people around, it depends also that they have that faculty developed that visionary faculty developed.

S: Well, when I say yes, it isn't enough to think of that faculty simply in terms of a certain kind of receptivity. It is an actual faculty, it is an actual sort of spiritual organ. Even in the course of ordinary sense perception, it isn't a passive process. I think this has been entirely discounted now by modern psychology, it is not that your senses or your sense mind are purely passive and simply receiving impressions like a piece of blotting paper. They are actively selecting impressions, they are choosing which impressions they will receive. So it is much more the case then with that higher, more visionary faculty. It isn't just a sort of passive receptivity, you just don't sort of sit back and wait for a vision to unfold. You, as it were, reach out towards the vision.

Dave R: There have been accounts though, haven't there, of individuals who have been surprised, as it were. In other words they haven't been [4] consciously aware of developing that particular faculty at the time and it comes up from behind, as it were, unexpectedly. So in that case that brings us back to the Guru, doesn't it?

S: Hm, well, the possibility is always there, the imaginal faculty is there even in an undeveloped or even in a highly rudimentary form. So certain sets of circumstances may appeal to that very strongly and develop that in various forms. There maybe a very definite response in a particular kind of situation.

Dave R: Well I guess I'm putting it to you then to perhaps in some way develop the circumstances so that ... (laughter)

S: Well, circumstances can be developed, but circumstances can't be engineered Hm?

Dave R: Can't they? (laughter)

S: Well, I'm making a distinction obviously between developing and engineering. By engineering I mean a sort of rather wilful development, rather than, as it were, allowing things to happen - not without effort - but so to speak naturally and spontaneously. One finds that when there is a circle of people, whether intimate or otherwise, a sort of atmosphere builds

up. There is a sort of heightening of that atmosphere. But one can't think at the beginning: "Well I'm going to build up the atmosphere. I'm going to heighten it". That is what I call engineering, or it can be even manipulation, and it can be, if one isn't careful, even with a, so to speak, non-spiritual motivation. Here we come back to the question of motivation. Well, why is one so keen say to engineer things in this way or to manipulate in this way, rather than allowing them to develop or to grow spontaneously? Perhaps one is in too much of a hurry. Or perhaps one has got, say, a mental idea about something and is trying to grasp the mental idea rather than allowing the reality of the thing actually to develop. One has to watch that too. But how did this whole question arise, what discussion did it emerge from?

Dave R: The discussion was this in the Mitrata Omnibus, where we continued today on the reality or not of myth. Or whether there is truth in myth or not. The factual, historic versus the mythological and the magical.

S: I have gone into all this, one will remember, in several lectures and also in some of the earlier sections of the "Three Jewels" and I've mentioned there, well say in the case of the Buddha's life, there are incidents that we can be reasonably certain did actually happen of an ordinary historical nature. And then there are other incidents which are presented as having [5] happened so to speak historically, but which we can be reasonably certain are myth introduced into the context of history and apparently continuous with it, but actually belonging to a quite different order of reality. But then again, I've also made the point that there are some incidents about which we can't be quite sure. There are some which could be regarded either way. There are some which could actually have taken place, but which are wrongly regarded as myth and similarly there are incidents regarded as mythical which might actually have taken place. So we can distinguish between different categories. But none-the-less that doesn't detract from the quite fundamental distinction between truth of history and truth of myth - truth of myth of course belonging to quite a different order altogether, whether it is inserted into an historical context, or whether it is quite evidently transcending that. Mahayana Sutras, broadly speaking, one can say, at least from the Indian point of view, are sort of myth inserted into history. They are represented as actually happening within the context of the life of the historical Buddha. But, clearly, in most cases they didn't take place historically, they took place on what one can only describe as another level and have a higher order of truth which is more valid, more universal.

Gerald Burns: I thought I detected in the Mitrata section we were studying that you were almost implying that perhaps the poetic truth in some ways is more important than the historical truth.

S: It's more important for the spiritual life. If one is a scientist, if one is an historian, well, the literal, factual, historical truth is more important. For you, as an historian, the spiritual truth of the myth is quite irrelevant ... except to the extent that it tells you what people, as a matter of historic fact, believed at that time. But spiritually, no doubt, the myth is far more important, it gives you much more spiritual nourishment than do the bare facts, the historical facts, of the life of the Buddha.

Clive: So all these incidents of visions being manifest for the benefit of disciples and other, are all situations that developed to that stage rather than were engineered by the Guru, the person who manifested the vision.

S: There are not only in Buddhist tradition but in other traditions too, there are quite a number of instances of visions being induced as the result of, you know, the heightened surrounding atmosphere. But I think [6] one must beware of thinking in terms of someone deliberately doing something. It is a bit akin say to telepathy; you may sometimes become aware of what is happening in someone else's mind. It is as though a consciousness of what is happening in somebody else's mind arises within your mind and then you recognize that what has arisen within your mind is in fact a reflection of what has arisen in somebody else's mind. It is not that you, as it were, say to yourself: "I think I'll have a look into that person's mind this afternoon": it doesn't happen quite like that.

Dave R: No, but then again, on the other hand, there do seem to be some people who have an ability, who've developed an ability for some reason or another in that area, who can quite naturally and frequently reach into people's minds and read their thoughts, or reach into people's ...

S: Ah, but then again, this does not contradict what I am saying. That is to say, there are people within whose minds the thoughts which are passing in other people's minds more easily arise than is the case with other people. Do you see what I mean? But what I mean is that it is not that they say to themselves: "Now let me take a look into somebody else's mind". That is not actually what happens from their side so to speak. It is because they are, as it were, sensitive, they are, as it were, transparent to the thoughts of other people, and as it were, spontaneously reflect them. And if you, well sometimes ... that, well they may not even recognize maybe, not even care to recognize, that those thoughts actually originate in the minds of other people, but none-the-less they act in accordance with those thoughts. Do you see what I mean? For instance, there is the story I heard once about a certain teacher with whom - this story was told me by a friend of mine - this teacher had a little Buddha image on a shelf. So when this friend went along to actually see him, I think it was to say good-bye, he was going away for a long time, the thought passed through his mind, you know, "How nice it would be if the guru were to give me that image". And no sooner had the thought passed through his mind than the guru reached out his hand and took the image off the shelf and said: 'Please take this.' Now it is not that the guru necessarily recognized consciously that this particular person wanted that image, but he is sensitive, he is tuned into the disciple. So even though he may not go through that conscious process of thought: "He has formed a thought desiring the image, therefore let me give him", he, as it were spontaneously on account of his inner sensitivity, acts in accordance with the needs of that disciple.

[7]

Dave R: Where things have gone wrong is that people have unfortunately interpreted that as being some kind of psychic mysterious mental telepathy (next words indistinguishable)

S: ... I'm not saying that telepathy doesn't take place, but I'm only saying that there are misunderstandings as to the way in which it takes place. I mean, people who perhaps don't have that sort of experience they tend to think of it much too sort of personally. As though they think of, say, the guru exercising that faculty as they would exercise it, or as they think they would exercise it had they obtained it. But that isn't the case at all, and very often you find extraordinary things happening around gurus, and when it is put to them: "Well, how have you done this?" or "How have you done that?", they say: "I know nothing about it." Not that they're pretending or telling lies; they don't know anything about it. But these things tend to happen in their ambience and it seems to some disciples that prayers are being answered



etc., etc. But it is not that the guru is sitting there listening to people's thoughts and saying: "I'll answer this and I'll answer that prayer. But owing to the state of consciousness which he has attained, there is a certain sensitivity and there is a certain spontaneity of response - things happen but the guru doesn't necessarily always know what is going on.

Dave R: Well in the case of the Buddha in some of the Mahayana Sutras or in the case of someone like Tomo Geshe Rimpoche, who is known to have manifested a vision. Now I say manifested, or even engineered because, you know, a good sized village became aware of it almost simultaneously.

S: Yes, this wasn't so much a vision, this was a materialization, which is somewhat different.

Dave R: Yeah, or even more so in that case, a miraculous event. What do you think has taken place here? Do you think it was something that arose spontaneously because the circumstances had developed to a certain point of atmosphere?

S: There are three explanations of these sorts of things given in Buddhist texts: one is that it is dependent upon the higher spiritual development of the teacher; two, that it is a result of faith on the part of the disciples; and three, that it is due to the intervention of devas. These are the three explanations that are given. I can mention an instance of this sort of thing which I heard about from a bhikkhu friend of mine. He had been in Burma with the relics of Sariputra and Moggallana in, it was about, the early '50s. [8] And these relics, which you probably know were returned to India in the early '40s after being in the Victoria and Albert Museum nearly a hundred years. They were kept in two small glass phials. These phials were mounted on sort of gold columns, so you had an unobstructed view of the relics. And there was plenty of extra space inside the phials so that the relics actually could, so to speak, move around. The phials were about so big and about so thick and the little grains of relics were only so big. So there was plenty of space inside. So this bhikkhu friend of mine told me that when he was in Burma, he was exposing these relics for the veneration of the faithful, he and other monks, and he said they saw the relics slowly revolving inside their glass capsule and a rainbow light emitted. So this particular bhikkhu friend of mine - he was a quite ordinary, well-meaning, devoted, somewhat worldly bhikkhu with whom I'm still in contact, and he declared that this must be due to the faith of the assembled people. He was not conscious of any psychic powers within himself. He was a bit sceptical, I think, about devas, but the thing was happening, he couldn't deny it. And there were thousands of people, tens of thousands of people present - you know, Burmese Buddhists can be very devoted - and the effect was that relics actually started circulating within their capsules and rainbow light was emitted and seen not only by the bhikkhus, but by many other people present, the ones who managed to observe. The bhikkhus of course had the best view. They were, it must have been, only a matter of inches from the relics.

So he attributed that to the faith of the disciples. So there are these three explanations and it's sometimes quite difficult to tell which may be the correct one in any given case. It may be as a result of the higher spiritual development of the teacher; it may be as a result of faith on the part of the disciples; it may be that beings that we call devas which exist or do at least according to Buddhist tradition, are intervening. There are these sorts of possibilities.

Clive: In the case of manifestation, then, that doesn't particularly depend upon a particular faculty of the people who are being receptive, or the people who are involved ...?

S: If the manifestation is a physical one, then it doesn't depend upon any development of a higher spiritual faculty. If literally the material relics revolved inside their capsule, then anybody with eyes to see can see that. But sometimes things, so to speak, happen which are seen by [9] some people and not seen by others at all. In that case, the assumption is that those things were not happening in a literal material sense, so that everyone could see them in physical life, but were happening on another plane which was visible only to someone with opened spiritual eyes so to speak.

Dave R: It is interesting to hear you comment about those three instances or cases. I take it then, or I assume, that you don't have the ability to as a more highly evolved spiritual being to manifest physically these visionary experiences, or not visionary experiences, these physical experiences.

S: Ah, but so what I said before holds good. It is not that one does anything but that something happens when one is around; one may not know anything about it at all. And so if one...

Dave R: Yes or no Bhante

(Laughter)

S: Neither yes nor no nor both nor neither!

(more laughter)

S: ... I mean there are people that, yes, one might ask and who might say that, yes, certain things have happened at certain times. But I mean I might not know anything about those things and it is the same with others.

