

General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

From the mid-seventies through to the mid-eighties, Uryen Sangharakshita led many seminars on a wide range of texts for invited groups of [Order members](#) and [Mitrans](#). These seminars were highly formative for the FWBO/Tiratna 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 Tiratna 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 [Tiratna 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 Uryen Sangharakshita.

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

Hyphens were missing from this file. Some have been reinstated through spellchecking.

Guhyaloka 1988

The venerable Sangharakshita

Questions and Answers at the Men's Ordination Retreat, Guhyaloka, May/June 1988.
Present: Sangharakshita, Dharmacharis Vessantara, Dharmapala, Bodhiraja, Vairocana, Purna, Dharmavira, Surata, Vajrananda, Ratnaghosa (Ben Murphy), Satyabandhu (Alain Seneque), Paramartha (Damon Peterson), Paramashanti (Stanley Gordon), Ratnabandhu (Anthony Sharkey), Vimalabandhu (Tjoan Thung), Aryasingha (David Morrin), Varaghosa (Dan Satterthwaite), Aryaguna (Chris Watson).

Session I, 26.5.88

Tape 1, Side 1

Sangharakshita: ... questions from the various groups, minus two which were in fact answered in one of the discussion groups and which we probably do not need to go over again. I have not arranged the questions in any order they are rather miscellaneous so I will go through them in the order in which they have in fact been written out. Some of them do not require very much by way of comment; others perhaps need to be gone into a little exhaustively. We shall see. The first question is from Vessantara's group, and is from Vessantara himself:

In the Going for Refuge pamphlet, you mention the four criteria which people have to satisfy to be accepted as Mitras. Our group noted that there is no ethical criterion i.e. no overt stipulation that prospective Mitras be making a serious effort to follow the Five Precepts. Do you think that some ethical criterion should be added to the four existing criteria, and if so how should it be phrased?

Looking back to the earlier days when we introduced the Mitra system, as far as I can recollect I personally took it for granted that Mitras would be observing, or trying to observe, the Five Precepts, because after all those are always recited in the course of our public Pujas immediately following the Three Refuges; so even if one is not yet able effectively to Go for Refuge one can at least practise, or try to practise, the Five Precepts. But it could be I am quite open to the idea that it would be a good thing to spell this out much more, and when someone is being considered for Mitra membership it might be a good idea to actually consider whether that person is leading an ethical life, is making an effort to practise the Five Precepts; also, perhaps, look at his livelihood situation whether he is in fact following Right Livelihood, or at least avoiding the cruder forms of wrong means of livelihood. how did the question actually come up? Did it just occur to somebody?

Vessantara: I think so. At the beginning of the booklet you outline the four criteria, and it just seemed in a way strange that there wasn't any explicit ethical criterion. And it did just seem that if there were such a thing it would be a very good opportunity to go into the observance of the Five Precepts by the prospective Mitra.

S: And is that ever in effect done, do you know? Supposing someone was proposed as a Mitra and fulfilled, or seemed to fulfil, the four criteria but none the less was known to be leading, in certain respects, a rather unethical life, would that not surely come up one would imagine?

Voices: It would. Yes, I think so.

[2]

S: So presumably, in effect, that criterion is implied. One assumes, or one expects, that prospective Mitras are observing the Five Precepts, and if one finds or notices that anyone isn't, one considers that, one brings that up. But none the less it might be better to look into it more closely, to give an extra emphasis, perhaps, to the importance of ethics. For instance, one point that does occur to me at once is that in the FWBO, or even in the Order, we don't make it an absolute rule that people should abstain from alcohol, but if a prospective Mitra, [not] to speak of a prospective Order Member, was known to be prone to drunkenness and did get drunk quite regularly, clearly he or she, even could not be considered for Mitraship. But there have been Mitras with drink problems. I can think of one at this very moment who does drink much too much; but he has become a Mitra, and I wonder whether it was known, when he was accepted as a Mitra, that in fact he did have this particular habit; because, though he is a good person in many ways, he does have this weakness, and perhaps it would have been better to go into it before he was accepted as a Mitra. He has been a Mitra several years, in fact, now. Or if someone was known to be living by dishonest means I suppose that would also come under wrong means of livelihood; but if he had, for instance, been guilty of theft and one or two people, one or two Mitras, even, I know, in the past have been guilty of theft in their pre-FWBO days, and I wonder whether in all cases it was cleared up before they were accepted as Mitras. Again it would be desirable if that was done. These are rather exceptional cases, I must say. I don't want to start drawing up a whole long list of criteria, but it does also occur to me that it isn't really a good thing if someone is accepted as a Mitra, broadly speaking, if he is weighed down by debt. We even do make that point, of course, in connection with Order Members. First of all, if you do owe money to other people, you are in a rather difficult position, because really you are I think I have gone into this in the Ten Pillars you are actually hanging on to money which belongs to somebody else; unless, of course as I think I have also mentioned you have borrowed it from a bank, they have agreed to lend it to you for so many years at such-and-such rate of interest; that is different, I don't mean that. If you have borrowed from friends or relations, and perhaps they even need the money and you still are not paying it back, you are in a very ambiguous and dubiously ethical position. So that should ideally be cleared up before ordination or before being accepted as a Mitra, even. I know sometimes people do deliberately get into a reasonable amount of debt for a short period, knowing that they can clear it off and fully intend to do so. That is perhaps slightly different. But where someone persistently remains in debt and does not make a serious effort to clear off his debts, that isn't really a very ethical position to be in. Can anybody think of any other possibly weak ethical areas where prospective Mitras may be concerned?

: There is the question of abortion as well.

