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 Mitras. 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 Adhisthana Dharma Team

SANGHARAKSHITA IN SEMINAR

SECOND MITRA RETREAT 1976

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

(Tape One Side one)

Sangharakshita: Any points arising out of what we've done in the course of thirteen days of study. Or is everything clear and just awaiting further reflection. Or are there any little knotty points that could perhaps be cleared up before we start. Are there any sort of general comments or any questions?

_____: Reincarnation?

S: Oh, reincarnation, oh dear! (Laughter)

_____: Because I hear remarks about it.

S: Well, there are references to reincarnation to use your term. I think in practically all the texts that we've studied. So obviously this does form part at least of the framework of Buddhist thought. It must be said that Buddhism traditionally does take the teaching of reincarnation quite literally. It does quite literally, or Buddhists do quite literally believe and accept that one passes through a whole series of lives. That one has lived before. One is living now on this earth as a result of actions committed in the past and that unless one exhausts one's karmas in this life, or very nearly exhausts them, then one will be reborn again, reincarnated again. This is traditionally part of Buddhist teaching. All schools of Buddhism accept this or take it for granted.

It's rather interesting in a way that to the best of my knowledge nowhere in Buddhist literature is there any attempt to prove the teaching of rebirth or to demonstrate it. It seems it was so universally accepted that nobody questioned it and therefore no-one felt any need for proving it. But we're not in that sort of position. The only sort of discussion, the only sort of debate that seems to have taken place, at least so far as India was concerned, was with regard to the exact nature of the process. In this sense there were basically two views or one might even say three views, just to enlarge the scope a little - two of which were non-Buddhist and one of which was Buddhist.

To just refer to the two views to begin with. The first view which was a non-Buddhist view, a Brahminical view, was that something called a Jiva, a living being or something called a self, an atma, that passed through a series of lives on earth or even a series of lives in other worlds or both itself remained unchanged. This was one current teaching. You find this sort of teaching reflected in the Bhagavad Gita. In the Bhagavad Gita which is of course a Hindu work, a little bit later than Buddhism, a little bit later than the time of the Buddha, Sri Krishna is represented as saying that just as a man may take a new set of clothes and putting aside the old set put on the new set, in the same way casting aside the old body, the self takes a new body. So the assumption clearly here is that the

self remains unchanged. The atma is this unchanging reincarnating entity. So this was one view. This view was not accepted by the Buddhist. One can say paradoxically that the Buddhist believes that reincarnation takes place but that nothing and nobody is reincarnated. As Buddhagosha says there is rebirth but there is no-one who is reborn.

So what does this mean? It means that what we call rebirth is not a process which any unchanging entity undergoes. Rebirth is the term given to the process itself. That Buddhism points out that you can speak for instance in terms of "my thoughts", "my emotions", "my actions". So grammatically it is as though you are the subject of all those predications. You are distinct from those predications, those predications are distinct from you. It's rather like when we say "it rained". But is there an it which is raining? No. There is only the process of the rain falling going on. You just have that grammatical subject "it" as a linguistic convenience. In the same way Buddhism says you have this predicate "I" or "self" as a sort of linguistic convenience but actually the "self" is no more than the sum total of all those thoughts and words and deeds and feelings and actions which are in a state of continuous flux which are a process. There is no subject of the process apart from the process itself.

So therefore the process of consciousness, constantly changing, goes on from what we call life to life, linking now with one psycho-physical organism, now with another, now with one body, now with another but there is no unchanging subject of that process. This is where the Buddhist view of so-called reincarnation differs from the Hindu one or indeed from the Western one. In other words Buddhism maintains the continuity of this ever-changing stream of consciousness, for want of a better term, from life to life, but does not believe in any unchanging entity which is reincarnated. But certainly Buddhism does believe in that continuity of existence from life to life.

But this raises all sorts of questions. For instance it raises the question of time. Is time real? Buddhist thought tends to say that time is not real. That time is part of the way in which we perceive things, not anything that we perceive in itself. Time is part of the structure of our perception. So if you speak in terms of reincarnation it means that you're thinking in terms of time. You <u>did</u> live in the past, you live here now, you will live in the future. This is thinking within the limits of time. If you transcend time you transcend reincarnation. If you no longer think in terms of time, you no longer think in terms of reincarnation. So also we find the Buddha, and following him Buddhism generally then, that when you gain Enlightenment, when you become Enlightened it is akaliko, it is a timeless thing. It is outside time. So if it is outside time, it is outside birth, it is outside rebirth.

So in <u>reality</u> there's no rebirth, in a sense. In reality there's no rebirth. That there is such a thing as rebirth is one of the illusions that you awaken from when you're enlightened. But when you are unenlightened, so far as you're concerned, there is rebirth. So this is probably as much as we can say without getting into very deep waters indeed. Nowadays quite a few people are interested in proving or demonstrating rebirth scientifically by collecting instances of alleged recollection of previous lives. This is very interesting. But scientifically even it isn't all that significant because even if you collected absolute proof and say a thousand people just remembered their previous lives, it would only prove that those thousand people had remembered their previous life. It wouldn't necessarily prove that everybody had a previous life even though he didn't remember it.

So as I say that line of investigation is interesting but perhaps not very conclusive. Another thing that we have to remember is that the more emphasis is placed on becoming enlightened here and now in this life the less emphasis is placed on reincarnation. And we find that in those forms of Buddhism which stress very much enlightenment here and now in this life, like for instance Zen,

there's very little mention of rebirth. There's not much importance given to it. But where for instance, as in Ceylon, many people believe that you can't gain enlightenment in this life any more, it's too late, well, it's too late and it's too early. You're too late for Sakyamuni Buddha, too early for Maitreya Buddha. [Laughter] You just have to wait and what is the best that you can do. Lead a good life, observe the precepts, give alms to the monks and pray for a happy rebirth in the future. So where there is no emphasis at all on gaining enlightenment in this life there is a corresponding increase of emphasis on rebirth, in this case the happy rebirth, preferably in a heaven world.

So in the case of a person who is thinking very seriously about gaining enlightenment here and now the question of rebirth hardly arises or the question of reincarnation hardly arises. I remember in this connection Christmas Humphreys telling me many years ago that since the days when he started up the Buddhist Society there had been quite a considerable change in people's attitudes towards karma and rebirth and he mentioned particularly that when he started up the Buddhist Society which was in 1924, I think, '25, but the people who came along were mostly interested in karma and rebirth and one of the things that most attracted them about Buddhism and perhaps the thing that did in fact most interest them was that it taught karma and rebirth. But he said now, and this is ten, twelve years ago, he said the teaching of karma and rebirth attracts hardly anybody. Now they're interested in other things or attracted by other aspects of Buddhism.

So it was as though in those days in the aftermath or the early stages of the aftermath of orthodox Christianity more people wanted to be assured that there was a life after death. They'd lost their faith in Christianity so they wondered, well, is there a life after death? Or not? Many people wanted to think that there was a life after death. They didn't want to think that death was the absolute end. So Buddhism, with what they took to be in its teaching of karma and rebirth or reincarnation, seemed to offer some sort of assurance that death was not the end. But nowadays people seem either to think, well death is the end so what, or they're not bothered. They don't even think very much is there a life after death or not which is in a way quite strange, quite interesting. I don't know how it is in other countries or was in other countries but in England during the Victorian period people were very much exercised with this question of the immortality of the soul and whether science made it impossible to believe in the immortality of the soul. But nowadays people don't seem to bother about the immortality of the soul. They don't even think about it any more. And certainly people who come into Buddhism aren't looking for some assurance of you do go on living after death. Either they believe that you do in some way or other somehow or other and just don't bother about it any more, or they think that you don't and think it isn't worth thinking about. But they don't seem quite so exercised over this question of the immortality of the soul. They don't seem to care very much one way or the other.

And this brings me back to the third alternative which I mentioned. I mentioned that there was one Buddhist way of looking at this matter and then two Hindu ways. I've mentioned one Hindu way. The other or rather non-Buddhist way, it wasn't strictly Hindu in the Vedic sense. The other Indian way was to regard death as the absolute end, that with the death of the physical body nothing of use survived. So according to Buddhism this was one of the two extreme views. The first extreme view was that your soul at the death of the physical body went marching on unchanged and took over some other physical body. That was one view. The other, as I've just said, was that at death, there'll be a complete halt, a complete full stop. Nothing survives. So the view that you went marching on unchanged to take over a new body, this was called (Sattatavada?) or eternalism or rather it was one form of eternalism and the view that you came to a halt, a dead stop, at the time of death, this was called (Ucchedavada?) or "cutting off" doctrine. Cutting off-ism or nihilism because it believed that

at the time of death you were just literally cut off like that and nothing was left over. So (Sattatavada?) or (Shasvatavada?) and (Ucchedavada?), (Cchedana?) as in Vajracchedika Sutra, to cut.