Clive: The ability can be conscious or unconscious; or is it unconscious?

S: It is not that it is conscious, it is not that it is unconscious, but I mean I go back to what I have said before that in the ambience of someone who is more highly developed than most, certain things will happen. Because a sort of aura is set up a sort of field of vibrations is set up, which subtly modifies or affects the surroundings and the people in it. The person who is at the centre of that field or at the centre of that aura, may well not consciously know everything that is going on, anymore than he knows what is going on on the physical level. But none-the-less, things may happen, and it is due to him, even though he may not be conscious of it and though he may not have had any conscious intention of bringing about any particular result.

Dave R: Is it possible that he may, on the other hand?.

S: Well, that assumes in him a sort of manipulateness which is probably directly contrary to the spiritual development of the individual . In scriptures and in biographies of teachers you may read the account that: "He did so and so" or "He decided to do so and so". But the account is written after all from the standpoint of the observer, not from the standpoint of the disciple. [10] from the standpoint of the person around whom these things happen.

Dave R: As in the case of some of the sutras.

S: As in the case of some of the sutras ... So we have to be careful because we look at things in our way, we present things in our way, in terms of our own experience. For instance as in more general terms, it is said "The Bodhisattva is compassionate, the Bodhisattva acts compassionately", it is said the Bodhisattva does not think of himself as acting compassionately. I mean, to us, it looks as though the Bodhisattva says: "Oh let me go out and be compassionate". The Diamond Sutra says that the Bodhisattva makes the vow, you know, to save all living beings, but at the same time he reflects that no living beings exist. In a sense he isn't doing anything. I mean, other beings may see him as being engaged in all sorts of activities, he doesn't feel himself so to speak 'subjectively' as engaged in those activities at all. It's a sort of spontaneous, natural process in his case. But when we describe the Bodhisattva's activities, we cannot but describe them in the way that we would describe our own activities and that is completely mistaken. So it's the same with these, as it were, you know, super-normal powers, we cannot but think of, say, the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Gurus and so on, exercising them in the same way that we would exercise them if we had them. But we think of ourselves as having and exercising them as we are now which means in a very different state of consciousness. But that is not the case with those beings.

Clive: So if that's the case then it seems that the more developed beings still have quite a lot of unconscious activity. I mean ... it's ... other than ...

S: No, it's not unconscious activity, in the sense of activity going on within an unconscious mind, but many effects are produced when they are around of which they are not necessarily aware. Because it's as if you write a book and that book circulates among people. You've written the book and you have sent it out, but you're not aware, necessarily, of the effect it produces on the minds of all the people. But it doesn't mean that you are unconscious to some extent, no.

Dave R: There's another example, Bhante, in the 'Survey' you relate the story of Amitabha and how at one point he was a Bodhisattva and he vowed that when he became a Buddha he would create a Pure Land called Sukhavati. Now, he presumably creates this Pure Land out of his powerfully developed one-pointedness of mind and compassion. Can you elaborate a little on what's being implied there?

[11]

S: I thought I'd elaborated there itself. But, what is really the substance of this sort of teaching is that there is another world which - I think the day before yesterday - I was speaking of in terms of an imaginal world, perceived by the imaginal faculty. If one thinks of this sort of higher spiritual world in terms of Sukhavati and if one follows the myth in the Sutta that is brought into existence in this way, well, perhaps that is taking it rather literalistically. Because one could say - (well I think I must have gone into this a little further on in the 'Survey' dealing with Shinran's teachings) - that Sukhavati is a sort of colourful symbol for Reality itself. Not that Reality itself is colourless and standing in front of this colourless reality is the colourful symbol of the Reality - we distinguish in that way just by our own modes of thought. But Sukhavati represents a glimpse of Reality itself not through concepts but through symbols. And, in as much as it represents a glimpse of Reality and in as much as Reality transcends time there is really no question of Sukhavati coming into existence - even brought into existence, you know, by virtue of the vow of a Bodhisattva. In other words, one

mustn't take that literally. It's not history, it's not cosmogenesis, hmm? So one might ask, well, you know, "What is the meaning of saying that it was brought into existence by the Bodhisattva?" Well not that it didn't exist before and then he thought of it and then he produced it, but what you perceive is correlative to what you are; the object corresponds to the subject.

Dave R: So if a devotee, hearing or reading a Sutta, decides to devote himself to the chanting the mantra and dedicating himself to Sukhavati with the hope that when they die, they'll get born into Sukhavati, then in actual fact, the effect of doing that would be that they would create the Pure Land within themselves during the course of that life.

S: Yes, one could say that. But not that they would've created simply in a metaphysical allegorical way, but they actually, in actual spiritual reality, would be living in the Pure Land before they die. So that after death, well, one can only say the physical body had dropped away, they would be where they were.

Dave R: So to sum up then, Suttas like that would be 'Upaya' 'Skilful means'.

S: Well this is what the Mahayana Sutras themselves very often say, but then again one must be very careful how one uses this term 'Upaya' and when one thinks of the Bodhisattva's skilful means, it is not that the Bodhisattva so to speak consciously and deliberately thinks: "Ah, now I shall use such and such means" huh? And this is the way that we cannot but help [12] thinking of it, again it is the literalistic way. But the Bodhisattva naturally and spontaneously communicates with beings in such a way as to benefit them. It's just as when you're talking to somebody, you ... when you're really communicating with them, you don't, as it were, think consciously and deliberately: "Oh, now I think I'll start speaking a little more seriously" or "Now I think I'll tell a little story." It all happens spontaneously in the flow of the communication. So the Bodhisattva's use of 'Upaya' is like that. The Upaya is not separated from the Bodhisattva himself, the Bodhisattva is the upaya. So one mustn't think of the Bodhisattva as sort of mechanically bringing in a particular upaya because he thinks it's suitable to the occasion. It's a much more spontaneous process than that.

Dave R: The sense itself is gone.

S: Well again, one can say that but again one must be careful that, you know, one is actually attaching a genuine experience leading to that, hmm? Because normally we don't have any experience at all of what experience is like when self is gone. It is something quite unknown to most people. I think perhaps the Mahayana Sutras give quite a lot of trouble to people, not only those who reject them, but those who accept them. Because the question always arises: "In what sense is one to take them?" I think perhaps that really the best answer to that is: "Don't take them in any sense at all, don't think about them in those sort of terms. Just read them, or listen to them and experience them, just as you might read a play by Shakespeare or a poem by Shelley. Don't ask yourself - or at least not to begin with - what it means and whether it's true or even whether it's myth or legend or history or what not. I mean, the important thing is that you experience it and you respond to it. You can sort out the other details afterwards.

Clive: There's just one thing I want to go back and ask you about - telepathic communication. You said that it happens, you described how it happens - spontaneously, or without

preconception, but can it happen with preconception?

S: Well, on the level on which one thinks of oneself as an ego, so to speak, yes it can happen. But to the extent that you don't think of yourself as an ego - which of course you are advised to do by Buddhism - it happens spontaneously. Because you can conduct an experiment with other people and [13] you can arrange to transmit messages to each other at a certain time, or you can arrange to transmit a certain word, a certain image, a certain mental picture, this can be done. Well, this is telepathy on quite a low level. When one is speaking, say, of telepathy on the dynamic level, sense of self, of ego is already attenuated. So one doesn't think in those sort of manipulative terms on that sort of level, not to speak of the level of Enlightenment. So on that level, things, telepathic things will tend just to happen.

Clive: I was thinking more in the case of say the Buddha. I can't imagine for instance the situation between the teacher and disciple that you described about the rupa image. I can't imagine the Buddha not being aware that that's what was going on. Is that the case, or would it be the same with him?

S: Well, the Buddha might be aware in some cases and in others he might not. What I'm saying is that he doesn't have to be aware, he isn't necessarily aware. You know the image can be produced by the impact, say of the recollection of the Buddha on the devoted consciousness of the disciple. The disciple can, as it were, open himself to the Buddha without the Buddha necessarily being aware that he is so doing. But at the same time, one must remember that the Buddha's consciousness is quite different from an ordinary consciousness. In a sense ordinary consciousness isn't there, it functions in a different sort of way. All the time one is thinking of the Buddha as though the Buddha was just another person except that he was enlightened. But his whole mind, his whole mind-system functions in a completely different way. He is not even aware of people at ordinary times in the way that unenlightened people are aware of other people, not to speak of these occasions as if they are special to us - of telepathic communication. We are told that the Buddha or Bodhisattva doesn't perceive another being; so with whom will he have telepathic communication? What does telepathy mean then? I mean, the Buddha appears to speak to others, the Bodhisattva appears to speak to others, but we are told that is not their "own" experience at all. Their mode of functioning and experiencing is quite different. So once again we are thinking quite literalistically of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and Gurus as though they were exactly the same as us and function in the same sort of way, the only difference being, of course, that they are enlightened. The Enlightenment is sort of tagged on to the unenlightened being which is not the case at all.

END OF SIDE ONE

[14]

S: So, you know, one could be a bit paradoxical and say that unenlightened beings - yes they have psychic powers and can exercise them. Enlightened beings do not. It's only the unenlightened who exercise psychic powers; the Enlightened don't.

Dave R: That is to say in their presence strange miraculous phenomena do happen.

S: So far as the unenlightened are concerned, yes. The unenlightened make those sort of

statements. (Laughter)

Was the discussion entirely on ... (muffled by laughter)

Subhuti: There was somebody else who had a question.

Rudiger: Yes, the questions are quite academic... (laughter)

S: It's nice to have a good sound academic question occasionally.

Rudiger: In your examples, you mention the staircase, or the tree, in the Christian...

S: Examples of what?

Rudiger: Examples of myth and legend. For example, the staircase as linking opposites like Earth and Heaven and so on. The problem which arose for me was I could understand quite easily in Christianity Earth and Heaven to be opposites. In the example of the staircase leading from the Heaven of the 33 deities down to Earth I didn't really feel these were opposites, but more different realms of beings inhabit there and now I ask, in what way are Heaven and Earth opposites in Buddhism? Are they?

S: This probably raises the question of contradictories and complementaries. By a contradictory one means something which excludes another thing; contradictories are mutually exclusive. Whereas complementary things are things which are different but which as it were reinforce each other rather than cancel each other out hm? When one speaks in terms of Heaven and Earth, one usually speaks in terms of contradictories. The best example of contradictories is light and darkness, because you can't have light when you have darkness and you can't have darkness when you have light. In the same way for Buddhism, the mundane and the transcendental are contradictories; you can't have the one where you have the other, unless you go into Mahayana sunyata philosophy, which is a different question. So in the case of this staircase in Buddhism between the Earth and the Heaven of the 33 Gods, [15] inasmuch as the heavens are within conditioned existence, this is not a ladder, a stairway between Heaven and Earth as between contradictories. It's a ladder, it's a staircase, within what is essentially one and the same reality - in this case the conditioned. You are going from a lower to a higher level within the mundane itself. So this is the stair in this sense, which is not quite the same as the stair in the sense of a stair from, say, Heaven and Earth as contradictories. Do you see what I mean? You can take the stair or the tree as a symbol either of that which links contradictories or provides a means of transition between complementaries. The second would be the case here. But it is as you said being a bit academic because the image of the tree, the image of the stair, in fact any image of this nature is simply meant to convey a vivid sense of upward movement of ascension, whether it is from lower to higher in the conditioned, or from the conditioned to the Unconditioned itself. One could even say that on the level of imagery, on the level of symbols, these sort of more conceptual immediated differences don't really exist hm? On the level of symbols, Earth is Earth and Heaven is Heaven and the tree or the stair stretches between them. From the point of view of the symbol, whether the Earth represents this or the Heaven represents that, is beside the point. Earth is Earth and Heaven is Heaven, they have their own direct symbolic appeal: you don't need to, as it were, translate them into conceptual terms. Do you see what I mean?