S: Yes, especially in the case of women, I suppose; and men to the extent that they might have been parties to it. I have pondered this several times, because there have been several women Mitras who as Mitras have had abortions, even though it was made clear to them by women Order Members that this was not considered ethical in Buddhism. Just very recently, just a few days ago, I got a letter or report in this connection. About three years ago there was one particular woman in fact, there were several cases at that time, but there was one particular woman Mitra who did have an abortion; and she maintained that it was not unethical and had no psychological effect on her whatever. But now, three years later, I hear

[3] she is beginning to think or to feel that it has had a psychological effect upon her, and that she now has to deal with that. In the case, say, of a woman and there have been a number of such instances who had an abortion years and years ago before she even heard of Buddhism or came into contact with the Friends one just had to say, 'Well, look, just recognize it was skilful; you didn't know any better; just feel rational regret for it and put it behind you, and just resolve that you won't have recourse to abortion again' if it is so far back in that person's non-Buddhist past. But I am really very sorry if women Mitras have abortions, but there have been a few such cases, in fact.

Surata: We usually check that at Mitra convenor's level; it is always gone into, especially with women. But if there are men in a relationship, we usually go into it with them as well.

S: That's good.

Surata: It's considered a sort of esoteric criterion.

S: Ha ha! yes. If Mitra convenors are well aware of this and raise these points, that is fine, yes. But perhaps it should be, so to speak, codified.

Surata: I think, with regard to the practice of the Precepts, we probably notice things that are obvious contraventions, as it were, but we don't necessarily formally go through them all when we look at it, which might be a good idea.

S: Yes, it would help make the whole thing more systematic; because someone for instance, the person I mentioned, the man who actually was very much given to alcohol at the time he was accepted as a Mitra in his case that could not have been looked at. Perhaps people were not even aware of it, if he doesn't turn up actually under the influence of alcohol at the centre and no one knows him very well personally, how is it, so to speak, to come out unless it is actually inquired into, or he is directly asked? so I believe we have had prospective Mitras, even Mitras, who have been involved in various shady deals particularly, perhaps, in east London! (Laughter.) That needs a little bit of looking at. Sometimes you need to convince a person that, actually, something that he has done is not really very ethical, because people in Bethnal Green I mean I am not only mentioning people in Bethnal Green but some people, at least, in Bethnal Green have their own very distinctive ideas as to what is ethical and what is not: ... 'falling off the back of lorries', for instance, I believe. But, yes perhaps you are the only Mitra convenor, Surata, present, are you not?

Surata: ...

S: Ah. What I was going to suggest was that some Mitra convenor brings this up at the next Mitra convenors' meeting which he attends, and suggests that the Mitra convenors collectively consider this, perhaps draw up a short list of, well, semiofficial criteria, and then just send me a copy of that so that I can consider it. Anyway, let's leave that, shall we? So, (2) this is still Vessantara's group: this question is from Damien(?): [4] Where and when did the Three Jewels symbol originate? Presumably you are referring to that sort of trident shaped symbol?

Damien: That's right, the Three Jewels.

S: The three prongs, uh? I am not sure if I can say exactly where and when it originated. I am not even sure if it is definitely known. But at least a very early example of it is to be found in Sanchi. You know Sanchi is famous for its stupas of the third, second and first centuries BC

and even thereafter. It is especially famous for the Great Stupa, and the Great Stupa is especially famous for its four magnificent carved gateways, one for each of the four cardinal points. Were you aware of all this?

Voices assenting.

S: Those gateways are really quite magnificent. They consist of two pillars, about 10 or 12 feet apart maybe a bit more and the pillars have capitals carved with animals. Then there are three architraves, as they are called sort of crossbeams, one on top of the other, separated with sort of carved blocks, and voluted, as it is called. The topmost architrave in each case is surmounted with a dharmacakra supported by animals, and the dharmacakra supports the trident. These gateways belong to the first century BC. So certainly the trident, that Three Jewels symbol in that quite fully developed form, appears not later than that. Whether there are really any earlier examples which are known definitely to be earlier I couldn't say; one would have to look up books on Indian Buddhist art. But the Three Jewels symbol in that particular form, the trident form, does go back at least to the first century BC, and goes back to Sanchi, which is not far from the centre of India. It is in the present-day state of Madhya Pradesh near Bhopal; everyone has heard of Bhopal due to the disaster. It is just a few miles from there. It very often does surmount the dharmacakra. That is a straightforward factual question; it doesn't require any discussion, I think. So let's move on to the next one, question 3, Vessantara's group still, and again from

Vessantara: Could you please explain the difference between what is discerned by the dharma, prajna and sammanta(?) caksus?

S: There is another question following that about these caksus. Perhaps I had better read that one too and answer both together, again from

Vessantara: According to Nyanatiloka's Buddhist Dictionary, the list of the five eyes given in the Pali Curinirdesa(?) differs from the Sanskrit tradition. The first two are the same, then 3, 4 and 5 are the panna cakkhu, Buddha cakkhu and sammanta cakkhu. What distinction do you think is being made here between the fourth and fifth eyes?