So the Buddhist point of view is presented as a middle way. That there is in any case no unchanging entity so it neither survives nor does not survive but there is a continuity of the process of consciousness beyond what we call death. This is the Buddhist view.

_____: (?) in this (?) of consciousness will survive death (?) You lose the ego or you could carry on your ego (?).

S: No, one can look at the ego in two ways. One can look at the ego in the sense of the consciousness which is bound up with this particular physical body. Or one can look at the ego as something, in a sense, even deeper than that, a sort of point of reference which goes beyond and is not limited by the physical body. The first kind of ego obviously doesn't survive death. What does survive death is something that is, for want of a better term, independent of the physical body and to the extent that the ego is identified with or conditioned by the physical body, to that extent, the ego does not survive bodily death. What does survive bodily death is, as it were, a different kind of ego. You could say a more subtle ego, a more deeply rooted ego.

_____: Could that be sort of ego in the sense of, rather than just an ego wanting to cling to this existence ...

S: An ego wanting to cling to existence as such.

_____: Yes.

S: There's a quite interesting bit I was reading in a book yesterday that John brought from the public library. There was a book of interviews with modern writers and there was an interview with Ginsberg. Allen Ginsberg. I don't know if anyone's heard of him? No?

_____: Yes.

S: Oh he's one of the famous beat poets of America. Quite a character. Anyway I happen to know him personally. He came to see me when I was in Kalimpong and he came to see me when I was in London some years ago and he's always kept a bit in touch. Anyway he was being interviewed and, I forget how it came up, but Ginsberg mentioned that he'd been studying Blake. He'd become very, very interested in William Blake and his writings and ideas and life generally. And he mentioned in the course of the interview that Blake had said just shortly before he died and in fact had written a letter that "though my body is decaying my mind and my ideas and my (imagination?) are so active I feel that they're just going to go beyond death". So Ginsberg said in the interview, "I don't feel like that. If I was really ill and old, I just wouldn't be able to think like that. I mean, I'd just, if my body was decaying, I'd be decaying too". So you see the difference - that Blake's realisation of his mind as it were apart from the body, to put it dualistically in a way, is so strong that he identifies much more with the mind than with the body and he feels that he isn't dependent upon the body and he is going to go, as it were, on, not marching on unchanged but in this process of constant spiritual development, of evolution.

And it's interesting that we find that the Buddha, according to the Mahaparinibbana Sutta saying much the same sort of thing. He says to Ananda that "though I'm so old my mind is still vigorous". And he said, "Even if I became so frail that I had to be carried about from place to place by four strong men on a litter", that is a sort of big stretcher, he said, "my mental vigour and my capacity for teaching the Dharma would be unaltered". So it represents the same sort of thing.

So I think in certain states you can have this sort of feeling very strongly that you are not identical with the body. That you're not totally dependent on it. That you have a life and an identity almost quite separate from the body which will continue beyond the body, which will survive the death of the body. But Buddhism would simply add that is not an unchanging entity, that is a stream of consciousness, for want of a better term, in the process of constant development, constant change. Well, at least constant change. If you make an effort that change can amount to development but at least change. Not remaining identical, not remaining the same. And this is in a way one of the basic principles of Buddhism - that everything is process, everything phenomenal is process. There is no subject of the process. What we think of as the subject of the process, it is only the process itself abstracted from itself and thought of as something distinct as when we say, "It rains".

_____: Bhante, having a disenchanted Christian background, I always keep wondering what the Mahayana viewpoint is of Jesus Christ's continued reference to God. You can't, I mean one obviously knows that Jesus Christ lived and what he did was a lot of good work and a lot of spiritual guidance for people, and moral guidance for people, but what was his reference to God? Why, what does Mahayana consider God to be?

S: Well, traditional Mahayana, like traditional Buddhism generally, considers the idea of God taken literally as the creator of the universe. I mean the supreme being, if you like an anthropomorphic supreme being who has created the universe and who governs it; it regards this sort of idea as simply wrong, as a delusion. So the question may arise, well, as you say, well, what about Christ's reference to this idea. I think a sort of full-blooded Mahayanist would make no bones about saying, well, Christ was simply wrong because they don't have that sort of conditioning that we have - that Christ can't be wrong.

So even though we give up Christianity, very often we're left with this sort of lingering feeling, you mustn't criticise Christ. Because Christ was mistaken or Christ was wrong goes very much against the grain. Or that Christ might have been even deluded or a bit of a crank. But even if people are not Christians find it very difficult to think in this sort of way. Perhaps one should just as an experiment. For instance, D.H. Lawrence has written a very well known short story or rather long short story, short novel, "The Man Who Died". He doesn't mention the name of Christ but clearly it's referring to Christ and he represents Christ, because D.H. Lawrence has his own way of looking at things, as having made one great big mistake which Lawrence shows him in the process of realising after the resurrection because he didn't really die, he wasn't really resurrected according to this story. He recovered. He recovered. And he realised that his whole mission had been a mistake. And what was his main mistake. Well, again according to Lawrence, to put it bluntly, he'd never got married. (Laughter) Lawrence depicts Christ as proceeding to rectify this mistake with a very attractive young priestess of Isis and gives a quite graphic description of that.

So you see this may or may not be so. Christ may or may not have made a mistake but it's very interesting that Lawrence has, as it were, the courage to conceive the possibility of Christ having made a mistake and actually depicted in this story as proceeding to rectify that mistake. To put that

mistake right. But it's very difficult for most people to do that.

_____: I certainly doesn't have any qualms from a Muslim point of view or Jewish point of view ...

S: No-one has any qualms about thinking, well maybe Mohammed was a bit of a disreputable character. We've not been brought up as Moslems. Maybe he shouldn't have had all those wives. A Moslem will feel very sensitive about that. It's a matter of historic fact he had twelve or fourteen wives but the orthodox Moslem when he brings himself to mention this at all nowadays - this is a Westernised Moslem - do go to great pains to show they weren't really wives at all, they were widows of his followers who had fallen in battle. Most of them were old and unattractive anyway. But even they can't quite explain away that youngest and most attractive wife that he was very very fond of. So Moslems have this sort of difficulty. Orthodox Buddhists even have difficulty explaining away what they might consider to be the Buddha's mistakes. This is something that we were talking about earlier on. That the Buddha gave that instruction about the meditation on death to certain disciples of his who proceeded in his absence to commit suicide. That certainly doesn't square with the idea of an infallible Buddha.

But then if we look in those same scriptures the Buddha does not claim to be infallible. But certainly in the Christian scriptures Christ does seem to claim, at least according to the predominant interpretation, to be the son of God in a very special sense. So we can't so easily dispose of it. Some critics in the past, some theologians, have tried to get around it by putting the matter like this. There are only two alternatives. Either Christ was what he claimed to be, the Son of God, God incarnate, or he was mad. Now clearly he wasn't mad. (Laughter) So he must have been the Son of God. There's no middle way. They try to sort of force you to choose in that sort of manner. But there are other ways of looking at the matter.

With regard to this question of God. All right, supposing one has got, let's say, some respect for Christ, even though one is not a Christian, one has got some respect. You don't regard him as a complete charlatan. You don't regard him as an absolute myth. You believe that there was a man called Jesus, the Christ, who lived around that time, who did teach, who did preach, perhaps who healed the sick, perhaps who worked miracles even. You'd probably draw the line at his rising from the dead. You'd think that maybe that was mythical. But there was some such person who did give a spiritual teaching but we can't regard him as the Son of God. We can't regard him as inspired and infallible. So what about this God belief that he did seem to entertain? We, of course, let's assume, don't believe in God but here we find this particular person, whom we can't help respecting to some extent, believing in God. So what is the position? How does it fit in? How are we to make some sort of sense of it? The Christian, by the way, encounters a similar difficulty from his point of view, when studying the life of the Buddha. Here is the Buddha who's leading such an exemplary life, the embodiment of all the virtues, who is serene, who is dignified, who is loving, who is forgiving, who seems very wise and intelligent but he doesn't believe in God! So with Christ we've got, as it were, the opposite difficulty, from our point of view. Well, he's healing the sick. He seems very compassionate. Seems to have lots of energy, seems to have great spiritual purpose but he believes in God. So let's take it that there's no difficulty about the Buddha not believing in God because God is a delusion after all, but that still leaves us with difficulty about Christ believing in God.

So I think we can only look at it in two ways or from two different points of view at the same time. First of all there is the question of framework of ideas. Contemporary framework of ideas. Even the

most gifted human being, even the most enlightened human being doesn't fashion his own medium of communication. He has to communicate with people through the common language, the common tradition, the common idiom, the common even language of ideas. You see what I mean? Now we notice this, we found this very, very much when we were studying the Sutta Nipata, the Buddha having to communicate his ideas in brahmanical terms very often. Sometimes he communicated by negating those ideas but those ideas were still the medium of communication even when negated. So we find Christ living and working and teaching in the midst of a people that believed in God, who had no idea, no conception of a religious life apart from belief in God. So speaking to those people even if you didn't believe in God you'd find it very difficult not to use that idiom sometimes. You see the point?