But if you translate Heaven and Earth into contradictories, then that which links them becomes a means of transition from one contradictory to another. If you interpret them as complimentary, then that which connects them is a means of transition from one to the other complimentary factor.

Symbols are quite subtle and you could say that even the stairway which goes from Earth to the Heavens even though those heavens are mundane, the symbol itself can still be a symbol of the transition from the mundane itself to the Transcendental. Symbols are not really clear cut, their meanings are not sharply defined. That's why they are symbols.

Steve Francis: Just a little bit before that is another example you gave where the Buddha rises into the air, the top half of his body is flaming and... (unclear - talks about the Buddha emitting flames and jets of water) ... then you go on to the next instance about a bull appearing in the East and disappearing in the West (unclear) ... I was just wondering if you could actually say a little bit about the symbolism of the bull.

[16]

S: Well, when one speaks about symbols, what is one really doing? All right, there's the bull yeah? Let's not even say symbol of the bull, because already you're introducing an element of intellectual interpretation. Well, the bull appears. All right, so what? What happens then? The bull appears; he appears at each of the four cardinal points, doesn't he? I don't remember in which order of the points he appears, whether in a clockwise or an anti-clockwise direction. But the bull appears. So when one talks about the bull appearing, what is one supposed to be doing? Is one supposed to be explaining it away or pointing out parallels in other mythological systems? Do you see what I mean? The bull appears - so what having read that, well, what does one do next? I mean, a bull appearing may mean something to you, it may strike a chord, it may set up a resonance, or not. If it doesn't, there isn't really much you can do about it at this stage. You could read about bulls in Minoan civilization, and you could read about the Taurabolevin and you could read about the rites of Mithras and all the rest of it. It would be interesting, but it would all still be very much on the intellectual plane. But if the figure of the bull appearing really sort of sets up a resonance in you, well then you can start exploring that resonance. That is really the only useful thing you can do.

Some people respond to certain symbols and not to others...

Well if you don't respond to it then in a way it isn't a symbol. A symbol isn't a sort of objective thing: "Well that's a symbol, a bull is a symbol" If you don't respond to it, it isn't a symbol. You could say: not for you, but that is being a bit unnecessarily subjective. Take for instance, the beginning of the Sutra of Golden Light, there's this dream described - a sun disc and it's like a gong - a figure in white comes and strikes that gong. Some people find this very meaningful; it sets off all sorts of repercussions within them; others are just vaguely reminded of the, what is it?

The Voice: The Rank films gong.

S: That's right and that is about all. So I mean, one can talk about a symbol, one can write about symbols. There are lots of books about symbols written by all sorts of academic people, but very often they don't seem to have much feeling. They're sort of just, you know, academic compilations. Well that is not really the function of the symbol at all. The symbol is there, so

to speak, for you to respond to. If you've got a thing about bulls, you know, it could be quite meaningful for you yeah? Otherwise not.

[17]

So one of the reasons why one, you know, flips through books on mythology and all that, is just to maybe find some symbols with which you can resonate, which can put you in touch with other aspects, as yet undeveloped aspects of your own being.

Malcolm Webb: Would you say that people can be symbols.

S: Yes I think this is possible

Malcolm: Some people refer to a particular type of person when they're talking about ... such-and-such, and-such-and-such has strong sexuality. So we use that person as a symbol.

S: This is probably not a symbol proper, probably what is happening here is some projection. But non-the-less, that is not necessarily a bad thing, you know, to become aware of oneself in this sort of way. Yes, we do use people, see people as symbols or experience people as symbols in that sort of way. Very well, the policeman, say, becomes a symbol of authority. In the riots that they were having in England recently, it was quite clear that the police had become a symbol of authority. The people who were attacking the police were not so much attacking those particular individuals - they didn't even see them as individuals. They were attacking something called 'Authority' which they saw embodied in those particular blue uniformed figures.

Malcolm: And I mean you have "Sex Symbols" don't you?

S: Yes, well this is a sort of popular usage that they, I forget who it was in my day - it was Dorothy L'amour, that's right - she was a famous sex symbol when I was a young man, young and innocent. Well, what does one mean when one uses that sort of expression. It's a rather loose expression. I mean you're not really concerned with the individual; that person, the so-called individual, is just a sort of centre for a whole cluster of projections and meanings.

Malcolm: A way of life ... a way of action...

S: I mean, I for instance ... For instance, when the Buddha saw the fourth of the four sights, the figure of the mendicant, well, he didn't see him as an individual, he didn't know his name or where he'd come from, he just symbolized, you could say, the Spiritual Life. That figure was a symbol of the Spiritual Life and it deeply impressed the Buddha.

It wasn't just a symbol, because he thought of doing likewise; the symbol represented also a way of life.

[18]

Mike Scherk: Isn't that really essential in looking at anything mythical to, in a sense, not to see characters who are people actually as people. So to think of ... in the Don Giovanni legend, not to think "Oh he's treating these women really terribly, he's awfully cruel.

S: Oh yes, or if you try to count up the number of women and calculate whether it was



actually possible for one man in the course of so many years. Well, you are taking the myth too literally, you see. It's not meant to be taken in that sort of way. I think there is this almost incurable tendency of the mind to take, try to take myth literally. It just doesn't work, you tie yourself into knots and you raise really insoluble questions for yourself.

Vessantara: ... illustrated books, like further the way to understanding.

S: They're merely illustrations. But the purpose of the symbol is to say something which words and thoughts cannot say. If you can, what ... the meaning of the symbol is not exhausted by words, when you've explained the symbol you haven't explained it. And therefore, sometimes when people ask for explanation of a symbol, well they just want what they think the symbol represents, while actually it doesn't represent anything, to be made intellectually accessible to them, which it cannot be. The symbol appeals to quite different faculty, you could say to the imagination with a capital I. If you haven't developed that faculty, well the symbol will mean nothing to you, you can elicit all sorts of meanings from it by comparing it with similar myth etc., etc., trace its origin, history and development, but it will do you no good whatever.

I think with regard to symbols, we have to resist the temptation to ask: "What does it mean?" in the conceptual sense. Because, once the danger is that when an explanation is given and you've understood that explanation, it's very likely, it's very easy to do, you think you've disposed of the symbol, you've dealt with it, you've mastered it, you can pass on to something else, but in fact you haven't even begun to deal with it.

Dave Luce: It can be worth asking though because somebody might have a feel for a symbol; a few words from that person could actually set that symbol resonating through yourself.

S: Yes, but not by way of giving an explanation, but by conjuring up allied symbols because very often a symbol belongs to a whole family of symbols. It might even be the nucleus of a whole cluster of symbols and you can perhaps evoke the other members of the cluster and that will help in the appreciation of the central symbol.

[19]

Alan Angel: Could you say, possibly, a few words, a few images, linking up the two parts of that miracle, the first part of fire and water, and the second part with the bull? I can't feel, I can feel for them individually, but not as a connected whole.

S: In other words, what is the connection? Though in a way that is a sort of intellectual question, isn't it?

Clive: Well he did say can you suggest a few images which might link up, rather than give an explanation.

S: Well, one can think of images because for instance, if you think of the Buddha high up in the air, that suggests something perpendicular doesn't it? That's the vertical, but then the bull's appearing in the four directions of space - that's something horizontal. So it's a bit like Mount Meru, with the sun and moon on either side, or the four gods, North, South, East and West; or it's like a wheel mounted on a pole, as you get in some village festivals. Do you know what I mean? You can have a pole and a wheel at the top, the pole goes through the hole at the

centre of the wheel and the wheel is hung with ribbons. Well, it will produce all these sorts of associations, perhaps they will help cast some light on the connection between these two sets of symbols. But there are all sorts of associations for Bull. Bull is a very important, or very prominent symbol in many parts of the world. He's a very big animal; he's very powerful; he's got horns; he's very shaggy; he paws the earth.

Malcolm Webb: I presume that symbols could grow and develop for some people. And now we have symbols like crowns ... like the caveman, the leader would have a club which would become his symbol .

S: Sceptres.

Malcolm: Sceptres ... that have evolved...

S: I wouldn't say that this symbol, if these are symbols, has literally grown, it has only been elaborated in accordance with different cultural conditions.

Dave Brennan: The symbol is basically the same...

S: Well, I hesitate to say that one symbol is the same as another, but [20] whether it's a cave-man wielding a club or a policeman wielding his baton or someone in authority sending you a letter through the post, it's the same sort of thing. For the caveman, when he sees that club, he might get a certain feeling. You get the same feeling when you see the policeman's truncheon; or you get the same feeling when you get that fat envelope. I wouldn't say that there has been a development of symbols as such, but merely that the expression has become more elaborate or more refined, or more sophisticated or whatever. I mean, the fountain pen can be as much a symbol of authority as the club. There is a poem by Dylan Thomas, what is it? "These five kings did a man to death" - referring to the five fingers with which someone grasped his pen and signed somebody's death sentence. But before we conclude, let me just go back to something I mentioned earlier on, which was the lectures on the Mahayana Sutras. That is to say especially the White Lotus Sutra and the Sutra of Golden Light and the Vimalakirti Nirdeśa. All three contain a considerable element of what I call "Transcendental phantasmagoria". But one might ask the question, well "Why should one have lectures on these things at all? Why should one not just encourage people to read the sutras?"

Well there is the point that the sutras were not originally just read, that is to say, read by each person privately by himself or herself. The sutras were sort of expounded, as you find texts are still expounded in India, by a sort of story teller. He'd gather an audience around him and he'd say, "Well, this is what I've heard"; "Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha..." and then he'd go on giving the whole description, he'd recount the whole sutra with a bit of running commentary to make it more accessible and intelligible, even acceptable, to people and sometimes bits of the commentary were subsequently incorporated in the text itself. That was the sort of thing that happened. But it does seem that when you just read these sort of texts through, they may strike you, the symbols may strike you or they may not. But it's as though when these symbols are sort of conjured up by being described in a circle of sympathetic people with a certain atmosphere, with everybody concentrating, everybody hearing the evocation of the symbols then for a lot of people at least, they become much more vivid, much more tangible, much more immediately realizable. Do you see what I mean? So, the purpose of lectures is not just to explain what the sutra means - to some extent that is the

practice because the sutras aren't all symbolism. There are other things which can be explained and expounded, but there is a lot of symbolic material which needs to be, as it were, created or re-created in [21] the course of the lecture. And when that is done in the presence of, or in the midst of a number of sympathetic, receptive people, they can have a much more vivid apprehension of the symbols than just reading by themselves. Just as, you know, when you do a Puja together with other people, very often you can have a much more intense experience than if you just recite that same Puja by yourself in your own room. But this is of course an approach to Buddhism which has not been adopted by any other Buddhist group as far as I know, in the West at all. I think we're quite alone in this sort of approach. There are Buddhist groups of Eastern origin which take their Mahayana sutras quite literally, but that is another matter. And there are other Buddhists who try to say interpret sutras in a few cases along sort of Jungian lines. But that is again not to appreciate the real value of the symbolism. So, as far as I know, we're the only Buddhist Movement in the West that does try to appreciate the symbolism of the Mahayana sutras and in fact of the Buddhist tradition generally, for its own sake and to allow it to fulfil its own real function. I think most other Buddhists, especially, say, Theravadins and say Zen people, will very often depreciate symbolism and depreciate Mahayana sutras because they contain so much of symbolism. And for people of that sort, myth is just equivalent to, well, fiction. And this is why so much literature that purports to be Buddhist literature produced nowadays is just so dry, so airy, it doesn't offer one any real sort of spiritual nourishment. It doesn't resonate in one's depths at all. It's dead, it's the spectre of Buddhism, not Buddhism itself.