S: I think one can disregard the details here, and examine the basic principle. Among these five eyes, the one which seems to be mentioned most often by L...(?) is the dharma caksu or dhamma cakkhu, and the opening of the dharma eye is synonymous with Stream Entry. And Stream Entry occurs, or the dharma caksu opens, or the first three fetters are broken, when a certain degree of Insight, a certain degree of vipassana, a certain degree of prajna, manifests itself. So the opening of the dharma caksu is a quite crucial event in the spiritual life of the Buddhist. As you know, it corresponds to real Going for Refuge. In a way, that is the only caksu you need to bother about, practically speaking, because you know that from Stream Entry onwards there are various stages of spiritual progress culminating in [5] Enlightenment whether that is defined in terms of arhantship or whether it is defined in terms of supreme Buddhahood. And you know that that further spiritual progress essentially consists in breaking more fetters, attaining a higher level of prajna, and so on. So the other eyes, really, basically, only measure or mark off succeeding degrees of prajna, succeeding the breaking of further fetters. Do you see the point? So if, of course, you believe that there is a difference as of course, all Buddhist traditions do believe between the wisdom of the Stream Entrant and the wisdom of the arhant, there will be a higher degree of prajna in the case of the arhant and

therefore a higher eye, so to speak, opening. So that gives you your second eye. In theory, you could have an eye for the once-returner and an eye for the non-returner as well as for the arhant, but tradition doesn't do that; tradition gives us only three higher eyes one for the Stream Entrant, one for the arhant and one for the Buddha. But the fact that the Buddha's eye is, so to speak, a higher eye than the arhant's eye depends on making a distinction between the degree of wisdom attained by the arhant and the degree of wisdom attained by a Buddha. But, even if there is a difference in their respective degrees of wisdom, it will all be still concerned with prajna, with Insight into Reality, Insight into sunyata and so on. The other two eyes, of course, are not transcendental: one is the eye of the flesh and the other is the psychic eye, the supernormal vision, which is not transcendental. Does that make it clearer?

Vessantara: Yes, Bhante.

S: The terminology doesn't matter. You can call the fifth eye the Buddha caksu or you can call it sammanta caksu it doesn't matter, it is the highest eye in a five-eye system, wherein there is a differentiation between the wisdom of the arhant and the wisdom of the Buddha.

Vessantara: So, speaking metaphorically, at least, does this mean that from the point of Stream Entry onwards it is as if you are simply developing a greater quantity of prajna rather than a quality of prajna?

S: One could put it in that way; except that there are attached to the Buddha, as I mentioned the other day, as distinct from the arhant, certain special qualities of the Buddha. But they do not really appear to be matters of prajna. Even some Mahayana philosophers maintain there is no essential difference between the prajna of an arhant and the prajna of a Buddha.

Tsongkhapa apparently is of that opinion, inasmuch as he holds that the arhant intuitively sunyata in the highest sense no less than does the Buddha, but the Buddha has an extra equipment of skilful means due to his previous vows etc. But I am personally not sure that one can make that sort of distinction, or make the distinction, if one makes it at all, on that sort of basis if you see what I mean.

Vessantara: So, again speaking metaphorically, could you think in terms of the Stream Entrant having a flash of Insight, like a flash of lightning, which illuminates the landscape, and as you go on your development of the further eyes is simply that the lightning is more continuous so you can see the landscape more clearly, but you are still looking at exactly the same landscape? Would that be a fair metaphor to use?

S: No, because the wisdom of the Stream Entrant, once attained, is not intermittent. The flashes of lightning simile, which I have used myself, applies more to [6] the gleams of insight, with a small i, which you get prior to the actual achievement of the kind of wisdom that makes you a Stream Entrant. Because the wisdom that makes you a Stream Entrant is transcendental, is not anything that can be lost; it is in a sense always there, even though in a sense you may not always be conscious of it, but it is there, it is never lost. That is, in a way, its essential nature.

Vessantara: So could you find a simile or metaphor for the connection between the state of prajna of a Stream Entrant and so on?

S: Well, you could have a metaphor of the stem of a plant, and a flower opens at one particular point on that stem. That corresponds to the wisdom which you attain on Stream

Entry, or in which the attainment of Stream Entry consists. And, further up on that same stem, you could have a bigger and more beautiful flower opening, and that is the wisdom of the arhant. It is a bit like the analogy of the kundalini and cakras and all that sort of thing you could look at it in that way. But I think one should not allow oneself to be confused by the differences in nomenclature as regards the eyes, but get the principle firmly into view. The eye is itself a metaphor for Insight or the wisdom that is attained. And, in the case of those three transcendental eyes, they represent between them three successive degrees of penetration into Reality one characteristic of the Stream Entrant, one of the arhant, and one of the Buddha, on the assumption, that is to say, that there is in fact such a difference between the arhant and the Buddha.

Bodhiraja: Do you know when the dharma eye opens?

S: This, in a way, is another question, and it depends on what you mean by knowledge. If you know something, you certainly know it; you don't really require, in a way, to know that you know it, because then you would have also to know that you know that you know it! So, if you know something, you know it, especially where Ultimate Reality is concerned, where there is no distinction of subject and object. But you may not 'know' it in terms of a particular traditional doctrinal framework; but, if you were interrogated about it, from your answers it would be clear that that was in fact what it was that is to say, that you had had the experience of your dharma eye opening. But you could have that experience without knowing the expression 'dharma eye', without having read the relevant Buddhist scriptures, simply as the result of the momentum of your own spiritual life and practice.

Bodhiraja: Say you had come across the concept of the dharma eye, and studied it, then when it opened would you recognize that?

S: You might or you might not, because you could have read a work where it was badly explained, and did not give you really the means of recognizing in traditional terms what in fact you had experienced. But, if you had come across an adequate account of the opening of the dharma eye, one that really gave you a very good idea of what actually happened, it is highly likely that when you had yourself the experience, you would say: 'Ah! That is what I read about before. This must be the opening of the dharma eye.' But you can have the experience without that sort of framework of reference; in which case, in a sense, you don't know what has happened, but in a deeper spiritual sense because it is, after all, your own experience you do know.

[7]

Bodhiraja: So you don't know its name?

S: You don't know its name. Or, more than that, you don't know how that particular experience is located within an overall framework of spiritual reference. For instance, you may not know consciously that certain fetters have been broken, but later on you may just become aware that you are not acting quite in the same way as before, and you might see more and more clearly in exactly what way or ways you are not acting as before. But when you develop that degree of Insight you wouldn't know that, so to speak, straight away, unless it happened in a very dramatic sort of manner, and you actually felt something dropping away. But you may not always be able to identify exactly what it was that had dropped away; that would become clear, that would transpire, perhaps, only later.