In the same way the Jews believed in a messiah who was to come. So therefore the Jews who gathered around Christ couldn't help wondering, well, isn't he the messiah? Because that was the sort of current religious idiom. That was the sort of thing they'd been led to expect. So they couldn't get away from that. So sometimes we find even when talking about Buddhism, in a colloquial sort of way, we occasionally when talking to non-Buddhists, we can't help using, at least in the poetic and literary way rather than the theological way, the term God. So one shouldn't be scared of the term if one finds that, well, it does help to put things across, to some extent, at least provisionally.

So we mustn't forget this - that Christ was operating in a situation where, well, to speak of God was to use the natural language. So had he not used it it might have been very difficult for him to communicate anything. Had he directly repudiated that language and not spoken in terms of God at all, even said there was no God, he probably would have made himself completely unintelligible and completely unacceptable. As it was he had a hard enough time and in the end he was crucified but perhaps he wouldn't have been listened to by anybody if he had rejected the idea of God completely. In other words, if he hadn't used that language there would be no other language to fall back on. It was like India where there was a non-theistic language already. Even though some people did believe in God, there were many who did not. There were several Indian philosophies which were non-theistic. So when the Buddha spoke in this non-theistic language there were many who could understand.

But in Palestine at the time of the Buddha, well, who would have understood if anyone had spoken the language of non-theism. So in a sense you could say that the Christ was forced to use that sort of language. So this is one possible explanation. That he himself didn't believe in God, at least not quite in that sense, but couldn't help using that language.

There's another way of looking at it which is quite interesting which has been suggested by Middleton Murray. Middleton Murray points out that Christ thought of God essentially as father. He wasn't so much God the creator of the world, the creator of the universe or the judge or the giver of the commandments. Christ had the conception, if you like the feeling, for God as the father. So Middleton Murray goes into this quite a bit especially in connection with Christ's baptism by John the Baptist. Do you remember this? So when, according to one account, I forget which of the Gospels it is, but according to one account, at the time that Christ was baptised the heavens opened, the Holy Ghost in the likeness of a dove descended and a voice was heard saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased". Do you remember this? Now Middleton Murray asks, well, "Are we to imagine the heavens literally opening and a white bird coming down and a voice sounding? No" he said, "these are all attempts to represent something happening to Christ himself, some experience of his. Now what is that experience?" And he proceeds to try to explain that

experience in a quite interesting way, in a way that the orthodox Christian might regard as a bit irreverent because it is almost trying to get inside the mind of Christ. But Middleton Murray, though he's a Christian in a way, he doesn't consider it irreverent. He believed that he was trying to get to grips with Christ as it were and what he really was like, what he really taught. So he points out that - leaving aside the orthodox Christian way of looking at things - he points out that Christ seems to have started off as a follower of John the Baptist. So what was John the Baptist's teaching according to Gospel? "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." So repent. If you're told to repent what does that suggest?

_____: You've done something wrong.

S: You've done something wrong. So it suggests a sense of sin, a sense of guilt. So Middleton Murray (suggests?), in fact he almost argues, that Christ in his younger days was caught up in the movement of John the Baptist. This is why he was baptised by John. He was looking at from an historical, not from a traditional orthodox theological point of view. That here was John the Baptist going around the country, exhorting people to repent of their sins because the kingdom of heaven was at hand and advising them to be baptised as a sign that their sins had been forgiven them. So Christ was caught up in this movement. So according to Middleton Murray who suggests that he felt a sort of conviction of sin. That he fell. This goes against the orthodox Christian ideas that he was sinless. But Middleton Murray is looking at it just from an historical point of view, the fact was he was caught up in John the Baptist's movement suggests that as a young man he had felt that yes, he had sin, he needed to repent and Middleton Murray in fact said that - in fact he gives various reasons I think - that Christ was very much involved with this sort of conflict, this sort of feeling of sinfulness, of "How am I to get rid of sin? How am I really going to repent etc., etc?" And his experience of baptism represented his sort of consciousness that his sins were forgiven.

Now when you feel guilty, and when you feel guilty because you've sinned how do you feel about other people's attitudes towards you or the attitude of the world, the attitude of life towards you?

_____: Accusing you.

S: Accusing!

_____: Threatening.

S: Threatening? You say threatening. So when you were relieved from that (original) sin and guilt how would you feel about the universe and about life then?

_____: (?)

S: How would you feel?

_____: Friendly towards it.

S: Friendly. How would you feel that it was towards you?

_____: Friendly.

S: Friendly, yes. In other words instead of feeling a sort of stepson you would become the son, yes. Do you see what I mean? Or instead of being the person to be punished for his sins, you'd become the beloved son. You'd feel as it were that you'd become like the son of the universe. The universe was looking kindly upon you, that it loved you. So according to Middleton Murray, Christ used this word "Father" or "God as father" to signify his experience of life no longer threatening. That life as it were loved you. The only way that he could communicate this sort of experience to the audience of his time was to speak in terms of a God who was Father. So Middleton Murray says it's a mistake to regard this as a theological affirmation. That there is a God, a supreme being, a creator of the universe. He is your Father because he created the universe. According to him in using the idiom of father, or God the father, Jesus or Christ is trying to communicate this sense of forgiveness and overcoming of alienation from the universe. Do you see this?

It's a very, in a way, very convincing way of looking at it, at least it enables one to have some sort of respect for Christ still as a spiritual figure and to understand perhaps a bit more sympathetically what he meant by and why he used the idiom of God and why especially he spoke in terms of God the Father. Maybe it's a bit like what I was saying, in another sort of context, about when you are full of mettā you see everything as beautiful. When you are no longer conscious of sin, when you feel free of sin, then things will encourage you and (?) kindly to you rather than threatening. So it's quite noticeable that Christ, throughout most of the gospels, seems to be speaking in terms of a God of love and forgiveness rather than in terms of the threatening and vengeful Jehovah of the Old Testament. But Middleton Murray again says that this is not a theological affirmation or theoretical teaching, he is trying to give some sort of expression to his changed sense of things, his changed experience of the universe. That the universe is no longer a threatening place. The universe is, as it were, an encouraging place. It was as though your own father is looking down on you and looking after you, and according to Middleton Murray this is what happened (?) this kind of experience when he was baptised or the baptism represents that. So this is quite an interesting way of looking at it. However he could not but use the current (?) idiom to try to communicate something of that sort of spiritual experience.

No doubt an Indian Buddhist or maybe the Buddha wanted to speak about that sort of thing, he would have been able to do so in purely psychological and spiritual terms without saying anything about God, anything about God the Father or the love of God or anything of that sort. But Christ had at his disposal only the theistic idiom which he modified to some extent.

_____: It seems this (?) Here we have the first example, it seems quite a correlation between Jesus Christ and the Buddha when he was preaching the Dharma by going to areas where they had particular practices, and allowing them to continue those practices as a means of devotion only, just as a means. Who was Middleton Murray?

S: Oh. Middleton Murray was famous originally as a great friend of D.H. Lawrence. He was mainly a literary critic and writer. He wrote some very interesting books on D.H. Lawrence, on Blake, on Swift and Shakespeare, and Keats. He wrote some very interesting literary criticism bringing out the spiritual value of these great English poets. And he approached the life of Christ in much the same spirit. In fact he compared sometimes Christ and D.H. Lawrence which really shocked orthodox people. But he quoted them in the same sort of way, with the same sort of spirit, and tries to get something out of them, in the same sort of way. Tries to get at some sort of meaning for himself out of them which means he, in the one case he offends orthodox literary criticism, on the other hand offends orthodox Christian theology. He's got much the same sort of approach and he only died in

about 1957 and the second half of his life he lived up in Norfolk, not so very far away. He had a very, very catastrophic domestic life. A terrible life but he still plodded on nonetheless. He had four marriages. Three of them were utterly disastrous failures and very traumatic experiences for him. But anyway as Dr. Johnson says, "in the end hope triumphed over experience yet again" (Laughter). Dr. Johnson's famous definition of a second marriage, "the triumph of hope over experience" (Laughter). He also published "Peace News". He was a very prominent pacifist for a number of years. He was quite an interesting character. After his death he was largely forgotten, in fact he was forgotten by many people before he died even. But I personally think his whole approach and many of his ideas, very, very interesting indeed. I've got quite a number of his books upstairs. They are still available second hand in many bookshops. Many of them haven't been reprinted for years and years. He is relatively neglected nowadays but I think he's a very valuable sort of writer. He's not a great writer. He's a sort of middle man as it were in a way. He comes in between the really great creative writers like Lawrence and the more ordinary writers like some people whose names I could mention. But he's very, very stimulating.