It's as though one has to steer a middle path between fundamentalism on the one hand, taking everything literally, and scepticism and rationalism on the other hand. In a way, though, fundamentalism and rationalism are really the same attitude seen from slightly different points of view. A fundamentalist theologian is very close to a rationalist theologian. The Theravadin takes the Pali scriptures, which he takes to be historical in the fundamentalist way; some Mahayanists - I'm thinking of Chinese Mahayanists, say in the United States - take the Mahayana Sutras literally in a fundamentalist way, taking them to be history. I mean, as much as in the old days in the West, people took the story of Adam and Eve as history, it was thought the book of Genesis was a book about ancient history.

Mike Scherk: This wouldn't have been a problem originally though, in a sense because Buddhists traditionally in India and in the Far East would not have differentiated between historical fact ...

[22]

S: Exactly

Mike S: ... and mythic

S: Because reason had not as it were split off from the whole man, so that you have a split between reason and emotion.

Mike S: So when you speak of these Chinese Buddhists in the US, are they the so-called "New Chinese" who are quasi-Western educated?

S: Yes, Yes.

Mike S: ... mostly Western educated.

S: Yes, though there are Chinese amongst them, but their attitude is fundamentalist. But that is not really so different from the rationalist attitude, because both are concerned in their own way with literal truth. Or rather, factual truth. They're concerned with facticity rather than truth. (Pause)

Voice: What is facticity?

S: Oh, well, facticity is the quality of what actually happens in history. For instance, in the Mahayana Sutras, there is a description perhaps of the Buddha seated on the beautiful Lion Throne under a tree in Rajgriha. Well, a fundamentalist Mahayanist would maintain that literally the Buddha did sit on the Lion Throne, that is to say, an enormous raised seat with Lions supporting at each end. It is extremely doubtful whether that sort of throne was known at that historical period. Clearly, the throne is symbolical, it is not to be taken as a piece of furniture actually existing then, on which the Buddha sat when delivering his sermon. Do you see what I mean? It has another meaning: the seating on the Lion's Throne - if you want to explain it, which you really shouldn't - it's the fearless proclamation of truth to the four quarters of the world. It's just like those lions roaring.

So, whether you're a Theravada fundamentalist or a Mahayana fundamentalist, in both cases, you're lacking in imagination, you're lacking in spiritual vision. To take Mahayana sutras literally is no better than taking Theravada Pali texts literally. Actually, the Pali texts contain quite a lot of legendary material, well, that is just not dealt with at all in present day expositions of the Dharma by Theravada bhikkhus and others; they just [23] ignore all that material. They concentrate on the abstract conceptual expressions. Do you ever hear any bhikkhu giving an exposition of, say, the Maha-Sudassana Sutta or anything like that? No, they never mention it; it is much too colourful and poetic for their tastes. But there it is in the Pali Suttas, in the Pali Tipitaka. They prefer to concentrate on all those nice dry bits that they can really get their teeth into.

Well, were those all the points that arose - nothing left?

Dave Brennan: Could you say what the Abhinishkrama Sutta means ... what does the word Abhinishkramana mean?

S: That means 'renunciation', 'going forth', 'giving up the world'. It's the sutra of the Buddha's giving up the world, going forth into the homeless life. It's an early biography of the Buddha. It's sometimes preceded by Maha, Maha-Abhinishkramana Sutta, which is either the Great Sutta, or the Sutta of the Great Renunciation.

Subhuti: So what are the Avadanas?

S: There is a section about Avadanas in "The Word of the Buddha" [now published as the Eternal Legacy]. An Avadana is a sort of Jataka, but it's the story of the previous life or lives not of the Buddha himself, but of an Arhant or Buddhist hero. For instance, Asoka. It means something like "exploit". It's usually translated "heroic exploit". Heroic, it's the sort of heroic exploits of the arhants and others in their previous existences. So very much corresponding to the Jatakas.

Dave Rice: Just a small point - visionary experience can take place in the Dhyanas, is that correct?

S: Yes, though again, the word "visionary" can be used in a number of different ways. One could say broadly speaking that there are two or even three kinds of visions. There is vision in the sense of eidetic image, that is to say, you close your eyes and you can reproduce some material object by way of a mental picture as clearly as when you actually saw the object with your eyes open. Some people can do this very easily, others can't do it at all. That is eidetic image. This is very much on the level of ordinary consciousness, or just a little above it. But then there is vision in the sense of something that you see - there is no other word for it - [24] in a quite different sort of inner space, which has an intense emotional - effect on you, which the eidetic image usually doesn't have. So one has to distinguish these two; the, what is called the eidetic image, and the visionary experience in the more spiritual sense. One could say that there is even a third sort of vision beyond the second, which in a sense one doesn't see. That might seem contradictory, but it's more like a feeling but in a sense you do see it. Or you could call it a much more refined vision. It's not gross, even like the ordinary spiritual vision.

Dave Rice: It's just that in the past, I've had one or two very vivid and very lucid dream experiences, where almost a whole vista took place that was very similar, you might say, to one of these sutras. In fact it was, well it was very cryptic all the way through. I'm just wondering whether or not some of the Mahayana sutras may not have been almost a rendition of some very lucid, very vivid dream, that some of the meditation masters had, and therefore wrote it down and perhaps expanded in and elaborated on it.

S: Well, one could say that meditation masters wouldn't need to dream, because what in the case of the ordinary person is dream in the case of someone who has developed meditation to a considerable extent is vision. So if you are able to see visions in a way you don't need to dream. And I think the visionary experiences you tend to get in dream can be of different kinds, can be of the different kinds I've mentioned. You can have just eidetic images - which is what most dreams are - or you can have sort of visionary experiences during the sleep state and these have a quite different sort of value.

Dave Rice: Is it possible through the practice of meditation and spiritual development in general that dreams would become consciously controlled visionary experiences?

S: Yes, but in any case, by practising meditation, the dream life is influenced. I think quite a lot of our friends know that, they have experienced that. If you are on, say, a special meditation retreat, doing a lot of meditation, the quality of the dreams changes. Sometimes of course there can be a reaction on the dream level, but that is another matter. But certainly the meditation affects not only the conscious mind, so to speak, but also the unconscious mind, again so to speak; it sets up reverberations on all these different levels of your being. Maybe a simpler way of [25] expressing it would be to say that on account of the meditation experience, or the result of the meditation experience, you get experiences which you don't usually have. You can speak of them as coming from the unconscious, but that doesn't really help very much. It's a bit of symbolism, even, you could say. You mustn't take it literally.

So in the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana perhaps even more, dreams are taken quite seriously. I was reading, - because in the West we haven't taken dreams all that seriously - well I was reading that in the Islamic world, especially among the Sufis, over a certain number of years,

a certain number of centuries, no less than 7,500 books dealing with dreams in a quite serious manner were produced. Those apparently all still exist in Arabic and Persian.

Dave R: The Arabian Nights is one classic example.

S: Yes, it's a classic, but these books are a somewhat different kind of a philosophical spiritual type. The significance of dreams, the place of dreams in the spiritual life.

Dave R: There's one or two instances where the Buddha says that such and such a Bodhisattva or such and such a Buddha is preaching the Dharma all the time in a certain realm. Would that then equate with some of these dream states, where you get into a dream and something like that is happening?

S: Well, just as through the meditation state, you can contact, so to speak, an objective world, in the same way via the dream state, you can contact an objective world. So in a dream you can have a glimpse of Reality, even just as you can in the waking state, in the state of meditation. You mustn't think that access to Reality - for want of a better term - is confined to the waking state. This is what is usually thought, but that is just the limitations of the waking state, the conscious mind itself.

Well is that all? I think it had better be.

End of Day 4 Tape 1 Side B

Preordination Course 1981 Tuscany.

Questions and Answers

Day 2 Tape 2

S: What has emerged this morning?

Dave Rice: Straight off! Something emerged this morning. We were discussing the ascetic practices which Gotama took up, or rather took in the first seven years before his Enlightenment and which after his Enlightenment he denied. I...

S: When you say denied. What do you mean?

Dave Rice: He denied that that was a method of gaining Enlightenment. And where as I am inclined to agree with that, I can't help feeling that they must have been instrumental in developing a lot of strength and energy and will-power (for the Buddha) in that period. Could you comment on that?

S: Well, one might take an extreme example, because sometimes extreme examples can be rather illuminating. Yes! Take for instance the example of Angulimala. Angulimala was the famous dacoit we might say who was 'converted' by the Buddha and that the Buddha met him at a very important moment in his career. There is a long story attached to this, I can't repeat the whole story, but the gist of it is that Angulimala had to collect a garland of 100 severed hands. And he had collected, I'm not sure whether it was 98 or 99 but anyway the Buddha met

him at this crucial point (laughter) and he [2] thought that the Buddha's hand might complete his garland. So that anyway he had obviously been a quite terrible character and terrorized all the countryside in the quest of his 100 severed hands. The police were after him. The king's troops were after him. But eventually he did come into contact with the Buddha and the Buddha of course converted him, and he became a Bhiksu. Now there's no doubt that Angulimala was in a way a very devoted character. For instance, why had he been collecting these 100 severed hands at all? For whom had he been collecting them? Well, he'd actually been collecting them for his teacher. His Brahmin teacher; again I don't want to go into the full story but when you complete a course of study with a Brahmin teacher this is still the custom in some parts of India you offer a dakshina, an offering, and this teacher had demanded an offering of a 100 severed hands. So Angulimala after his you could say his faith and devotion had killed nearly 100 people to get their hands; he showed great faith he showed, you could say, great determination, great fearlessness. So had these qualities actually helped him gain Arhantship as he eventually did under the Buddhas 's instructions? Had the fact that he had killed so many people actually helped him on his way? Well, if you put it in that sort of a way, one begins to pause, you see what I mean? So it raises the whole question of how do you know whether something helped you or that something hindered you? I mean, in that you could say that, well, if someone has gained Enlightenment, he has gained it after doing so many things. But does that mean that he has necessarily gained Enlightenment because he has done all those things? The fact someone gains Enlightenment after a whole sequence of human experiences, does that fact mean that he has gained [3] Enlightenment as a direct consequence of that whole sequence of human experience? If not, how are you to distinguish between what has helped you back and what has helped you forward? I mean that is the question isn't it? So what is the criterion? How are you to tell? Whether it's Angulimala's murders or the Buddha's ascetic experiences before his Enlightenment or your own little mistakes earlier on in life before you come into contact with the FWBO How can you know whether it helped you forward or held you back? What is the criterion? Can you know in retrospect in that sort of way? That really is the question being asked, isn't it?