Bodhiraja: You say in your latest book, *The History of my Going for Refuge*, that on reading *The Diamond Sutra* that was the opening of the dharma eye. This is a conclusion you have reached subsequently?

S: Yes. This is the conclusion to which I have come. Though I do qualify that, don't I? I think I use some such phrase as 'to some extent', don't I?

Voices: Yes.

S: Because, at that time, I didn't have a framework of reference. I didn't know what was happening. I had read those works and a few others. So I can as it were look back; I can sort of recapitulate, and certainly it was an experience of that kind or that order. But whether it was fully that, at that time, this I cannot be quite sure of, so I do not make a categorical statement.

Vessantara: So would you expect an Order Member, given all the sort of teaching and very clear descriptions of things which you have given would you expect somebody arriving at the stage of Stream Entry as an Order Member to know that?

S: Oh yes, indeed, yes. But, on the other hand, it would still be possible for an Order Member, on the basis of what he had read, to think that he had attained Stream Entry when he had not! (Laughter.) One must make that observation too.

Vajrananda(?): From what you say in your book, it did seem to suggest that an Order Member might consider that he had gained Stream Entry to some extent.

S: I don't think that, literally, you can gain Stream Entry 'to some extent'. I think I am using that kind of phrase to indicate that at that time I did not really have the necessary intellectual framework to be able to decide what, spiritually speaking, had happened, whatever that was. It must also be said, though, that it is not so much that the line of demarcation between, say, insight with a small i and Insight with a capital I is very difficult to determine. In a way, it is more subtle than that. Very often I have given an analogy which I shall mention in a minute you can accumulate a number of insights with a small i, and they can eventually add up to, so to speak, Insight with a capital I; but you may find it very difficult to determine at the time at exactly what point that happens. The analogy I gave was this: supposing some of you may have come across this; I gave it [at one] Tuscany you have a pair of scales, and they are both as it were filled with little tiny grains of something; and supposing, actually, one pan is higher than the other and one is lower, one is heavier, but you may not be able to see which actually is heavier because the [8] difference may be so fine that it passes your powers of perception, but none the less on this side there are perhaps one or two grains more, on that side one or two grains less. Therefore, by a fraction of a fraction of an inch, that pan is lower. But if you start adding grains more and more, then the difference will become tangible, and you will know that the right-hand one is lower than the left-hand one. But you may not be able to tell just when, with the addition of, say, one grain, the one pan becomes a little heavier. In the same way, you may not be able to tell when, by the addition of just another flash of insight, the insight is transformed into Insight. You may know it only some time later, when that Insight has developed to some extent and has begun to manifest in a change in your behaviour, and so on. So, even if you start thinking that, well, yes, you must have attained Stream Entry, wait a while and see whether that Insight is really

confirmed and there are noticeable changes in your external behaviour over a considerable period of time, and whether those changes are noticed by your friends and commented on by them. But just on the basis of a single experience even though a very powerful experience one should never start thinking of claiming that one must have attained Stream Entry; you may find, after a while, you have fallen away from it, and therefore that it was not a genuine experience of Insight, even though at the same time a very remarkable and worthwhile experience. So one should not bother too much about 'Have I become a Stream Entrant or not?' Bother about maintaining your spiritual practice, especially trying to develop Insight, and have the confidence that, when Insight is really manifested, when you really are a Stream Entrant, then it will have a transforming effect on your whole being, and people will perceive or experience something different about you. And it may then be borne in upon you that, well, some quite radical change must have taken place in you, amounting to Stream Entry. But even then you should not preoccupy yourself with that idea too much; just carry on with your practice. Certainly you don't want people comparing notes and trying to find out whether they are Stream Entrants or not. That can be a quite unhealthy preoccupation. Some Zen groups have intensive weekend sesshins, and at the end it is announced that Mr So-and-so or Mrs So-and-so have actually attained kensho, which seems to correspond to vipassana, and I think that is not, as far as I can see, a very skilful way of doing things. It can give rise to feelings of conceit, or it can give rise to feelings of envy or competitiveness. So is this business of the eyes clearer now? All right, here we come to another nice little simple one, from Damien: Was Buddha, Dharma and Sangha a pre-Buddhist formulation? No. As far as one knows, it is quite distinctively Buddhist. The Jains have a similar triad I can't offhand think what it was, but it certainly wasn't Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Something more about Stream Entry, again from

Vessantara: On the last Tuscany course, you said that someone who had gained Stream Entry might rest on their oars for a while, making no effort but just being carried along by the stream, as it were. If Stream Entry is just one aspect of a spiritual experience which also has, as its altruistic aspect, the arising of the Bodhicitta, does not compassion for all beings urge the Stream Entrant on? How can he rest on his oars when there is so much suffering to be alleviated?

S: Well, there are a couple of preliminary points to be made here. First of all, the equation of Stream Entry and the arising of the Bodhicitta is, of course, my own [9] interpretation. This is not traditional, though I think the equation or identification explains a lot that is in tradition. So the question does not arise within tradition; especially it does not arise within the Hinayana tradition, with those stages of the Stream Entrant, the Once-Returner, the Non-Returner and the Arhant. So let us look at it from the point of view of the Hinayana, which is also the standpoint of the modern Theravada, and which also seems to be, if one understands the terms properly, the original standpoint of Buddhism. It is often stated this, in fact, is the traditional teaching that the Stream Entrant has not more than seven more births remaining. So what does that mean? What does that imply?

Vessantara: Well, he is inevitably going to gain arhantship.