He also developed certain ideas with regard to the higher evolution. I've referred to him in some of my lectures in this connection. He spoke in terms of the meta-biological evolution. That is the evolution which comes out of the biological evolution. And he had certain mystical experiences of his own which helped him to understand spiritual writings, spiritual life, the great poets and the great religious teachers. He never came in contact with Buddhism unfortunately though there's a very, very interesting review by him of Madam Blavatsky's Secret Doctrine which shows he had a really great sensitivity to these things, and it is a great pity that in his day more was not known and published about Buddhism. So that was John Middleton Murray.

_____: What you say about Christ and ...

(End of side one Side two)

... the context of monotheism, you could also say about Buddha and the context of karma and rebirth.

S: You could, yes. You could argue like that. You could even ask yourself, well what is the sort of general principle that karma represents. Karma represents conditioning, whether you spread it over this life or whether you spread it over a whole series of lives. It means conditioning in the sense of a pattern, a particular pattern which you just go on repeating. So the Buddha is saying, as it were, to go on repeating a pattern is not life. Certainly not spiritual life. I mean this is another way of putting the same thing. Don't go on repeating the existing pattern. Create the new pattern or not even a pattern. Just create something new. Don't just repeat that old pattern. When you're reborn what does that mean? You've created the same pattern with minor variations. Or rather not even created. You've just reproduced the same pattern with minor variations.

So when you start going up the spiral, you've stopped this repeating pattern and you're doing something new. You're doing something truly creative. So karma represents patterns. So you could say much the same thing in principle without bringing in rebirth or plurality of life at all. So you could say that the Buddha used the idiom of karma or rebirth because that was the current one but what he was really getting at in principle was that you should not go on repeating the old pattern. Indian thought happens to believe that the pattern extends over what is regarded as past and future lives. Well, that may well be so but the principle is not to repeat the pattern.

_____: Would you say that we're (?) the idea of (?) of merits (?)

S: One could regard them as different ways of looking at the same thing because what is merit. Merit is something positive that accrues to you as a result of your skilful actions. So if one is evolving, if one is following the path of the higher evolution positive things are constantly accruing to you as a result of your skilful action i.e. your effort to develop. If you associate the idea of punya necessarily with reincarnation, well, then you could say that, yes one is thinking in terms of higher evolution rather than in terms of punya but you can accumulate punya in this life itself. (Pause) (?) talking of pattern there's an essay by D.H. Lawrence called "Do you have a pattern"(?). According to Lawrence women need patterns or a woman needs a pattern. He says it doesn't matter much which one you give her, at least give her one [Laughter] and let her be clear that that is her pattern. I mean some people wouldn't agree with that but one could say to the extent that one isn't an individual one needs a pattern. To the extent one is an individual one does not need a pattern. (?) you may use the pattern or may even communicate with the pattern but you do not need the pattern.

_____: So Lawrence did see women as individuals?

S: To the extent that they needed patterns he saw them as not individuals. (Laughter)

_____: Can you expand on that Bhante, one may use a patterns, how one could use the pattern?

S: Provisionally what is the difference between needing something and making use of something. A framework of ideas is a pattern. You may not need that pattern, in the sense you may not need that sort of intellectual support for the living of your life but you may find it very useful to communicate with people. Or to simplify things.

_____: Then could you say in actual fact that a person that was creative, but wasn't using a pattern could be looked upon as an eccentric?

S: Say that again.

_____: Could you say that a person who wasn't really using a pattern but in actual fact was thinking creatively could be looked upon, by people who were using the pattern as being eccentric?

S: I imagine they could look upon them as being eccentric and lots of other things. What does eccentric mean? Eccentric means flying away from the centre. If you regard the centre as representing the same sort of thing as the pattern, yes, he could be regarded as eccentric or as upsetting the boat or something like that. Or as an anarchistic sort of influence. (Pause)

Sagaramati: That meaning of pattern (?)

S: Well, no, no. Reacting against patterns is also a pattern you could say. A pattern of reaction. One has to be quite sure it is creativity that is emerging and transcending the pattern, not just a counter-pattern. Not just the other side of the carpet as it were.

_____: There's a difference between a pattern and a mandala?

S: Yes, a mandala is something which is creative.

_____: What is a mandala exactly in the way you use it?

S: Traditionally a mandala is a circle. I mean mandala means circle and you usually have a Buddha figure in the middle, and other Buddha figures arranged at the four cardinal points, other figures in between and various ornaments and decorations and a lot of symbolism and so on. But what is the principle of a mandala? I mentioned this some days ago didn't I? There is a Tibetan definition of mandala or making a mandala to the effect that making a mandala is taking any prominent aspect of reality and adorning it. So what exactly does that mean? Taking a prominent aspect of reality and adorning it. When we say prominent aspect of reality what do we mean? We mean something that is prominent for you. It is prominent because you give it prominence. You give it prominence because it attracts you, it's something that you find personally attractive and then, because you find it personally attractive, you start organising everything around it. You put something to the north, something to the south, something to the east, something to the west. In this way you build up a mandala.

Now obviously it becomes very important what you put at the centre of the mandala. In fact you might even say that the more intrinsically valuable what you put at the centre of the mandala is, the more truly it is a mandala. You might put yourself at the centre of the mandala. That wouldn't be really a mandala in the true spiritual sense. You might put food at the centre of the mandala and organise everything around that. It wouldn't be a mandala, it would just be a kitchen. (Laughter) But suppose you put say the Buddha at the centre of the mandala, or an aspect of the Buddha, a bodhisattva at the centre of the mandala. Then the mandala becomes a real mandala. So if you take a prominent aspect of reality in that sense, that is to say, take the Buddha or the bodhisattva or other sort of such spiritual figure that most appeals to you, and put him or put her in the centre of the mandala and then organise everything around that, then that is the real mandala.

Usually there is always in our life something which we consider as being of supreme importance around which we organise everything else. It may be job, may be home, wife and children. It may be our literary work. It may be our friends, it may be some movement that we belong to. So in this way we're always setting up a mandala. Sometimes of course it so happens that there isn't really anything that we're devoted to. Instead of a mandala, there's just a mess. For there to be a mandala there should be one thing that you put in the centre to which we give supreme importance and around which we arrange everything. And when that one thing is something of great spiritual significance then the mandala is a mandala in the true sense. A Christian would say, to use his (?) language you should put God in the centre of your mandala, that's the right place. A good man is the man who puts God in the centre of the mandala, and the bad man is the man who puts Mammon in the centre of the mandala or the devil in the centre of the mandala.

But what do you put in the centre of your mandala. Do you put money in the centre of the mandala? Or do you put something sort of intangible? Do you put say reputation in the middle of the mandala or do you put your work in the middle of the mandala or do you put your wife in the middle of the mandala? Or your dog? (Laughter) Or do you put the Buddha in the middle of the mandala? Because whatever you put in the middle everything else will be organised around it in subordination to it, and that will be the mandala of your life.

_____: How does that work if what was sort of central to your life and what you perceive as

what you more or less revolved around is something fairly pointless, fairly useless and you're deeply involved with eating lots of food or something; would you be better off if you wanted to create a mandala sticking food in the centre of it and working outwards putting all these other things around it and thus using that to sort of, I don't know, (?) feel more for the other things, or to put something which you don't actually feel that much for but which you could see ...

S: I'm not thinking of something that you can do consciously and deliberately. The mandala is what you build up willy-nilly in accordance with what you put in the centre.

_____: Well maybe I'm confusing that with the actual making of the mandala.

S: Yes. I mean the mandala is there. It's not something that you do consciously. When it does become more conscious and more aware then of course you will place at the centre of the mandala those objects which are associated with a more highly developed awareness (?) objects of greater spiritual significance and value.

_____: So really there's very little purpose at all in having pictures of Tibetan ...

S: Well, it's ridiculous if you've got up on your wall a picture of a mandala and a Buddha in the middle and you've not put the Buddha in the middle of the mandala of your own life. It's ridiculous. Really! It's just using these things as a decoration, even as a disguise.

_____: Well, even more so when it's not just a Buddha in the middle but some obscure deity or (?) ...

S: It is really a sign of degeneration, a debasement generally that reproductions of thangkas which were originally connected with quite esoteric practices and rituals just become incorporated into calendars which hang up on everybody's wall. It's in a way quite shameful.

_____: In that respect how do you perceive the fact that we sell them to centres?

S: Not very happily, really.

_____: Well, that's what I thought. These different Thangkas, some of them like Avalokitesvara, Padmasambhava and then really odd ones whom you never hear of - the mandala of somebody or other.

_____: Isn't this just an appreciation of Buddhist art and should be seen as ...

S: I think should there be an appreciation of Buddhist art? Or is not even appreciating Buddhist art a similar kind of degeneration? That is to say, appreciating in a sort of aesthetic sense, not using it for the spiritual purpose for which it was meant to be used.

_____: I find it very useful, because ...

S: Find it what?

_____: Very useful because many people like (?) explain. If it wasn't there probably (?)

S: What have you got, well ...