Dave Rice: Well, I don't see why not. I mean in Angulimala's case presumably it did not take all that much effort to collect these hands, Whereas in the case of the Buddha it must have taken an extraordinary amount of effort to achieve some of these practices, even though the practices, in and of themselves, were useless and pointless. He must have - to have starved, and to have done a lot of those things would have required a tremendous amount of will-power it seems to me.

S: But this is true. But the question is not whether a certain amount of will power was involved or whether that will power was rightly applied, and that is the criterion. As in the case of Angulimala. Yes, he showed great energy, great resources, great courage but to what purpose? So it seems to me to connect up with something else I have talked about sometimes which is from a certain point of view almost an inability or an unwillingness to admit that we did make a mistake, that a certain part of our time, or a certain part of our life even has actually been wasted. Do you see what I mean?

[4]

It's as though one wants to say, 'Well, everything helps, nothing was wasted. Yes, there were not any mistakes, I did not make any mistakes because if everything that you've ever done in your life has actually contributed to your present attainment of Enlightenment you haven't made a mistake.' You haven't ever made a mistake because everything that you've done has

led to Enlightenment.. So if you've never made a mistake then it seems or it suggests that it is impossible to make a mistake so anything you do leads you in the direction of Enlightenment. But it's the whole point of the Buddha's teaching that some things, some actions, some mental states lead you in the direction of Enlightenment and others don't. So unless one adopts the point of view that everything leads to Enlightenment one is forced to distinguish in one's own previous history between those things that actually led you and those which did not. The fact that you actually did those things and gained Enlightenment doesn't mean that you gained Enlightenment partly because of those things. Otherwise you commit the logical error of "consequent upon, therefore because of." One might give an analogy; supposing you set out on a journey; supposing you set out to go from 'a' to 'b' . You wish to go, in a sense you should go by the shortest route, because you want to get to 'b'. Supposing you make a detour by mistake and you arrive at the point 'c' which is quite in the wrong direction. You then go after discovering the right direction from 'c' to 'b'. You do get to 'b' from 'c' or rather you arrive at 'b' from 'c'. Well then, you ought to have been at 'b' in the first place. So therefore, it is not that 'c' has actually helped you to arrive at 'b', it has helped you to go from 'c'. But the fact that you went to 'c' has not [5] helped you. Yes?

Dave Rice: Personally, I have been in circumstances where I have set out from point 'a' to point 'b' and made a detour to point 'c' and in the process slowed my journey. From the stand-point of point 'b' it was a mistake but at point 'c' I bumped into somebody who I hadn't seen for a long, long time and enjoyed the contact so much that it's worthwhile making the mistake.

S: Ah! But here the analogy doesn't hold good because point 'b', which is Enlightenment itself, is that than which nothing can be more worthwhile.

Dave Rice: Except that the Buddha went through the experience in order to realize that it wasn't of any benefit.

S: Ah! But he said having done that himself, he says, he tells us it isn't necessary.

Dave Rice: Well O.K. Having arrived at that point we then went on to discuss the difference between effort and will. Something which is will and something which requires effort in order for growth to be...

S: So what emerged from that discussion? Because clearly effort is necessary but clearly the Buddha has it seems suggested that an effort which is too willed is counter-productive as in the case of Sona Kolivisa which I mentioned yesterday. So again what is the criterion? How can you know whether you are making effort or whether you are merely willing to make an effort and making a willed effort? [6] How can one know, say within one's own experience? Can one know at the time? What is the feeling which you get when you're making an effort? And whether the feeling that you get when you are making an overly-willed effort? There's a very different feeling quality attached to the two things.

Malcolm Webb: Could it be a more emotional and integrated feeling?

S: Well, yes, presumably, but then how does that sort of register? How do you feel when you are into something?



Voice: A harmony or a...

S: Mm mm.

Voice: An inspiration as opposed to a lack of it.

S: Well, yes, so when you make that overly willed effort, what is the nature of that? What is happening when you make that sort of effort?

Ratnaguna: You're sort of doing violence to your self.

S: So what does that suggest when you say 'doing violence to yourself'? That suggests quite a degree of cleavage within yourself as it were. Because you are doing violence to yourself. Almost as though you're another person, another thing, another object, so clearly there is a lack of integration. When you are making a genuine effort you feel all of a piece; all together, even though it may not be for a very long time but when you are making this overly willed effort you don't have [7] that sort of experience. It's an experience of one part of you so to speak forcing along the rest of your being. And that part which is forcing along the rest seems to become, with the passage of time, smaller and smaller. And the other part or half that you're dragging along seems to become bigger and bigger, heavier and heavier. In the end you come to a standstill or you have a breakdown.

Voice: Do you think this might have been the case with the Buddha and his ascetic practices?

S: Well it is, well the Buddha does say, according to some of the Pali texts, that he did actually collapse physically, that he fainted and fell down.

(Pause)

But that doesn't really solve the question altogether because the fact is very often that we are not all together. We can't throw ourselves into something completely, wholeheartedly and therefore make the genuine effort. There is so often a discrepancy between what we really see needs to be done and what we actually feel like doing. There's the effect of the gravitational pull. So probably it is only in our rarer moments, our better happy moments, that we are really able to throw ourselves into something, absolutely, completely, and make an all-out effort and then only from time to time.

The rest of the time we are using an effort of will, but that should not involve too great a discrepancy between our understanding and our emotions in terms of what we were discussing yesterday. And also as I said yesterday there must be that constant overall effort to bring the two, the [8] reason and the understanding and our emotions together through the mediation so to speak, of a higher, what I called yesterday, imaginal or visionary faculty.

(Pause)

Dave Rice: Is there ever an instance when a very willed effort is called for?

S: Well, I think it depends on the situation, I mean sometimes you may depend on a willed effort to save your life; though sometimes a willed effort is not necessary in that

circumstance, because it summons up the energy.

Subhuti: But in fact what you have said is that a willed effort is almost always necessary in the early stages of one's spiritual life, in so far as your not integrated.

S: Yes, yes, well though of course, one has to raise what I said yesterday: the question of why are we are not in that integrated state. And if you are too unintegrated or even disintegrated you have to sort of retrace your steps and not really try to do anything until such a time that you are more integrated and therefore more able to do it as a whole being. But there is another point of view from which we can consider this. Because when we are speaking of this effort, whether it be of the more genuine kind of effort or the more willed effort or wilful effort, we are thinking of it as being made by an individual; that is to say, we are thinking of it as an effort made by an individual in pursuit of some cause or some goal which he himself acknowledges to be good and desirable for [9] himself. But very often the situation isn't at all like that; because we are not truly individuals, we are at least to a great extent members of a group and we are influenced by the group, that is to say, we listen to the voice of the group. The group tells us that something is desirable and that we ought to want it because it is desirable, and therefore because we belong to the group, because we are sort of immersed in the group, because we desire the approval of the group, we pursue those goals which the group indicates as desirable. But we are not really doing that as individuals, and those goals which the group indicates as desirable may not be goals we ourselves as individuals see as desirable. So it's not really just a question of a sort of hiatus between our own understanding and our own feeling but a hiatus between what the individual feels is desirable and what the group suggests - or even dictates - is desirable. A forced effort, or this overly wilful effort, may come about when you are in fact not trying to fulfil individual goals at all but are trying to fulfil goals of the group which are in conflict in fact with your individual goals - even though you might not have clearly formulated those individual goals for yourself. Do you see what I mean? For instance, to put it very concretely: You may come along, get in contact with the FWBO, you may like the company of people in the FWBO very much, you may want to belong to that particular group, you may feel very happy with the members of that group. You may want to be accepted by the members of that group. You want to feel that you have their approval. But you discover that in order to gain the approval of the group it is necessary to do certain things, or at least there are certain things that they regard as desirable, that the members of the group regard as desirable. For instance meditation; you may not originally [10] be interested in meditation, you may just have wanted to enjoy the company of those particular people but then it is suggested to you that you ought to meditate. You don't want to meditate, or at least you have not as yet formulated the wish for, or desire to meditate, but because you wish to please those people you meditate or you try to meditate. Well, you may be able to do a little bit in that sort of way but supposing that then they suggest you come on a meditation retreat and you do 8 hours meditation a day. Is it possible to do 8 hours meditation a day (unless you have a sort of unrealized desire to meditate) merely to please these people? Therefore you encounter resistance and if you are to meditate 8 hours a day it can only be by way of willed effort. So in this way also the willed effort comes into being. You make the willed effort because you want to do those things which are regarded as desirable or necessary by those people whom you want to please. So when that happens you have to ask yourself, 'Well, what is in fact the situation? Do I really want to meditate or not?' Well, you might end up realizing that you don't. And then of course, there is no question of willed effort because you realize that that is not what I want to do. On the other hand of course it could be that even though you didn't originally want to meditate you have come to see or have come to

understanding that you like these particular people as people but you like something in them, something about them. And that meditation has something to do with that. And you'd like to be one of them; which means that you'd like to be like them; which means that you have to develop those qualities that they have developed; which means that you have to practise meditation because meditation has helped them to produce or develop those qualities. And therefore having understood the situation you should happily and positively with real effort [11] as an individual, start to meditate with them -that's a different sort of situation. Do you see what I'm getting at? So I am making the point therefore that willed effort very often comes about when we are trying to fulfil or trying to meet the wishes or the expectations of the group, rather than to achieve goals that we have set for ourselves as individuals. So we can't consider therefore this whole question of willed effort without considering the relation of the individual as the proto-individual for the group and the group's expectation of him. We can't consider this question, I think, just with reference to the individual or proto-individual by himself. So when you feel that you are making a willed effort you should ask yourself, 'Well, is it possibly because I'm trying to fulfil other people's expectations and not meet my own genuine needs and aspirations?'

Alan Angel: So that would seem to come from question of guilt. The possible coercive influence of the group.

S: The question of guilt is very relevant here because if you feel that you are not doing those things which are expected of you by other members of the group then you feel threatened by the withdrawal of their approval and their affection. Then you start to feel guilty when you engage in these activities which you know the group doesn't approve or fail to engage in the activities in which the group does approve. And so the question of guilt also comes in here.