S: Yes, within the next seven births he is inevitably going to gain arhantship, even if he does not make any further effort. Any further effort only speeds up the process. So he may attain arhantship not within the outermost limit of seven lifetimes but in this present lifetime itself. And the Theravadins, of course, would find it worth while doing that because they regard the

basic motivation of the spiritual life as the desire to escape from suffering. So if you can get out of the samsara, escape from the samsara within fewer than seven rebirths, why not do so? Why rest on your oars? But if you are not bothered by the prospect of seven more births, you can rest on your oars in the assurance that, after or within those seven lifetimes, you will inevitably gain arhantship and not have any eighth rebirth. This is the traditional teaching, and appears to be the teaching of the Pali Canon; but it all rests upon taking quite literally those seven [rebirths]. I personally doubt whether you can do that whether you can take literally the fact that there cannot be, for the Stream Entrant, any eighth birth. The figure seven occurs so often, and seems to have always such a symbolical association, that I am very doubtful whether it is here to be taken quite literally; because you have the Buddha sitting seven days under the Bodhi tree, and then sitting seven days under another tree, and then you have in the end seven periods of seven days. In the case of the bardo, there are seven periods of seven days. So I very much doubt whether that period of seven days is to be taken literally. Also it seems to be rather against the general spirit of Buddhism that, superficially at least, there is no spiritual attainment without corresponding effort. You could argue, of course, that with Stream Entry you have done all that was necessary. I have given, for instance, the analogy from the Theravada point of view of the drop of acid that you drop on to something. Once you have dropped the drop of acid, that's it; you know that, given sufficient time, it will eat through whatever you have dropped it on to. Were you here when I made that point in Tuscany? Were you present then?

Vessantara: I don't remember clearly.

S: Yes, I made it three or four years ago, I think. But you see the force of the analogy. But, though it illustrates the Theravada point of view, is it really a sort of valid analogy? One can ask that. I tend to think not. I tend to think that that figure seven is not to be taken literally, and that therefore, though you cannot fall back, further effort is needed for further progress. And, of course, this does bring in the question of the correlation between Stream Entry and the arising of the Bodhicitta and the compassion aspect which is there, of course, really, though not brought out by the Theravada so much, that the same compassion is present in the Stream Entrant; he cannot be devoid of compassion. So the upshot of it all is that I don't really accept that, after the attainment of [10] Stream Entry, the attainment of arhantship is inevitable within a given period. But that would need to be argued citing all the relevant texts and scriptures. A recent book, which I have brought with me to read I have only looked into it so far and I am not sure what it is called [?] does make this point that Buddhism is a sort of Calvinism, and that after hearing the Buddha and becoming a Stream Entrant you are destined for Enlightenment, and that therefore all you really need to do is to listen to the Buddha, to hear the Buddhavacana, [and] you gain Stream Entry as it were automatically, and after a while, automatically again, arhantship. He seems to have interpreted Buddhism along these quite Calvinistic lines. I have yet actually to go through the book properly. But again, this all arises from taking that seven rebirths period quite literally, taking the number seven quite literally; which I am disinclined to do.

Vessantara: I am still not quite clear whether you think it would be possible for a Stream Entrant to rest on his oars.

S: That depends [on] what you mean by resting on his oars. I don't think it possible that anyone, having reached that degree of spiritual momentum, should turn aside from the spiritual quest. I am sure he or she would want to progress further. On the other hand, there is

such a thing as a strategic rest, just to give yourself the energy for a further effort. One can quite legitimately rest on your oars in that sort of way; otherwise you are literally doing something, making an effort, all the time, which may not be the most skilful way of proceeding in the case of a Stream Entrant. If you are not a Stream Entrant, well, you can't afford really to do anything else except make an effort all the time! You certainly can't afford to rest on your oars except for very, very strategic reasons, without any suggestion of rationalization! So maybe the expression 'rest on one's oars' was not to be taken too literally. If you adopt that almost deterministic interpretation of the Transcendental Path, you don't really need any oars at all, [not] to speak of resting on them! So does that deal with that? It no doubt could be gone into more systematically, but perhaps we won't. Then there are a couple of questions which I will leave, as we have dealt with them in a discussion group, and we come on to Purna's group, with a question from

Vajrananda: At what point of breaking or weakening the fetters does the practitioner permanently dwell in access concentration or above?

S: In a way the two are not comparable, because breaking or weakening the fetters pertains to Insight, and dwelling in access concentration or above pertains to samatha. None the less, there is a connection, because what happens when you ...

[11]

Tape 1, Side 2

... We all know what they are, I need not enumerate them now. You have still got the other fetters to deal with. You have only weakened the forces of greed, hatred and delusion, so they are still present to some extent. So you do not, therefore, dwell in a dhyana state, or even in the access concentration, permanently. The five hindrances will still bother you to some extent. But inasmuch as you have broken, say, three fetters and are perhaps weakening others, those five hindrances will be very much weaker than they normally are, and it will therefore be much easier for you to dwell in access concentration or states of concentration above that. It will be easier for you to attain the dhyanas. But the breaking, say, of the first three fetters, and the mere weakening of the remaining fetters, will not be really sufficient to enable you to dwell in access concentration or above, so to speak permanently, without further effort. That would be possible, presumably, only in the case of a Buddha, because a Buddha would not have any residue of defilement, any residue of unskilful mental states, left at all. So what prevents you going in, say, to the first dhyana is just your unskilful mental states and the fact that your concentration or your attention is drawn outside. A Buddha, whenever he simply sits and is not having to occupy his mind with some external matter, as it were automatically goes into at least a lower dhyana state, because there are no hindrances to stop him. He has, as it were, to force his mind or to deliberately direct his mind to external things. Not that, when there is nothing of that sort, he withdraws into himself in a purely subjective manner, because that distinction between subject and object has been transcended; but to the observer it would look as though the Buddha had as it were withdrawn. But, in terms of samatha, he would be experiencing dhyana then, and in terms of vipassana he would be experiencing what he always experiences that is to say, complete Insight into Reality.