_____: A Wheel of Life.

S: All right, that's different because this is meant for that purpose. The Wheel of Life is meant for that purpose. The Wheel of Life is meant as an aid to teaching. Pictures of esoteric deities are not meant as aids to teaching, they are meant for purposes of visualisation after you've received the necessary initiation. So the Wheel of Life is in a quite different category,. The picture of Sakyamuni is in a quite different category. Even one could say that the main Bodhisattvas, Avalokitesvara, Manjusri, Vajrapani, Tara, these are in a different category. Maybe even Amitabha, Amitayus even a different category. But these very obscure, esoteric, Tantric deities which one is supposed to look at, to see, even to look at and see their paintings, after initiation. These are quite unsuited to this sort of distribution. The fact that it's happening at all is a sign of a great vulgarisation of the Dharma. I get quite surprised that even Tibetan lamas lend themselves to this sort of thing. It's quite (?).

In the same way I'm not at all happy about Tantric rituals being performed in London by visiting Tibetan lamas to an audience, just like musical concerts. This seems to be an absolute betrayal. It's just a sign of degeneration. It may be Buddhists who go along and get great inspiration out of it which is fair enough, but those chants are not meant for that particular purpose. They're an integral part of a ritual which has a spiritual significance. It would be rather like us say putting on an ordination ceremony, not because anyone was being ordained really, but just as a performance. This would be a complete misuse of it. So there's a lot of this sort of thing going on. It's just one symptom of the breakdown of spiritual traditions and the secularisation of life in a negative sort of way. It's unavoidable.

I remember discussing this with Mr. Chen many years ago in Kalimpong with regard to certain esoteric teachings and he said the tradition is that these things should only be imparted to disciples who have prepared. But he said, "What can one do?" he said, "Nowadays, everything is printed. People are going to publish, they are going to translate regardless of the traditional attitudes". He said, "One can't just stop it. You just have to accept it helplessly". It's a great pity that this has happened from the purely spiritual point of view. It means nothing is regarded as sacred. Anyone who runs may lead.

Alan Angel: But surely it's of no use to people who haven't been initiated into it, into the actual practice.

S: It is in fact of no use. But then they lose the sense of it being something sacred. It becomes ordinary and everyday and then the general feeling spreads around that this is ordinary, everyday well-known, everybody's seen these things. Everyone's got them up on their wall. So what, they don't mean very much. Just pretty Tibetan pictures.

Padmaraja: You could even apply that to works of art, couldn't you? They become purely decoration.

S: But many works of art were intended as decoration.

Padmaraja: I mean true works of art.

S: Well, one could say it with regard to works of art that to appreciate them you have to look at them. And to look at them they have to be seen and to be seen they have to be hanging there, you could say that. Whether you do actually look at them, that's another question. But anyway they are there to be looked at. In the case of these esoteric deities they shouldn't even be looked at without initiation.

_____: Why is that Bhante? Is it because like it stirs things up in the unconscious or the subconscious mind?

S: You could say that. That is no doubt part of the reason and nothing should be stirred up unless steps have been taken to ensure that what is stirred up will be properly directed and if necessary dissolved.

Sagaramati: Do you think that some of these wrathful deities and that could even be harmful?

S: I don't know. I don't want to sort of exaggerate things or become sort of all pseudo-occult or anything like that. I doubt if they do any great harm. I doubt it. Though one has heard some quite odd stories. I wouldn't personally be very seriously bothered. I'd be more concerned about the loss of reverence and spiritual sensitivity that the circulation of such things in that way necessarily entails and in fact obviously is a symptom. That some of the lamas themselves no longer feel that way about their most sacred images and paintings.

Sagaramati: You say that (?)

S: I'd personally be not disinclined to filter out those, and if necessary making our views known and to the distributors. Even saying that we are quite happy to distribute the Wheel of Life and the Buddha and the great Bodhisattvas and so on but some of these other more esoteric things, we just think it rather sacrilegious to have them for general distribution in that way, and we'd rather not have anything to do with that.

Sagaramati: I meant actually selling them from our (?)

S: That's what I meant. We could well make our views known to distributors. There has been some question of our taking over Tantra Designs. I don't know what stage the present negotiations have reached. No doubt Subhuti will be attending to that now he's back. But if we ever did I'd very much like to see the whole thing reviewed.

_____: Somebody came into the centre not very long ago, a couple of weeks ago, a woman who'd obviously been on some Tibetan lama's retreat or whatever and she wanted to buy a thangka and all she was interested in was buying a picture of Dorje Chang, nothing else. Probably it sounded like the first retreat she'd ever been on.

S: Well it's just another manifestation - a very, very extreme and almost pernicious one of the path of irregular steps. The steps become so irregular that they no longer add up to a path. Just as of course sometimes the steps become so <u>regular</u> they no longer add up to a path. (Laughter) One mustn't forget that either! I think the first is the greater danger at present. That the steps in this particular context anyway, that the steps become so irregular that they no longer add up to a path.

_____: Would you say a Buddhist path doesn't really exist?

S: I wouldn't say it doesn't exist but it isn't, well, it's no longer properly applied, properly used. It certainly exists.

_____: I was thinking that a work of art say is a kind of pattern thing really meant to be looked at but the thangkas and that their primary use is to be used.

S: Well, to be used in the sense that they give you an idea of the kind of figure, the kind of spiritual form that you are trying to visualise in the course of your meditation practice. They're aids to meditation, aids to spiritual visualisation in meditation.

_____: If you take the western idea of say (?) occasion and just be looked at on the mantelpiece, that's a different use there (?)

S: Well, it's rather like for instance, yes, to give a Christian parallel, you don't really use a crucifix as a decoration. I mean if you're using it as decoration and having it just on the mantelpiece and don't even believe in Christianity it can be regarded as a misuse of it because it is a sort of devotional object.

_____: Say the thangkas are in a way, they're tools.

S: They're tools, yes, very much so. Tools for meditation. A particular kind of meditation. The original word, not for thangka exactly but which thangka represents is 'prabhā'. Did you know this? The word for what we call a Tibetan scroll painting in India and in Nepal was prabhā. Prabhā means a radiance. Something shining. So it's not just a painting, it is, well, a representation of the sort of vision, as it were, that you get in meditation of that particular Buddha or bodhisattva, which shines with a sort of spiritual light. The thangka is supposed to be giving you some idea of that. And this is the reason why there's the border. When the thangkas are mounted in the Tibetan traditional style there's a red border and a yellow border. This represents the radiance coming up in the picture. This shows it's a prabhā. A radiance. A luminous object. It shines.

_____: Bhante, when I look at the sort of spiritual world, sort of east and west, Christianity predominating in the west, Buddhism in the east, I see sort of two different facets of the religion. In the Christian religion there seems to be sort of almost apathy about God, it's a sort of hushed up thing, don't really talk too much about it, but there seems to be practical, working fellow mankind whether it be charities or missionaries or things like this. When I look on the eastern side, as I say Buddhism, I see that it's more a sharing of <u>spiritual</u> resources rather than I would say more practical resources and perhaps it's again my Christian conditioning that I feel that one should also help on a practical level, perhaps more so than on the purely spiritual because I once read a statement says, I can't afford to be spiritual in the sense that the person is impoverished and they can't afford to be spiritual. Does that make sense?

S: Well, I think there are several things that could be thinking. One it's good to want to do good but one must be sure that one is doing good. It's not as easy to know as one might think. Some people think they're doing good when they're just interfering with other people's lives and there's a saying I sometimes quote, "It takes all the wisdom of the wise, to undo the harm done by the merely good".

And the eastern criticism of the west, going to speak in these antithetical terms, the eastern criticism of the west, or one of the eastern criticisms of the west is that western people always take it for granted that they know what is good for other people. They interfere too much. But if you look at it from the standpoint of the eastern, say the Indian or the Japanese, the western people wouldn't let us alone. They came and interfered with us. We were quite happy living our own lives in our own way with our own civilisation. They insisted on interfering. Take the case of Japan. They didn't want to open up to the west, to western ideas, to western civilisation. They were forced to, literally at gun point to open up.

So they don't regard the western people and the Christians as doing good. They regard them as just interfering with other people and not minding their own business and wanting to do good to others without even knowing what is good. Bringing along whisky where whisky wasn't known before. Bringing along the Bible to people who already had their own spiritual culture. So this would be the eastern criticism of the west. And I've heard this from eastern friends, especially Indians, many a time. And as for Christians doing good they say, "Yes, no doubt, you do quite a lot of good through social work in the west. But what about those two World Wars, where did they start from. Those are all shoots from the same branch. This is always the outcome eventually of your whole western way of looking at things including Christianity. That you may have done quite a bit of good with your social work, but what about all the harm you did with your wars. On balance we don't think you have done all that much good". This is what the easterner would say. "But we on balance have done much more good". This is how they would argue. "We have shared our spiritual knowledge without forcing it upon others. We do what good we can to others on a small scale in a modest way. We don't take it for granted we know what is good for other people. Sometimes we think it's better just to leave others to their own devices even to their own fate. But we don't really know what is good for them. It's difficult enough knowing what is good for ourselves". This would be their line of argument, their line of talk. (Pause) Which is rather different from our own.