(Pause)

But again we come back to the question of asking oneself what is it that I really want to do? Do I really want to meditate? [12] Do I really want to get up early in the morning? Do I really want to study the Dharma? Or do I want to have a good time? We have to ask ourselves. Because we can only proceed from where we actually are, not from where we think we are or from where we think we ought to be. Only from where we actually are - wherever that may be. I mean the ideal can be as high as we like, as remote as we like, but we have to approach that from the point where we actually are now. So we have to ascertain where we actually are now. And that includes and involves ascertaining what it is that we actually want to do now. Even though we necessarily don't give in to that. At least we take it into consideration and allow for it, account for it. For instance when the bell wakes you up in the morning your actual feeling may be that you don't want to get up - so what should you do then? You first of all acknowledge that feeling of 'I don't want to get up' that 'I don't really want to get up at all, I would really like to go on lying here.' You accept that, you acknowledge that, but then you think 'even though I would like to go on lying in bed, I even more strongly wish to develop, I really much more strongly wish to develop, and meditation plays an important part in that, - that's what I really want to do.'

So understanding the situation you not exactly force yourself to get up, you just get up. You allow the lesser wish to be swallowed up by the greater one, even though at that moment the greater one is not as pleasant to you as it might be. But of course, you don't as it were, fool yourself and say 'well, no, I don't want to lie in bed, I am just having a little rest, it isn't

necessary to get up just yet, there's plenty of time.'

You don't sort of rationalize in that kind of way. You acknowledge that what you really want to do is to go on lying there, [13] and you proceed from that point.

Mike S: It sounds in some ways that the problem of getting caught up subtly with the group's values and expectations can actually get subtly more difficult, I guess, as one gets more heavily involved in the FWBO because there's a very... going to be, the more heavily you get involved, a stronger and stronger overlap between the group values of the FWBO as the positive group and say what one's reasons or part of one's feelings tells us what we want to do. In fact it is going to be the other part of oneself.

S: Well, there are several things to be said here. First of all: seeing the FWBO as a positive group. Eventually as the more... or the more that you become an individual it dawns on you that at the centre of the positive group there is a spiritual community, where there is no question of imposing anything, even anything positive, in any sort of way, and also you see that it is a positive group, or to the extent that it is a group it is a 'positive group'. So even a positive group or even should I say a positive group doesn't impose - it, as it were, it encourages and suggests but it doesn't impose; only a somewhat negative group would impose in the literal sense. So I've noticed that in those cases where people start feeling the positive group has something, as it were, heavy or making over-excessive demands upon them there is something in their own attitude, possibly carried over from their own experience in the outside world, which they have to examine. Because I have known cases in which people have protested that they don't want to be told what to do and they're not going to be, you know, obliged to do anything that they don't want to do - but no one [14] has actually told them! No one has said anything at all to them. There's the sort of impression that they have plucked right out of the air, and it becomes a very strange sort of situation, - one is very surprised. But it could be that someone, as the result of his previous experience so desperately craves for the approval of the positive group, in this case the FWBO, that he is prepared to do almost anything, even to deny his own, in a sense, individual wishes and desires to gain the approval of that group. Well, that is not a very healthy situation. He may begin by obeying, as he sees it, all the requirements of the group because he wants their approval so badly but sooner or later he will start rebelling and resenting the group, not realizing that he has seen the group in terms of a 'group imposing these obligations in a very heavy sort of way. So in a way, he will be rebelling against something that doesn't really exist. And one sees this happening in so many instances. So in that case that person must examine his own attitude. He's in a really quite difficult position then because it's very difficult for anyone to approach them. Because if someone approaches them they think, or they're likely to think, that that person is coming on heavy. They're going to give them a good talking to or tell them off. So they tend to avoid contact, and at the same time, in their mind, they have got a picture of this very sort of heavy authoritarian sort of organization building up stronger and stronger than ever and the stronger that picture becomes the more they stay away, and the more they stay away the less you can actually say to them. So if they aren't really careful they might move out altogether. This has happened in a few cases for this sort of reason. (pause) So it seems as though this whole question of effort versus [15] willed effort rather concerns people. It's as though that one needs to steer a middle way between acknowledging one's actual present needs and desires and an over all orientation of oneself in the direction of the ideal. You don't want to be so cut off from your own energies, your own desires even, that the ideal becomes an abstract ideal towards which you cannot actually move at all. And on the other hand you

don't want to give way to your desires in such a way that you lose sight of the ideal altogether and no longer orientate in that direction. These are the two extremes presumably indicated by the Buddha when he spoke of the Middle Way between the two extremes - self-indulgence and self-mortification.

D.L: There does sometimes, quite often, seem to be a conflict between the objective need of particular situation, the business, well most often the running of a business, and people who might find themselves with quite a lot of demands on them that they actually would rather not have. But the business needs to go on running, the Centre needs to go on running. It seems to be quite common. There seems to be this tension there very often and it's not always easy to see what is the best. Because on the one hand if that particular individual steps out of things then there is repercussions you know, and as far as the Movement is concerned, if we are to keep on building, developing businesses there needs to be a certain staying-power in people who can actually get things on, be able to drive ourselves at different times.

S: I think there are two things to be said here. One is that seems to be quite a, what shall I say, a hiatus between seeing and feeling. One sees that something needs to be done. [16] Well, in a sense, so what? One can see thousands of things in the world that need to be done. One has no hope whatever of doing them. One isn't going to fret about them. But in one's immediate environment, yes, there are things that you can see which need to be done. But it isn't just a question of seeing, it is also a question of feeling. So I think the conflict only arises when you 'see' without feeling. When you 'see' or without feeling, or without seeing a link between one thing and another; you mentioned for instance co-ops in relation to centres. Well, supposing you really do feel, as well as see, that that centre needs to be kept going and that you see that can only keep going if that co-op can be kept going and the co-op can be kept going only if you are involved in it. Well, you see and you feel all that together. There's no problem. The problem only arises when you can see without feeling. But one can even say that, well, if you see without feeling, are you really seeing? As I mentioned yesterday, seeing is not really seeing unless there is a feeling element there too. I think, if with a unified feeling and seeing, you look at something and you see and you feel it needs to be done, but it's beyond your capacities and you objectively acknowledge that, you're not bothered - you just put it aside. I mean, some of us would like to go around starting centres all over the place but we don't have the time or the energy. We'd dearly like to do it but we don't fret about it because it's objectively beyond our present capacities. The other point I wanted to make was this, that I think there has been a tendency, quite a strong tendency in the FWBO to be rather precious about 'self development' in a rather narrow limited sort of way. For instance, people seem or sometimes some of them are asking, 'Well [17] how does this effect my development? I mean, maybe someone asks you to post a letter for them and you start off, 'Well if I post this letter for them, will this help my development or not?' So they're getting in this way a bit precious about it. They're precious about their individual development to such an extent that the process of individual development is a bit almost self-indulgent. You don't feel like doing something unless, well, you feel like doing it. And because you have realized, well yes you must be in contact with your feelings you should only do something if you really want to do it, this becomes all too easily just doing what you want to do and calling it self-development. This is what I mean by being precious about your self-development. Whereas, very often, you should just throw yourself in; you'll survive; it'll help you. You have to consider the needs of the objective situation; you have to be more aware of or alive to the existence of the Object. In other words, what I'm really saying is that, even you are thinking in terms of individual development, even if you're thinking in terms of the development of the subject, that

development of the subject comes about to a great extent through involvement with the object. Do you see this? Even supposing you are concerned with the development of the individual or what I called the subject, the you, this doesn't come about as it were in isolation. You develop the individual, you develop the subject, through involvement with or engagement with object. That is to say, the thing or the person 'out there' which is not you.

A.A: So could you say that by developing the situation and developing your relation to the situation actually as a part and parcel of it, it develops you as an individual.

[18]

S: You mustn't think of self-development too much in terms of standing in front of a psychological mirror and sort of titivating yourself, making yourself look more attractive. It isn't really quite like that.

A.A: I was thinking more of just getting on with it and developing the situation generally, whatever you happen to be in, has, I mean, the effect of that is that you develop almost intuitively within it.

S: Yes, yes, certainly. Well, obviously you have to choose the situation in which you become involved. You have to choose it intelligently; not just throw yourself into any old project. But certainly I would say that there is no individual development without the involvement of the individual in a situation or cause which transcends the individual - or even which just simply differs from the individual, is not the individual.

D.L: There are people who do seem to become too inward-looking and actually render themselves completely ineffectual. They're afraid to do anything, afraid to commit themselves to anything in case it stops them meditating so much.

S: Well, certainly one [should] leave in one's life space for meditation but not in that precious kind of way. One may need at certain times to leave plenty of space, or even to do nothing but meditation for a while; that is quite a different sort of thing.

M.S: The form which this has cropped up in West London it seems to me a fair bit recently is people wanting, in a sense holding back from business; the term that often comes back is so that [19] they can 'keep in touch' sometimes more specifically so they keep in touch with their inspiration. Sometimes it is turned around: that if they don't take such and such time off or if they do this or that they will get 'out of touch', get out of touch with why they're actually working in the business in the first place quite often. Or they need to stop so that they can get into better communication with so-and-so.

Malcolm Webb: It's a question of being too gross (unclear)

S: Well, one has heard all these things before. What about being in touch? I mean in some ways one is more in touch with oneself when one is working than on almost any other occasion. Presumably some people at least have experienced this. If you're really working at, or on, or with, something that you are really interested in and you want to do you can experience yourself most fully. So one doesn't get out of touch with oneself by working - and also I rather question this concept of being 'in touch.' You know, 'in touch' with what? I don't think there is such a thing as being 'in touch'. It's a bit like the 'relationship' without anyone to

be related with. And like the young lady who said some years ago to me, "Well, I think I'll start up a relationship." Not that "I think I'll get into a relationship with such and such" but no "I think I'll start up a relationship" before any particular person had even appeared on the horizon. So it's much the same with being 'in touch': "I want to be in touch" - well that really is quite meaningless. Be in touch with what you're doing, being in touch with what you're feeling, that is intelligible, but not just being "in touch". So when you're working you can be in touch with what you're doing, working doesn't stop you being in touch because there is the work, the process of work for you to be in touch with. That's what you're in touch with and [20] when you're working, work. So you don't need to withdraw from work in order to be in touch, one must be in touch with work you can hardly work without being in touch.

What was the other point you made?

Voice: Gross energy.

S: Gross Energy! This is something I really wonder about. I mean gross energy. What is this gross energy?

M.S: I think the form... which Malcolm...

S: I've heard it all before. People say, 'I want to get in touch with my more refined energy.' I'm not so sure there is such a thing as a gross energy and a more refined energy. There are certain gross ways of behaviour and more refined, let us say, more gentler, more subtle ways of behaviour, but I would say the energy behind them is, in a manner of speaking the same energy.

(Pause for change of tape some words missing)

... me experiencing my more refined energies but me behaving or feeling or thinking or speaking in a more gross or refined way. I mean there are some forms of work which require a lot of physical, even muscular, energy. I think, though, one should beware of speaking in terms of using your gross energies in that sort of activity. Simply say it needs a lot of hard physical work. That's all you need to say. Whereas 'gross' suggests a sort of value judgement [21] which is not quite legitimate perhaps. But what was the other point? There was a third point.

Voice: Communication.

A: Ah communication. It could be supposing you're having to work on your own, and work on your own for many hours of the day, well, it could be that you get out of communication, so to speak, with other people, but that is not because you are working, but because you're working on your own. So either you can give up working at all and be with other people more or you can work with other people. But it's not the work that is getting in the way, it's working on your own and one would have thought that was obvious. Because it really means to say, if you're working on your own you're not working with anybody else. (laughter) So there's no great wisdom in suggesting that if you're working on your own you're falling out of communication. Well, at least for the time being. I think one should beware of these pseudo-pathologies. (laughter)

M.S: This is what actually arose in the context of building work with other people, gardening with other people and packing food with other people - they say they have to stop doing it in order to get back into communication.