Vajrananda: Are you suggesting that a Buddha is either in dhyana or in directed conscious thinking, and that that state is like diffused (?) dhyana but not actually a dhyana?

S: Yes. Without losing, of course, his mindfulness, without losing his transcendental vision; his Buddha eye remains open. But, short of that, there is always the subtle residue of the hindrances which would need to be overcome, or even in some cases just a very slight effort in order to attain the dhyana states. So what it basically adds up to is that vipassana does, of course, weaken the hindrances, and therefore, though it is distinct from samatha, makes the samatha experience more easy of attainment, and in the end virtually permanent. Some schools of Mahayana, by the way, did maintain that the Buddha was always in a state of samadhi, but that was not the view of the Theravada, and it does seem that the Theravada view, the older Buddhist view, is in a way more sensible and closer to the facts of the situation as we can make them out from the older Pali texts.

: Bhante, if you gained Stream Entry, in what way would you still suffer from the hindrance of doubt?

S: Well, with regard to the higher stages. It is not, of course, quite doubt in the English sense. It is a sort of wavering, isn't it? But even as a Stream Entrant you could have sort of passing doubts with regard to the possibility of higher states or stages of the spiritual path. Because there is still a residue of ignorance, and where there is ignorance presumably there will be doubt; though [12] perhaps the doubt would not be of the traumatic nature that you get prior to Stream Entry. I said the doubt would be 'passing'; it might be just a residue of previous conditioning, or might be due to the fact you were not in contact with people who had urged you to go on further. But inasmuch as ignorance was there, I assume doubt, at least from time to time, must also be there. Inasmuch as you do not have actual knowledge with regard to that of which we do not have real knowledge, I think there always must be some element of doubt, however firm your faith, even faith in the higher sense.

Vessantara: Despite the fact that you have knowledge of the Transcendental at this point?

S: You have knowledge of the Transcendental only up to a point, so to speak. But what about the Transcendental beyond? With regard to that, you are ignorant. So, with regard to that, I think it is not surprising if some doubts do, at least occasionally, pass through your mind. The tradition represents even arhants as doubtful about the possibility of their attaining samyaksambuddhahood, or becoming Bodhisattvas! They will even walk out, some of them, according to the Saddharma Pundarika Sutra, when confronted by the possibility that there might be a higher stage. Perhaps one is not to take that too literally, but it does illustrate a spiritual truth, perhaps.

Vajrananda: I feel a little bit confused, because in what sense has one broken that fetter of doubt? Is it a different sort of doubt?

S: You are talking about vicikitsa? I suppose that is the fetter of a sort of general doubt, ultimately, about the possibility of higher spiritual, that is to say transcendental, experience at all. But the breaking of that particular fetter, the becoming a Stream Entrant, represents only the attainment of a certain level of the transcendental path. Beyond that, there is still a further transcendental path, with regard to which no doubt you can entertain a subtle doubt. You cannot surely have abolished doubt once and for all in all its degrees, otherwise you would have abolished ignorance too, and you would in fact be an arhant or a Buddha. So I don't think one can, again, take the statement that the Stream Entrant destroys the fetter of doubt, vicikitsa, too literally. Certainly a very substantial level of doubt is removed, but there is still

the possibility of doubt regarding that which, for the time being, does transcend your actual experience.

: Would you say, then, Bhante, that the Stream Entrant is somebody who just has complete faith, that they don't have to experience doubt and overcome ...

S: Well, the Stream Entrant has a substantial measure of experience, inasmuch as the first three fetters are broken and the dharma eye has opened; there is a measure, a very substantial measure, of Insight. But perhaps, so long as it remains just a matter of words or ideas, one does not as it were envisage the immense distance that there is between Stream Entry and the higher stages of the transcendental path. One just enumerates them, so one thinks, 'Oh well, there is Stream Entry not too far away, and just behind that there is the level of the Once-Returner, then the Non-Returner and then the Arhant.' It all seems in a way quite close; but it probably really is not like that at all; there is an immense distance between each of these stages. So that, from the lower stage, you can easily entertain doubt with regard to at least the exact nature of the higher stages, exactly how you get there, what you have got to do. Or you may even doubt sometimes whether there is a higher stage, whether perhaps you haven't got as far as it is possible to go. Zen tradition is full of stories about monks and disciples [13] who thought they had gained Buddhahood when in fact they had just had a remarkable experience, and had to be brought down to earth, so to speak, by their teacher. Also Zen speaks of the 'great doubt' which intensifies and intensifies until you have gained full Enlightenment. Zen, of course, regards doubt in quite positive terms; you doubt your own experience, in a way, with their school; not that you doubt what you have experienced, but you doubt whether it is the ultimate experience. And as long as you can doubt, you must doubt and you should doubt, in that sense; otherwise you make no progress. But that is not quite doubt in the fetter sense, the vicikitsa sense; the Zen people are giving a certain turn of their own I think a very useful turn to this whole conception of doubt. If you think something can be doubted, it should be doubted. If you have a spiritual experience, by all means doubt it, because if it is genuine it will withstand the doubt; your doubt will not disintegrate it, so try it, just as goldsmiths tested the gold. If it isn't gold, it will disintegrate or change in some way and you will know it is not gold. Similarly with your spiritual experience: test it and attack it as much as you can. If it withstands the test, withstands the attack, then you can be sure you are on the right path and not just deceiving yourself. Anyway, let's leave that one, shall we? and come on to the second set. We are again with Vessantara's group. This is headed 'Ten Pillars of Buddhism'.