_____: I can't accept the sort of religious indoctrination and the way of life indoctrination westerners took to the east, but I find a few problems with respect to things like famine, disasters, and all this sort of thing and just social problems of life.

S: Well, the Indian would point out "We didn't have any famines before the British came". This is a historical fact. There were no famines before. I mean this is due to complicated economic and financial arrangements, as between Britain and India. But this is one of the things that Indian nationalists will tell you.

It may be you send out a few hundred missionaries, doctors and started up a few hospitals but you also brought famine to India they would say, in which several million people died.

_____: I'd like to see, again perhaps wrongly, I'd like to see more Buddhism has predominated in the east and it is rapidly being looked at in the west. It's very much a passive way of life, a system of thought. It's not forced upon you.

S: But that doesn't make it passive.

_____: No, no, but I mean the message is strong but it's not indoctrinated as you were referring to earlier, but I still feel that perhaps it's afraid of its own strength in a way. Of its own inner strength by keeping quiet on issues, just as to work with issues, say well, it's a matter for their

concern. Well, I means if they are Buddhists then they should think, "Well, the world is my country (?) a wider country.

S: Yes, but what does one mean by 'the world'? I think there's a danger of losing sight of what is right under your nose, that is your relations with the people you actually come into contact with. I think that this is one of the things that very often happens in the west. We have organised charities and things are done in this sort of impersonal way and very often people who work for these charities and put a lot of effort and energy into them but they lose sight of their actual relationships with the people that they're in contact with. The Buddhist view would be, "Well do good by all means, if you can see what good to do. But think much more in terms of doing to the people with whom you're in direct personal contact. Do it for them." Otherwise you find people worrying about what's happening to people in China and then they're not bothering about what's happening to people in their own house. I think in this country some people are very good at this. If you really want to do good or give some help you don't really need to look very far afield. So the Buddhist would draw attention to this fact. "By all means do good but the smaller the scale on which you can do it the better".

_____**:** But the power is with the minority of people. Power seems to be ...

S: Well, the power of doing good is with the individual. It's not even with the minority. It's with the individual. For instance, during the civil war in Nigeria, well, there were all sorts of appeals, give money for the poor suffering people in Biafra. What was behind all this? They wanted to have a Christian state. Why did all the Christians-dominated relief and refugee organisations support Biafra so much, wanted to do so much for it? So they could have a separate state cut off from the rest of non-Christian Nigeria. This is what was behind it all. That means stronger western influence, anti-Communism and so on. It's a very good example - Biafra. But many people might have contributed with a good heart, thinking of the poor refugees and these poor people who've been attacked by the majority, and they want to be independent, they want to be free. That might have been so but the Christian relief organisations, the charities dominated by Christians behind the scenes, were interested in intervening with this in mind, for political reasons. A Christian state in central Africa.

So I think when one is involved in large scale charitable activities and international organisations one becomes involved in all sorts of such political things which one would be better off as an individual, certainly an individual Buddhist, keeping clear of. So therefore I think from this point of view also if you wants to do good, do it individually. Do it with your own two hands, to people that you're in personal contact with and you know, or get to know. Not by contributing to big impersonal international agencies.

_____**:** There seems to be a basic lack of trust that people don't seem willing to help smaller (?) of any sort.

S: Yes, yes.

_____**:** They're much more into putting money into the (?) of a really big organisation. Quite a natural thing to do I would have thought. I mean let's just take (?) as an example. If I was giving money to help the homeless or Fred Bloggs would set up a charity down the road doing the same thing and (?) .....
Because I wouldn't know Fred Bloggs down the road.

Ananda: It's the same problem, you don't know what would happen with it all.

(break in recording)

S: (?) (?) (?) wanting to help with Tibetan refugees. Get in touch with an individual refugee. It's quite easy to do that through the different friendship associations and send him money yourself which is quite easy to do, international money order or through the bank, and lots of people started doing that and corresponding with their own individual Tibetan refugee whom they were helping individually. And that seems much the best way to do that sort of thing. Not through an organisation. (Pause) Bring it all down to the individual.

_____: I think it's worth noting that you can maybe say that (?) ..... (?) government of the country they came from and wherever the missionaries went, usually the British spies or the British empire went at the same time they were political to a great extent. They didn't really go out there to convert them but there was a covert design to them going, not only the overt one of turning people into Christians. They were very useful at the same time.

S: I have a report upstairs published by, or brought out by a committee of which a friend of mine was chairman, called "The (?) report on Christian missionary activity in the Central province of India", which is a very revealing document and a lot of evidence taken to show that many of the missionaries, especially the Catholic missionaries, were just politically motivated and were trying very hard to create a separate Christian state in the middle of India shortly after independence.

But anyway the main point I'm making is that if one wants to do good it's best to do it as an individual oneself or just get together with very few friends and do it in that sort of way, rather than helping to finance some very big international body over which one has no real control and which very easily can get caught up in all sorts of political activities and political manipulation (?)

_____: If Joe Bloggs comes along the road and asks you do a bit of decorating and not get money then maybe a lot of people would get started, rather than if you send a cheque off to 'Shelter'(?) (?)

_____: How do you give this cheque to the person? I mean is it simply there. Is the money still there or do you have to work for it to be able to get that money to send a cheque (?) directly or do it indirectly.

_____: (?) you can't contribute indirectly you can contribute directly. Perhaps you haven't got the resources to do it directly.

_____: Well, maybe you shouldn't maybe help people you don't know. As you were saying that your sister (?) can maybe sitting in a hovel. Rather than help her you send money off to New Zealand at some place at the other end of the globe that you don't know anything about.

_____: Well, perhaps there are more (?) in a hovel.

Sagaramati: You never know because you're too far away.

_____: (?) everything (?)

Sagaramati: Well you know. If he says he needs that you know that that person needs it.

_____: (?) maybe (?) by sending the money off to a foreign country (?). You're not going to get involved too much.

S: Well, I think apart from that there's the general consideration that in modern times the general tendency is on all levels of life, for things to be done by and to become the responsibility of ever bigger and bigger and more and more impersonal agencies whether it's business or politics or economics, banks, trade unions, even religions. So any action that one takes to take power, as it were, away from those big impersonal bodies and give it back to the individual, any such step is worthwhile. I think that's an important point to remember too.

Padmapani: Is this something which Gandhi prompted in the sense of trying to get India sorted out in the sense of like cottage industries?

S: Well, he really was very much into this for various reasons. I mean he wanted each village to be virtually independent and not to be necessarily physically independent. Well, he wanted a measure of power for the village, even in that sense but certainly economically self-sufficient, self-sufficient rather than independent and with a few light industries producing simple things that they themselves needed.

But I think in recent times there has developed to a small extent this counter-tendency or counter interest of devolution at all levels. Political devolution, economic devolution, even charitable devolution. And this is incidentally why in the FWBO we have no headquarters. Did anyone realise this? Order members ought to know. We have no headquarters. Do you realise that? Well, we don't have. Every centre is autonomous. The unifying factor is the Order and the Order is a spiritual community and different teams of Order Members run the different centres, but the centres are all autonomous, leaving aside branches of centres, but as soon as a branch becomes big enough, it becomes autonomous and there is no headquarters which gives that autonomous centre its orders. There is a spiritual influence coming from the Order as a whole through the Order Members connected with that centre but that is a purely spiritual thing. It has no legal standing whatever and that is quite deliberately so.

(end of tape one tape two)

The Order is not a legal body, it does not legally exist and this is quite deliberate. Only the individual autonomous centre legally exists. And no centre is subordinate to another centre. No centre is the headquarters of all the others. So we've done this quite deliberately so that every centre looks after its own affairs and it's responsible for its own affairs and takes its own decisions. There's no head office to tell it what to do. From a spiritual point of view this principle is very important. The devolution of responsibility. No handing up of responsibility. You keep it with yourself. Otherwise there's no initiative possible, no action, no creativity. So there's no head office for the FWBO either. What we would like to see is more and more small centres. We don't want a sort of organisational pyramid. I sometimes say a centre in every street.

_____: That would be just about right, wouldn't it?

S: Yes, I mean it quite literally. A centre in every street. Where of course the street was very, very long, well, you might have two or three (Laughter)

Any further points? Either from a text or of a more general nature. Oh yes one question I was going to ask (Laughter) Getting my own back! I was just wondering what people's impressions were vis-a-vis the different texts? Whether they definitely got more out of one text than out of the others or whether they're more or less the same in that respect or whether they reacted in any one way to one kind of text and another way to another. Any sort of reflections or feelings about that?

Jyotipala: Although Milarepa seems more concrete and down to earth, I think really the Perfection of Wisdom sparked off more. It's smaller. Although it's less concrete it seemed to stir up more.