S: Well, this suggests again an abstract idea of communication, an abstract idea of being 'in touch' or an abstract idea of 'relationships'. If you are working with other people and your working with them is not being used as a vehicle of communication - well, that is what you have to examine, which may involve just actually stopping work and sitting down face to face - it may involve that.

[22]

But it doesn't mean flying to some totally different situation away from those people so that you can just have more communication.

(Pause)

Did any other points come up?

Ratnaguna: In our group something... We had a big discussion about how Insight arises. I think the most intelligible question that came up was:

'What is the relationship between the initial flash of insight and stream-entry?'

S: This is a question that we have gone into quite a number of times. I think it's been gone into in one of the Mitratas on Samatta and Vipassana. Anyway just briefly it is one might say the universal Buddhist teaching in virtually all traditions that vipassana or insight or if you like, wisdom develops only in dependence upon a degree of concentration or dhyana, and usually it is said that there needs to be quite a build-up of dhyana before there can be any hope even of a momentary flash of insight, because the dhyana state is not just a state of concentration, much less still forcible concentration, it's the bringing together of all the energies, all the psycho-physical energies, into a sort of equilibrium, and in that equilibrium, especially in the higher dhyanas, there's no mental activity but there's a sort of direct seeing, or at least the possibility of direct seeing, and when that seeing actually takes place, that is Vipassana or that is Insight. And at first this is usually just momentary. So the tradition is that one builds up dhyana as a basis for the Insight. In some traditions, in some teachings, dhyana and Vipassana are alternated.

[23]

That is to say, you build up the dhyana, then you develop the Insight. Having developed the Insight, you build up the dhyana again; having built up the dhyana again, you develop the Insight again, and so on. You might ask, 'Well, how does one develop the Insight?'

Sometimes it comes spontaneously when you just turn the mind to something. You don't have to think about that object in order to see what it is like. In other words, your insight is not conceptually mediated. You, as it were, turn or you avert your concentrated mind to a particular object and then you see not only that but you see through that object. And that seeing through the object is what we call insight, - which is usually expressed in conceptual terms. Certainly in the Pali texts and many Mahayana texts it is expressed in conceptual terms. So you have the conceptual terms expressive of the original insight. So in the context of your dhyana you can, as it were, call to mind the conceptual expressions or conceptual



formulations, the traditional conceptual formulations of Insight and as it were bear them in mind, and in this way you encourage, so to speak, the development of the Insight of which those conceptual formulations are the formulations.

Do you see what I mean? You're not just recollecting conceptual formulations, you're using conceptual formulations as a basis for the development of actual Insight. Sometimes of course people do mistake the one for the other. So in some traditions or some teachings you have at a certain point just to drop the conceptual formulations. Just stop thinking about them, and allow the Insight to arise, so to speak, spontaneously, and this is the general method, this is the general procedure. But then the question arises;

'Well, if Stream Entry takes place in consequence of breaking the fetters, the first three fetters, if those three fetters are broken by Insight, how strong does the Insight need to be to [24] break the fetters?'

Well the answer is: it needs to be strong enough to break the fetters. (Laughter)

That is the criterion, and you only know if the fetters are broken by your ordinary everyday life experience, behaviour, and so on. There's no other way of knowing. There's no theoretical yard stick, so to speak. But it is generally said that there needs to be quite an accumulation of flashes of Insight. In fact the flashes of insight need usually to sort of consolidate into a fairly steady beam before the fetters are actually broken through. Just one small weak flash of insight, you know, in the course of meditation will not be sufficient. You need something much more powerful than that because the fetters are very strong indeed. They go very deep, very far. So of course theoretical questions arise like, 'Well how much insight is needed to break half the first fetter?' 'Is it possible, you know, to be in a state of having the first fetter half broken?' Well yes and no, it's like, in the case of a physical fetter. Well, if the fetter is half-sawn through, are you free or are you not free? No, you're not free because the fetter is still there hampering your movement. It may in a manner of speaking be half sawn through or may literally be half sawn through, but are you half free? Can you be half free? The fetter is either on or off regardless whether it is half sawn through or three quarters, or whether there is a little hair's breadth of fetter left, you know, to be carved through. So it's much like that with the fetters. Until the fetters are entirely broken they're not broken at all, for all practical purposes, and you know when they are finally broken through because there is a change in your whole being and consciousness and you behave differently, [25] act differently, from before. Things which bothered you before don't bother you any longer. So in that way you and other people know or can infer that you've broken those particular fetters.

Ratnaguna: So if you can have an Insight without breaking the three fetters does that mean you can have an Insight which doesn't actually change you an incredible amount?

S: Well, again this raises the question of, 'What is an Insight?'

By definition, 'an Insight is what breaks the three fetters or breaks fetters.'

If it doesn't break the fetters, it isn't for all practical purposes, Insight. It is only, you might say, the beginnings of an Insight in a manner of speaking. Or you could say that a weak Insight doesn't count as an Insight. Just as if you have a very weak light and you can't read by it, well it doesn't really count as a light, because for practical purposes it's useless. If the

Insight doesn't actually break the fetter well for practical purposes it's not Insight in the full strict sense, it's an approach to or an approximation to an Insight. It's really a question of words one might say because you can have a build up to a build up, a build up to a build up to a build up indefinitely.

A.A: But you wouldn't fail to notice the fetters being broken?

S: Well, you wouldn't fail to notice that something had happened. Depending on your knowledge or lack of knowledge of Buddhist [26] Scripture, Buddhist traditions, you may or may not think of it in that particular way or interpret it in that particular way. But you would know that you felt differently. You'd become aware that you were a different person to some extent, or to a great extent. That you'd certainly be aware of, but whether you'd be able to explain it precisely in terms of particular fetters broken, as I said, depends on the your degree of your acquaintance with the tradition. But if you were just to describe your experience, someone one knew the tradition would be able to say, 'Ah that fits', 'that squares with what the texts say'. You must have gained stream entry. And then you might say, 'Well, Yes, have I?' 'All right!' (laughter)

I remember in this connection years ago when I was in Poona. Somebody came to see me who was an ex-untouchable Buddhist with a complaint, virtually, about his wife. He said would I please come and speak to his wife because she was sitting up all night meditating and he wasn't too pleased about that. He admitted that she didn't neglect her duties, she did those during the day. But she sat up all night meditating and he said it was a bit uncanny. He didn't like it. So, I went along with another bhikkhu friend of mine to see this lady. So I asked her how she got meditating. So she said she'd seen at the end of her little puja book the mantra 'Om Mani Padme Hum' and she just started repeating it without knowing what it meant. There was a little Puja book printed by Dr Ambedkar years ago in Marathi with the Vandana and so on - right at the end it's got 'Om Mani Padme Hum'. Why put it there? I don't know - that's another story. Anyway, she'd seen this and she was repeating it; and she used to sit meditating all night through repeating this and meditating. So we asked her various questions, [27] this bhikkhu and myself, out of the scriptures and Buddhist tradition, about her experience and it was quite clear from her replies that she had experience of the dhyanas, I think at least up to third dhyana. She gave perfectly correct answers to all our technical questions, and I must confess we tried to trap her with sort of trick questions but she wasn't to be caught out at all. And she wasn't one might say, a very intellectual sort of woman, she was a simple, ordinary housewife and it was quite interesting to note how she answered the questions. When we put a question she would just stop and, not think, it was though she was listening, she was consulting her own experience - "Well, what did happen? Ah... that's what happened", and then she'd tell us, and it tallied with what the tradition said. So that's the sort of thing I'm talking about. - On another level of course. She didn't know a thing about the Buddhist scriptures, she only just sat repeating 'Om Mani Padme Hum' and getting more and more absorbed and having certain experiences, which she could describe when she was asked about them, but it tallied with what the scriptures said. So in any movement it isn't necessary that everybody should know what's in the scriptures, but it's good that some people know, so that we can check, as to where we stand in relation to the tradition. (pause)

Was there anything further on that?

Ratnaguna: There was, I don't know quite how to form it - can you? You know the discussion

we had about this.

Murray: Ah yes. There was a discussion and it was, it essentially went [28] around the model of where lightning flashes and illuminates the landscape and the lightning represents the Insight. What we were discussing was that the lightning flashes that illuminate the landscape so that you experience the Insight Experience. But it's like, in a sense, the full glory of the Insight experience, doesn't last but the effect on your personality, the effect upon the way you act, on the way you behave, is lasting. What happened was that there were two sides to the argument. One side took what I just said and the other side said, you know, once you experience an Insight that Insight was permanent so that experience...

S: (Interrupting) But actually Insight is permanent. So what you see, you continue to see, so there's not just a flash like a lightning flash, which is then withdrawn. In the case of Insight which is really Insight that is to say, fetter-breaking Insight, it remains constant. Whenever you look at the object you see it with Insight. So the Insight is there all the time. You may not be actually exercising that Insight in a particular instance, but it is there to be exercised. For instance if you have Insight you can see that a tree let us say, is dukkha-anicca-anatta. But you are not always looking at a tree. So you do not always actually consciously think that a tree is dukkha-anicca-anatta; that Insight is actually only present consciously when you look at the tree, when that Insight falls upon the tree, but as a faculty it's there all the time. Just like in the case with the eyes; you can still see even although your eyes are closed. When you open them you actually see. The [29] potentiality to see is there all the time. So it's like that with insight; once you have developed real insight it becomes a permanent faculty. Even though that faculty may not actually be exercised in a particular given moment. But you can say that those flashes of insight with a small 'i' which fall short of Insight with a capital 'I' certainly soften up the being. They don't permanently change it, only Insight with a capital 'I' can do that, but it is through that that the fetters though not broken through, have been softened and they can be more easily broken, though they're not broken yet.

Malcolm Webb: So one doesn't want to confuse dhyana with Insight then.

S: Oh no, in traditional Buddhist teaching that's almost the last thing that one must do.

Malcolm Webb: So that say, an Insight experience could be accompanied by a strong dhyana experience; the strong dhyana may come and go but the Insight remains.

S: Yes, the Insight arises in dependence upon the dhyana, and it is very, very rare that there will be a genuine Insight experience without prolonged previous experience of dhyana. But once the insight has arisen, it remains, even though the dhyana subsides. For instance in the case of the Buddha, we know he was not always in the state of dhyana, but he did not cease to be the Buddha, the Enlightened One - i.e. one possessing full Insight etc., when he was not in the dhyana experience. When the Buddha was speaking he was not in the dhyana state.

[30]

They're were some early Buddhist schools who maintained the Buddha was always in Samadhi but the majority of schools did not agree with that, because to speak there must be mental activity and mental activity is inconsistent with the dhyanas from the second dhyana upwards. So when the Buddha was speaking he could not have been in the second, third or fourth dhyana; but his insight remained undiminished.