Q: In the introduction, page 4, you say that you have been asked by an Order Member to speak about whether there is a philosophical term or phrase that would summarize the nature of Buddhism. You say that you hope to be able to say something about it sooner or later. Would you please do so now?

S: I am not so sure that I can. I am not so sure actually what was originally meant by 'a philosophical term or phrase that would summarize the nature of Buddhism'; I am not quite sure what the force of 'philosophical' is in this connection or this context. But I have recently some of you might know summed up Buddhism in one word (I am only paraphrasing now), and that was in an interview I gave for Resurgence. The editor of Resurgence, Satish Kumar, came and interviewed me, and I said that I thought I think he asked me about it Buddhism could be summed up in one word, which was 'impermanence'. Because usually Buddhist teaching is summed up in three words, isn't it: dukkha, anicca, anatta? But suppose you have

to reduce those three to one, which would it be? In a sense, anatta is profounder, but then impermanence, anicca, is the sort of connecting link. If you concentrate on anicca, you will arrive at dukkha at one end or on one side, and at anatta on the other side or at the other end. Do you see what I mean? Because supposing everything is impermanent all right, and you don't want things to be impermanent, you want them to be permanent, so you cling on to them, so what is the result? Dukkha. And then again, if things are impermanent, if they are changing all the time, do they have any real self-nature, any own-being that you can point to and identify? No. So what does that mean? Anatta. So really you could say that the three laksanas are reducible to one, which is impermanence, aniccata, and that that one word does in fact sum up Buddhism in the sense of summing up the fundamental insight, the fundamental vision, of Buddhism or what Buddhism is really all about or what it is oriented towards. I think originally the idea of summarizing the nature of Buddhism in a philosophical term or phrase suggested doing that by way of a sort of term or phrase of Western philosophy, perhaps contemporary Western philosophy: let us say, for instance, that Buddhism might be a form of pantheism, let us say, or certainly not theism but a form of spiritual nontheism, or transcendental humanism, as I have sometimes called it; but none of these sort of phrases are very appropriate, and perhaps in fact there isn't any such phrase which would sum up Buddhism in a [14] way that would do justice to it. Even dukkha, anicca, anatta even 'impermanence' doesn't tell you everything about Buddhism, but it certainly tells you something about the absolute basics of Buddhism. It doesn't tell you anything about how to achieve that realization of impermanence, or to make it more real, but it does point to what Buddhism is essentially concerned with; so perhaps that is the best one can do just say, if anyone wants or asks for Buddhism in one word assuming that they are not going to be Zen-like and say 'Mu', which is of course Japanese for 'No' or 'not' it isn't the sound the cow makes if you are not going to say 'Mu' in a Zen-like sort of way, you could say, well, impermanence. If you can just realize impermanence, universal impermanence perhaps we should say, then you will be very close to something like Buddhism, or to encapsulating it in a single term or phrase. We come now to something quite different. Oh dear, it is a historical question!

Q: Can you expand upon the possible connection you mention on p. 28 between Buddhism and Persian culture, with particular reference to Zoroastrianism?

S: I think one can't say very much about the connection with Zoroastrianism, but something about the general connection with Persian culture. Where does that come in? I mentioned a little while ago the gateways of Sanchi, which belong to the first century BC. The Great Stupa, of course, was started, it seems, in the third century BC, in the days of Asoka, and it does seem that in the days of Asoka, and perhaps more especially the days of his grandfather Candraguptamorya, there was a very definite connection between India, between the Maghadan empire, and the Achimienid(?) empire of what we now call Persia, in the time of Darius I. The evidences of that connection are actually quite interesting. Let me say a few words about Asoka first. Asoka is a very interesting figure in Indian history. Perhaps you don't all realize it, but Indian history is very dark. There are hundreds of years for which we have virtually no chronology at all. We don't have a history of India in the way that we have a history of Greece or Rome or any European country from the Dark Ages onwards. Indians, it seems, were not historians. Sanskrit literature is a vast literature; it is one of the very richest literatures that there ever has been in the world, but there is only one historical work in it which is really extraordinary. That is a quite late work, I think it is thirteenth century, called the Rajatarangini(?) or River of Kings, which is actually a history of Kashmir. But there are

no works of Indian history. So we just can't study Indian history, really, systematically or continuously, until the Muslim period, the Moghul period because the Muslims were great historians; we have lots of works in Persian and Sanskrit about the history of India, even in some detail, from that time onwards, then, of course, to the British period. But for the greater part of Indian history we have no history at all, no record, no account at all. There is only one great spot well, two great spots of light: one is Asoka, and the other is Huan Chuang(?). Now why is Asoka such a spot of light? Because of his rock edicts and pillar edicts. I assume you have mostly heard of these? Asoka actually inscribed on rocks throughout his empire what we might call addresses to the people of his empire. I forget the exact number of these edicts, but many of them were inscribed the same edicts in different places: I think 25 or 30 of them have actually been found. And he addresses the people of his empire in very direct, very personal terms. The edicts, if you put them all together, add up almost to a sort of personal testimony, almost a brief autobiography of Asoka. He even shares his thoughts, even thoughts about himself, his own life, with his people. So this is quite extraordinary and unprecedented in Indian history. [15] So you have got this person living in the third century BC, and you have got an exactly contemporary account of him to a limited extent, admittedly from his very own lips in his very own words. You don't even have that for the Buddha. The Buddha didn't carve rock edicts. He taught orally, and his oral teaching was handed on by his disciples. In the case of Asoka, you have got a first-hand evidence of what the man was like and what he thought: his own writing, so to speak. And for Indian history this is really extraordinary. So we have more knowledge, really, of Asoka, and to some extent of his period, than we have of any other figure in Indian history until Moghul times. You can see the significance of that this one spot of light in this early period of Indian history. The next spot of light is nearly 1,000 years later, when the Chinese pilgrims start coming, especially Huan Chuang, and they are very historically minded; they look at everything, they describe everything, they measure everything, and they write it all down as soon as they get back home in China. So our main sources of information about medieval India are the accounts of the Chinese pilgrims. There are no corresponding accounts from Indian sources whatever. The odd inscription usually to record a donation of a temple or a monastery to a certain sect or order that is about all that you get. So the Chinese pilgrims, especially Huan Chuang, are the second great spot of light. But then, coming back to Asoka: what gave Asoka the idea of these rock edicts? Nobody else in India had ever written rock edicts. And he seems to have done it very thoroughly; it wasn't just an accident, it was quite deliberate and systematic. So is there any precedent anywhere in the ancient world for rock edicts? Anybody know?