_____: I found the complete opposite.

_____: Yes, so did I.

_____: I felt for Jyotipala's point but I think largely because I haven't heard you talk about that kind of text before...

S: The Perfection of Wisdom?

_____: The songs of Milarepa I did on the weekend at least (?) (?)

S: Yes, I haven't talked on the Perfect Wisdom texts anywhere. But that is rather a question of novelty than of anything else in that sense. That simply you've not heard me talk about that sort of material before.

_____: I found the 'Meeting Spiritual Friends' does present itself very well. It listed or perhaps overlisted on occasions but it did bring it to the forefront rather than sort of getting lost in a sort of general melee and it was very well presented....

S: Right.

_____: ..... And I found it the most pertinent to myself and it was good to have it at the beginning of the retreat so that you were prompted into becoming aware of it rather than perhaps not ...

S: I deliberately put it at the beginning.

_____: (?)

S: You notice we covered Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

_____: I feel as if I've got.... In fifteen days I suppose we've done half as much study as we did in terms of time say on 'Dhyana for Beginners'. I feel as if I've got a <u>lot</u> more from this to go away and think about.

S: Is that perhaps because we covered a greater variety of material?

_____: (?)

S: If I may say so it was rather carefully selected. In a way you've got a pretty good idea of, well, Buddhist canonical literature generally though obviously very much a selection but a very representative selection. I mean really all that we should have had was something from the Chinese Buddhist tradition to really round it off.

_____: What sort of aspect would that be? How would that come across - the Chinese literature?

S: Well, possibly we could have say a Chinese Zen text which would give a different sort of approach to much the same sort of general topic. The same sort of subject matter. For instance you might add, or we might have done say the (?) doctrine of the universal mind. Yes, that would have given us quite a different angle on what basically is the same subject matter.

Padmapani: Have you ever thought of doing a seminar on one of Lama Govinda's books like 'Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism'.

S: The only one I thought possibly of doing a seminar on was 'Psychological attitude of early Buddhist Philosophy'. But on the other hand I think if we were going to do a book by a modern western writer on the Abhidharma we might as well do Guenther's 'Psychology and Philosophy in the Abhidharma' which is a much more brilliant, stimulating book. One would like to do lots of things. One could easily spend a whole year in this sort of way without any difficulty at all. There's the whole of the 8000 line Perfection of Wisdom to go through some time or other. Subhuti's urging me to go through the whole Majjhima Nikaya and maybe the Digha Nikaya too. I don't know where I'm going to get time. I don't know where they're going to get time either. I think some of you find it difficult to find time to go through the Heart Sutra! (Laughter) Or even the Refuges and Precepts in detail.

Sagaramati: I certainly found the Milarepa one, the text was like somebody grabbing you and shaking you (?) quite (?)..... from that point of view it sort of hits you.

S: I suppose it is because Milarepa is very much a character, very much an individual, with a very definite, for want of a better term, personality. (Pause)

_____: One person was amazed at reading a passage, how much there was in it. I mean I superficially couldn't see but as was explained by yourself there was an immeasurable amount of stuff there is (?) you said the other day, more and more of less and less.

S: Also it shows what we usually miss when we just read through in a comparatively superficial manner or even just skim through. There's so much that we miss. And maybe that we cannot but miss just reading it through on our own.

_____: There have been quite a few things which looking through though I've taken notes on I was quite capable of thinking out for myself but just reading through it I don't think (?) (?) make

enough of them.

_____: I personally don't think I could have read it even on my own.

S: Well, the Buddhist tradition will probably say that you shouldn't have read it on your own because that is there the tradition, that you don't read things on your own. You study them with somebody and then the full meaning and all the implications of the text are brought out for you and applied to your individual situation.

_____: Sometimes I really feel like the idea of maybe just studying a Sunday Newspaper. Really, because it's almost as if say after a retreat situation you become very aware of words and one wants to read texts and things but when I read a newspaper say, you get used to the same sort of glibly phrased words. The way they all come together, are strung together and then it goes into you, so to speak, it goes into one's mind so to speak, and you somehow, when you go and read texts later on they don't have so much meaning. You seem to have lost something and I can't help feeling it's to do with reading those articles, newspaper articles and things like that.

S: It just reminds me, I mean, since the retreat started I think I've been, I've not even seen a newspaper but I heard the news headlines once or twice and a few evenings ago I turned on to get the Ten O'clock news and I got the tail end of 'Kaleidoscope' and it was quite interesting. There was an interview with a woman called Margaret Powell. Anyone heard of her?

_____: Yes.

S: Familiar ground. I wasn't sure whether I had or not. Anyway (Laughter) she was being interviewed and she said she'd just returned from Australia and she'd written a book about it and the interviewer asked her what she thought of Australia. Oh, she didn't like it a bit. What did she think of the Australians? Well, she didn't like the men at all. Well, why not? They didn't know how to flirt. They never flirted. So this seemed really strange straight out of a seminar, as it were, on retreat. 'They just didn't know how to flirt. So what do you mean by that? She said I just made sort of flirty sort of remarks, they don't react, nothing happens, they just go on talking straight to you. They're really odd!' (Laughter) she said, and their social life, she said, they have parties and what happens? All the girls had very pretty frocks at one end of the room and all the men at the other talking and drinking beer (Laughter). She said, "I don't know why the women put up with it. I wouldn't". And so she went on in this sort of way and it seemed like an ideal situation, ripe for Buddhism! (Laughter)

But when you sort of listen to these sort of programmes and read newspapers, you're just in a way, sometimes if you're mindful, made aware of how very different your own point of view is, your own way of looking at things and that is good.

_____: Study is really taking apart and sort of seeing what actually strings it all together.

S: And what is given importance. What is given prominence.

_____: Set up a new centre.

S: Well the sooner we start up that centre in Sydney the better. They're just sort of waiting for us as

it were. But it's quite interesting that something that we would regard as a very positive situation becomes the object of criticism from the conventional point of view. Well, maybe from the conventional women's point of view. Well, Margaret Powell's not going to Australia again. I don't know what she'd say if she came on one of our retreats. (Laughter)

_____: (?) (Laughter)

_____: (?) (Laughter)

S: Anyway any other points. I don't think we ought to close on the note of Margaret Powell. Perhaps someone could just rise to sublimer heights for a few seconds. (Laughter)

_____: I've come across the term the Dharmakaya. I came across it in Milarepa.

S: Yes, this term comes in Pali literature as well as in Sanskrit literature. Originally it meant simply the whole body of the teaching. Dharma is teaching or reality; kaya is body, but later it comes to mean the Buddha's as it were essential nature. You can see the Buddha with your physical eyes, you see a physical body, the body of a human being. But you don't see the Buddha. You don't see the Buddha nature, you don't see his inner spiritual realisation which is his, as it were, true nature. The reality of the Buddha. You only see his rupakaya, his bodily form. You don't see his Dharmakaya, his spiritual form. So it comes to have that sort of meaning. The sort of inner essence of a Buddha. What makes a Buddha a Buddha. The realisation by virtue of which he is a Buddha, which is distinct from his empirical personality. Distinct from his physical body.

So you've got to begin with, or rather in the middle period, the Dharmakaya and the Rupakaya and then in the latest period you have also the Sambhogakaya. The Sambhogakaya is a sort of ideal Buddha, half way between, as it were, the absolute Buddha as represented by the Dharmakaya and the historical Buddha as represented by the Nirmanakaya as it now comes to be called. You get the idea.

_____: (?) the Sambhogakaya is absolute reality.

S: No, no. It is sometimes said that the Sambhogakaya is the Dharmakaya as seen by the great Bodhisattvas on a higher level of spiritual development. They don't see the Dharmakaya as it is. They see it through a veil but that veil is by now very thin, almost transparent, and that is the Samboghakaya. But we see the Dharmakaya through a very thick, heavy, almost muddy veil of space and time and so on. And what we see and what we can only see is the Nirmanakaya.

So very broadly the Dharmakaya is the Buddha as he is in himself. The Sambhogakaya is the Buddha as (?), as relating to, those who are spiritually highly developed. The Nirmanakaya is what the Buddha looks like and the way in which he relates even to quite ordinary people. They won't all see him in the same way. In a sense he won't be the same Buddha on these different levels in a sense. [Pause]

_____: Could you (?) some books for us to read? (?)

S: Books to read? Oh!

_____: (?) titles (?) recommended books to start reading?

S: I don't really know. I've sort of gone off recommending books rather. I tend to say, well, just study them. Study them in a group or study them on retreat if you get the chance. In a sense I no longer know. I'm a bit out-of-touch with the needs of people who are coming along now and what they might find really helpful as distinct from just interesting. Well, certainly the Bodhicaryavatara, yes. What is the title of that Matics translation?.

_____: 'Entering the Path of Enlightenment'.

S: 'Entering the Path of Enlightenment'. There is that which is available in paperback.