(Pause)

That's why when you have Insight you don't cease to experience objects of the senses, as you may do in deep dhyana but your attitude towards them will be different. Your understanding of them will be different, but the senses will continue to experience the sense objects, the eye will continue to see visual forms, the ear will continue to hear sounds and so on when you're not in the dhyanic state. But your Insight will not be affected nor will you do in relation to those objects anything which is inconsistent with that Insight experience.

(Pause)

Was that all from your group?

Ratnaguna: There was something. Have we got time?

S: We have a few minutes.

Ratnaguna: Earlier you were speaking about the way of achieving Insight by turning your mind on to a formula i.e. while experiencing the first dhyana, but that's not necessarily the only way to do it. Does that mean to say you can achieve Insight through any of the dhyanas but only if you go...? (unclear)

S: The standard or traditional procedure is that you go back to the first dhyana to develop Insight, by way that is of recollecting [31] or turning over in one's mind what I called the conceptual formulations of Insight. So the usual procedure or let's say the standard, the classical procedure is you immerse yourself in the dhyanas, first, second, third, fourth etc. Having remained experiencing the dhyanas let us say for a few hours or a few days or a few weeks you then come down to the first dhyana and start up mental activity. Starting up mental activity you recall those conceptual formulations of Insight. For instance you might say, from the Theravada point of view, that all dhammas are anatta. Or you might say from the Mahayana point of view all dharmas are Sunyata, or all dharmas are pure from the beginning; and it's not that you don't think about it. You can think about it but that would mean you were less in the first dhyana than you imagined but because it is subtle mental activity not gross mental activity that is present there. You don't sort of think or worry about those formula you just hold them in the mind or even repeat them and just as it were, allow the corresponding Insight to arise. One can't put it more clearly than that. You're not going to worry your way into the Insight. You're providing the Insight with a basis, because for the Insight to be comprehensible, for it in a way to be thinkable, it requires a basis and that basis is provided by the conceptual formulation. Now it's much the same in the visualization practice. In the visualization practice, you say visualize the figure of Manjushri, you visualize Manjushri. So supposing you see Manjushri quite clearly as a visualized form: you see the colour, the attributes, etc., just like a picture you see with your eyes closed. This corresponds to dhyana experience. But then of course as it were you can start reflecting what Manjushri embodies or represents. This corresponds to the conceptual formulations, the calling to mind of the conceptual formulations [32] and corresponding to the visualized form of Manjushri you can have a sort of spiritual experience which will be an Insight, do you see what I mean? In other words, to paraphrase very much, you will experience not just the visualized Manjushri but one might say the spiritual Manjushri or even, you might say, the presence of Manjushri. The first in Tantric tradition is called the

Samayasattva and second is called the jnanasattva and the first provides the basis for the Second. And sometimes you have to abolish the samayasattva so as to give as it were a chance to the jnanasattva to arise. Do you see what I mean? The experience of the of the jnanasattva in that context corresponds to the experience of vipassana in the previous context.

(Pause)

Vessantara: Could there almost be in this element of subtle reflection... ? ? ? you get the Zen monks walking along and the bottom drops out of their bucket and they have an Insight experience; is there some sort of subtle element of reflection on the experience?

S: It need not be a reflection, as I mentioned at the very beginning, it can be just a seeing, the mind is so clear due to the dhyana and so unobscured and so free from perturbation when it just looks at something it sees a certain truth or a certain aspect of the truth. You see what I mean?

You could say well if your mind is entirely clear and entirely pure when you see a bucket you see a bucket. Normally you don't see the bucket. When the bottom drops out, well, you really see the bottom dropping out of the bucket. It, so to speak, means much more than it usually does. Usually you don't see the bottom [33] of the bucket dropping out at all. You think you do perhaps but you don't. But because you're in that highly concentrated aware awake state you really see what is happening. And that actually seeing of what is happening is the Insight experience. Zen tends, though only tends, not to proceed by way of reviewing conceptual formulations, though it does to some extent. That's shown by the fact that they recite the Heart Sutra so much. That's a reviewing. You could say that the Heart Sutra was a sort of extended conceptual formulization.

Ratnaguna: Can you see then with the third and fourth dhyanas?

S: If your mind is in the third and fourth dhyana you can see, but if by 'seeing' you mean Vipassana and if Vipassana necessarily involves an element of translation into conceptual terms before you can even think or speak about it, then of course, it isn't possible to develop Vipassana directly from those higher dhyanas.

Ratnaguna: But why does it have to have the translation into conceptual terms?

S: Because the experience, so to speak, has to be assimilated by the total being. And it's assimilated via one might say - to use that term - the intellect. Otherwise it is sort of ungraspable; you can't assimilate it. It's like a dream. You know, sometimes you have a dream and you wake up, and you know that you have dreamt you can sort of almost catch it but not quite. It escapes you. So you're not able to assimilate it into your conscious attitude. It is a bit like that. It can happen that the Insight is so intangible, so elusive, so subtle, that once, [34] when you've had it, you could have had it but afterwards, if you have no sort of bridge, no conceptual formulations of the bridge, it's as though you just haven't had it. You can't recall it, it's gone. Just like the dream is gone.

Vessantara: So it doesn't change you?

S: It doesn't change you.

Subhuti: You have talked at times of Insight arising from the development of Metta.

S: Yes.

Subhuti: So where would the conceptual element be there?

S: When for instance you reflect that your metta is boundless, that there is no limitation. There is an element of reflection, quite a strong element, in the Metta Bhavana Practice. In a way you consciously make it boundless.

Subhuti: What I had understood you to be saying was that the Insight consisted in your capacity to transcend the subject/object distinction; to be able to feel Metta for others in that sort of way.

S: Yes.

Subhuti: Which didn't seem to imply a necessary conceptual element. It seemed to be that the Insight was the change that had taken place.

[35]

S: I think one would find that in actually experiencing the Metta in that way that you were, so to speak, reviewing what was happening in subtle mental terms and in that way providing a bridge between the experience itself and your, so to speak, normal experience so that one could influence the other. I suppose it depends on the degree of subtlety of the mental process.

Subhuti: You've also talked about Insight arising in dreams.

S: Yes.

Subhuti: So where would the conceptual element be there?

S: Well it could be a conceptual element arising in the dream because you could be actually given a conceptual teaching in the dream. In the same way you could, so to speak, meditate in the dream and you could review those conceptual formulations in the dream and you could develop Insight by way of these formulations in a dream. Or one could have a visionary experience in a dream and develop insight from that.

M.S: In that last two cases, where is the necessary dhyana basis say in a dream that you described, that the necessary basis of dhyana for Insight to arise or in the experience of metta.

S: In the dream state one could say you are in the first dhyana because you are disassociated with the physical body; there's no experience coming in from the five senses and there is only a subtle mental activity. You could say that, some teachers [36] do hold that; that the dream state corresponds to the first dhyana. So this is one of the reasons why the dream state is quite an interesting and quite a useful one that should not be neglected.

(Pause)

I think quite a lot goes on in dreams, though here we've touched on quite a vast subject of great importance. I think sometimes you find that people lead a sort of double life; their waking life and their dream life. Jung spoke of the dream life having a sort of compensating influence in a quite positive kind of way. It helps to redress any sort of inequality or imbalance in your life. So if we are to become integrated we need to become more aware of what is going on on that sort of level. Bring the two houses, so to speak, together, the house of the waking consciousness and the house of the dream consciousness.

Malcolm Webb: So, in terms of your creative imagination, of your visualizing in terms of meditation, if you were having strong dreams in the sense they were teachings or were, it seemed, visualizations in themselves, you could almost get a crossing over from your meditation to your dreams.

S: Yes.

Malcolm Webb: And that they were of the same texture.

S: This is also perhaps why one shouldn't be too concerned if your spending a lot of time on physical work. Dreams will make up for it (laughter). Dreams will make up for it, dreams will have a compensating effect. [37] You see what I mean? Because you have to sleep. You'll never work so much that you won't sleep. Maybe just for the odd night or two but nothing more than that. But perhaps it would be interesting to try to see what is happening as regards your dream life during those periods that you're doing a lot of physical work. It could be that a lot of a compensatory nature, in a positive sense, is going on, you know, during the hours of sleep. But don't just take into account what is happening during the waking state. I mean there is a link up in the Tibetan teaching between the state of sleep, that is dreaming sleep, and the Bardo State but that again is quite another big question. Because in the Bardo state you are out of the physical body, just as during sleep, you don't experience external sense objects. So there's a definite analogy between these two states.

Dave Rice: What do you think happened in the case of the Buddha then? Is it that he had such a profound visionary experience that he was able to draw Insight from it for the rest of his life or was it that he continued to have these visionary experiences?

S: It's not that Insight is a sort of capital on which you continue to live. Because it's there, you could even say that it's being re-created all the time. It's not that the Buddha had an experience, an experience, and then lived on it ever afterwards, remembering it as something which had happened to him. It was something that was with him all the time. The Insight was permanent. He didn't have to refer to his past experience, he referred from instant to instant to his present experience which was, in a manner of speaking, the same experience. (Pause)

[38]

A.A: What you said about the reflection reviewing the conceptualization process which is necessary for Insight that could show why when the Buddha saw his previous experience under the rose apple tree he went back to that first dhyana state he could then penetrate whereas before he seemed to be going higher and higher into the dhyanas but without actually breaking the fetters.

S: Well, as I mentioned, it does seem as far as we can tell - this is my personal interpretation -

that the Buddha's previous experience of the dhyanas, during his period of wondering and immediately preceding his you know, taking his seat under the Bodhi-tree, was rather forced, and that forced dhyana could not be a proper basis for Insight. It's as though it kept sort of slipping away before Insight could develop. But when he recollected his experience under the Jambu tree as a child, as a youth, then he saw the point. Dhyana was in a way something more natural, something more spontaneous, and it was that sort of dhyana which could last and be the basis for the development for the basis of Insight. It is also held that you need a more prolonged experience of dhyana because your whole being needs to be transformed by that. It isn't just that you understand something and that's Insight, it's as though the Insight is received by the whole being and therefore the whole being has to be in a much more refined and subtle state and it's put into that more refined and subtle state by the experience of prolonged dhyana, as well as by the observance of ethical precepts, not just as precepts but by your whole ethical way of life.

Vessantara: Could you see as time goes on people in the Friends doing longer [39] meditation retreats?

S: Possibly, possibly. But I was also going to say that we should, though I have used this expression "conceptual formulation", we should beware of thinking (I've mentioned this in the Survey) of Insight in too exclusively conceptual terms. You can think of Insight also in emotional terms. In terms of Faith rather than in terms of Wisdom. One shouldn't neglect that.

(pause)

Subhuti: Because it has some of the characteristics of both.

S: Yes, because you can understand what the Buddha has said about dukkha, anicca, anatta, quite clearly perhaps, be able to explain it - give a good lecture on it - but you may have no Insight at all corresponding to that understanding. I think people do sometimes have the experience of thinking that they have understood something but then one day having had an experience - it might not be a dhyana experience, it might be a life experience - and then suddenly thinking, that's what it's all about, that's what it meant. I didn't realize it. Before you thought you did, you thought you understood, but in fact you didn't. You only understood the words, the meaning of the words, not what the words indicated, or what the meaning of the words indicated.

Anyway I think time is up.

That is all.

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