_____: Not any more.

S: It's only in hardback. And I mean we have had a seminar on that and that is going to be published as soon as we can get it out next year so there is that sort of auxiliary material to help. There's also the Udana, I very much recommend the Udana which I believe is in print. That is an early Pali text. The Sutta Nipata too. We've had seminars on quite a bit of that. That material should be published in due course. Modern books. I think 'Buddhism: A Non-Theistic Religion' I rather recommend for the more intellectually inclined.

_____: That's out of print.

S: That's out of print, is it.

_____: What about the Path of The Inner Life.

S: Well, I recommend me obviously! (Laughter) Just take that for granted. Some of me is more relevant than other parts. I recommend 'The Three Jewels' but some people say it's difficult which rather surprised me. It wasn't meant to be difficult. Govinda is very good reading and Guenther if you like something really tough and difficult, but really quite solid. And 'Some Sayings of the Buddha' is very good, excerpts from the Pali texts though sometimes the language of the translation is a bit odd. The famous 'musing' occurs quite a lot. And the 'norm' for the Dhamma.

_____: The Door of Liberation?

S: The Door of Liberation is very good, yes, indeed. What books have people found particularly helpful themselves?

_____: The Path of the Inner Life.

S: You found that quite helpful. Good.

_____: What the Buddha Taught.

_____: What the Buddha Taught. A lot of our Friends find that rather dry. You didn't?

_____: I didn't. I found it quite (?)

S: Good. Ah well, there you are then. It is quite short and certainly concise and quite clearly written. Anybody else find anything particularly useful about books?

_____: I like (?) the Buddha's Way.

S: The Buddha's Way? Who is that?

_____: Saddatissa.

S: Saddatissa, yes, that's a quite new one I think, isn't it?

_____: (?) covers very simple basic (?)

S: Well, for a historical survey there's Dr. Conze's "Buddhism: Its Essence and Development". But he's a bit sardonic at times but he's quite well worth reading for the historical survey.

Alan Angel: (?) Buddhist Scriptures I think which is edited by Conze.

S: Yes, that's in 'Penguin'.

Alan Angel: Yes.

S: I must say I personally prefer the other anthology, "Buddhist Texts Through the Ages". I think that's even better. But having done that he was asked to do a second one which was the "Buddhist Scriptures". And also the "Songs of Milarepa" of course. One could well read those (?). There's "Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa", the biography. That's very inspiring reading. Some of our friends get quite a lot out of "The Tibetan Book of Dead" too and "The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation" which is the life of Padmasambhava. The publications of the Nyingmapa Centre are very good, like "Calm and Clear" and "Golden Zephyr". That whole series (?) very, very good material though quite, well, quite advanced in a way, much of it, very worthwhile material.

As for Zen, there are one or two quite good books. There's Trevor Leggett's, oh what's that one called.

_____: "First Zen Reader".

S: "First Zen Reader", that's very good. And then what's the second one, "The Tiger's Cave". That's good too. I quite like both of these books.

_____: That's by Trevor Leggett?

S: Trevor Leggett, yes. Trevor Leggett. Then there's, there's a book by Trevor Ling that we're going to do a seminar on, Simply "The Buddha". That is very readable and good, especially for historical background and basic teachings. "The Buddha". It's in paperback too, Penguin, "The Buddha" by Trevor Ling. And if you are, as it were, students of psychology and who are analytically minded then "Mind in Buddhist Psychology" is the thing for you. We're going to have a seminar on that next month.

I was just wondering what there is of a more poetical and inspirational nature.

_____: "Way of the White Clouds".

S: "Way of the White Clouds" is very good in that respect. And also in some of the Buddhist art books are quite inspiring. You don't always feel like reading and thinking. Just to look at the pictures is sometimes a very good idea.

_____: How do you feel about Trungpa's publications?

S: I feel a bit mixed about his publications. I think "Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism" can be a bit misleading.

_____: Can you say more about that?

S: Well, it sort of suggests that the reader is a very highly developed sort of spiritual person who has cut through all materialism proper but now has to be very careful that he isn't misled by spiritual materialism. Whereas the fact is that the average reader hasn't even begun to cut through ordinary materialism. But he can be so preoccupied cutting through spiritual materialism yet overlooks the fact that he hasn't cut through ordinary materialism. So the book flatters the average reader in this sort of way. Oh I must be careful, I mustn't take Nirvana as a concept. (Laughter)

_____: I quite enjoyed it! [Laughter]

_____: I saw it very much in the same way as your lecture on alienation.

S: Yes, right.

_____: But put in a different way.

S: I'm just thinking of it being let loose on the general public as it were, who haven't even got into any sort of regular spiritual practice as at least most of our own friends have.

_____: (?)

S: (?)

_____: What about the Dhammapada as a short sharp (?)

S: Yes, surely. The Udana is a little bit like that.

Sagaramati: I think when we did that thing in Glasgow. Most people didn't like the text at all - the Udana. They found it very, very dry and uninspiring.

S: It wasn't how we found it when we did it.

Sagaramati: No, that's true.

S: That's quite interesting. Was it simply that the Scots wanting more solid intellectual nourishment or (?) How did you feel about it Pat? You were there.

Pat (now Danavira): It may have been... Someone said there were too many people perhaps for the discussion. I don't know (?)

S: How many people did you have?

_____: About fourteen.

S: That's quite a lot. That is quite a lot actually.

_____: (?)

S: I think really for study, eight or nine is ideal. It's quite surprising we've done so well on retreat with sixteen people including me. That's quite a lot for study.

I think there are two things to look at here. What does one mean by dry? Did they find the material dry or did they find the whole period dry because they didn't have a chance to say very much?

Sagaramati: I think the way I took it was that it stated the obvious in a sense.

S: The obvious needs to be said.

Sagaramati: Yes. Maybe they didn't want the obvious.

S: But <u>did</u> it state the obvious? Well, if all those things were obvious to you, well you'd be half-way to enlightenment and more!

Sagaramati: It was stating the obvious to their intellectual side.

S: Well you must have had some very intellectual people.

Sagaramati: I didn't mean <u>that</u> intellectual! [Laughter]

S: (Laughter) (?) there might be something in that, yes. But sometimes you can think you've understood because you've not understood what it was all about.

_____: Some people need things to be dressed up in Chinese terms or Japanese or Tibetan or some other oriental flavour rather than pure(?)

S: I thought the Scots were more down-to-earth than that. Well, Nick was there. What did you think Nick?

Nick: I found it quite pleasant.

S: Pleasant?

_____: Quite inspiring.

Sagaramati: Generally what people said to me. I think it was just more of the archaic language of the text.

S: Ah, yes. Well one shouldn't let oneself be put by that.

Pat: I think was the size of the room we did it in and also the condition of the place. There was a lot of space in the room. But here it seems quite close.

Sagaramati: There was hardly a day with the same people there.

S: That makes quite a difference, quite a big difference. Well, we did have a seminar once in a tent and that went off very well. We were really crowded but it was fun. Some of the early seminars we had in quite cramped conditions. It didn't matter at all. It's almost better to have too small a room rather than too big a room for study. On the other hand I think for meditation you need quite a bit of space. You shouldn't be almost touching one another.

Sagaramati: Again I think that a text like the Udana, you would have to be in a very mindful state to benefit from it. If you read it just like a book then it's not entertaining.

_____: (?)

S: No, entertaining is hardly the word that one would apply for the Udana. Inspiring, yes, stimulating, yes, profound, yes, but not entertaining.

Sagaramati: You want entertainment? (Laughter)

Pat: (?) anybody (?) study. I think that maybe things like Milarepa may go down well. I feel quite good with the Songs of Milarepa. (Laughter) The Udana, even the book Udana, it looked as if it had been published about ten years ago, the copies we had, it had that feel to it.

S: So what?

Pat: That's just an impression I had about it, that it was a very old book. I wouldn't say I took part greatly in the discussion. Some of the stuff I found dry, to use that word, some of it, it was OK and I don't mind the language sometimes. I didn't mind the language of the Aryan Quest too much for instance even though it was repetitive. But I didn't tell anybody what I thought of the study group. I think that some seminars are just better. I didn't say things to the group very much.

Padmaraja: Did you have any notes from the seminar.

Sagaramati: I had my own notes.

_____: You were on the seminar?

Pat: The study group never really heated up. I think it did once or twice at the beginning.

Sagaramati: Things heated up when (?) threw in things like class, nationality and.... it suddenly caught fire.

S: I see. Maybe it was very much because you didn't have the same people each day so there wasn't any sort of momentum carried on from day to day. I think that's really essential in a study group, that it is the same group, the same people all the way through. And relatively small.

Anyway, (?) end on that note. All you've got to do now is to copy out your notes in the ensuring weeks, and revise them and polish them, and go through them regularly with the original text. I've got some extra ones here. Are they extra ones left? There's one missing. I think someone took one out.

_____: (?)

S: No, they've got (?)

_____: (?) (Voices)

(End of side - End of session)

Transcribed by Paul Doré

Checked and Contented by Silabhadra