: The Assyrian?

S: Yes, the Assyrians to some extent; but mainly Darius the Great, whose empire, of course, incorporated the Assyrian empire. Darius the Great inscribed similar rock edicts, some at least one of them even lengthier than Asoka's. And it is known, or at least the evidence is very strong, that there was a link between Persia, the Achimemid empire, and the empire of Magadha. So it seems pretty clear that Asoka got his idea of the rock edicts from Persian culture using the word 'Persian', which is really a comparatively modern term, in the broadest sense, because the Persian empire, the Achimemid empire of those days, was much, much more extensive than Persia is today. But there are other signs of influence. What about the pillars themselves? The pillars are highly glazed; they have a mirror-like polish, which is quite unprecedented in India, and again seems to have been derived from Persia. It would seem, from the descriptions that we have, that Asoka's palace was possibly modelled on the palace of the Great King the king of Persia in Persepolis, a sort of multi-columned palace of a

type which was not usual, it would seem, in India. There are other things, other little pieces of evidence. Some of the rock edicts in the northern part of Asoka's empire were inscribed in the Khorosli(?) script. Khorosli, I think, means 'donkey's lips', because it is supposed to look like the lips of a donkey. But that script was devised originally for the writing of what is, I believe, called Persian Aramaic or Persianized Aramaic. Apparently some of the expressions in these rock edicts, written in that script, are Persian in form rather than Indian. So you see, another little bit of influence. It does seem that there was a sort of cultural exchange between the Magadhan empire from the time of Bimbisara to the time of Asoka, and that the rock edicts and the polished pillars and several other things were just a sign of that. [16] So, yes, there was, it seems, this definite influence of Persian culture on India in the time of Asoka. The influence of Zoroastrianism is more difficult to trace. I have referred, I believe, to the triad of body, speech and mind, which does not seem to be Indian, and which possibly this is, of course, earlier than Asoka goes back to Persia and Persian culture, perhaps to Zoroastrianism. In Zoroastrianism there is emphasis, very strongly, on purification of body, speech and mind, and according to scholars whose works I have consulted, this triad of body, speech and mind is not found in the Vedas, not found in pre-Buddhist Indian literature. There is more that could be said; the whole subject, the whole field has not been properly investigated. We know, of course, that there was contact between one of the successors of Alexander Seleucus Nicator?(?) yes; who ruled the Seleucid kingdom, which was one of the kingdoms into which Alexander the Great's empire broke up, and he had contact, we know, with Candragupta, because he sent an ambassador called Megasthenes you must have heard of him and he wrote a work on India, fragments of which survive and have been collected by Roman scholars. He wrote a work called Indica, I believe. But unfortunately we only have quotations from that in other writers. As I say, these have been collected, so we know there was that channel of communication between the East and the West.

: So the Mauryan days started with Asoka?

S: No, the Mauryan dynasty started with well, the really prominent figure was Candragupta, his grandfather. Candragupta, by the way, married well, at least as one of his wives I think it was a daughter of Seleucus Nicator; and, according to a genealogical chart which I saw in oh, what was that book? by Darlington, on *The Evolution of Man?*, a general sort of history, Asoka must have had one Greek grandparent; which again is quite interesting, isn't it? This is according to this particular work. That's assuming that it was that particular wife, and not any other wife, who was the grandmother of Asoka. But it seems that that was the case; in which case, you have an interesting infusion of Greek blood, so to speak, into that Indian dynasty, and that very remarkable man having an eighth part of him actually Greek! And, of course, there is the *Milindapanha*(?), you know, the dialogue in the Pali, not Canon, but in Pali literature, between the Bactrian monarch and a Buddhist monk; again, another indication of influence. At that time I forget the details, but Seleucus Nicator seems to have ruled as part of his kingdom what is now Afghanistan, but had to surrender that to Candragupta when he was defeated. But, again, that area of what is now Afghanistan, had formerly been part of the Persian empire, but ceased to be part of the Persian empire after the defeat of Darius III by Alexander the Great. So it was an area through which there could be communication between India on the one hand and Persia on the other. Anyway, does that give you some idea of the sort of thing that happened? It is all very vague and general; you will have to read it up in historical works if you are interested.

: Can you recommend sources?

S: I am afraid I am rather out of touch at the moment; I have not read these sort of things for ages. But in the Order Library, there are several works you could consult. And there are several I have got at least two, I think translations of Asoka's complete edicts. There is an article about him in The [17] Buddhist Encyclopedia, and I think I have got a separate work on him, too. But I think it is very worth while to look at those edicts and to realize that it is the direct voice, as it were, of someone who lived how many years ago? 2,200 years ago. And that is very rare indeed, because there is no question of editing, or something being changed in transmission; there those letters are, carved into the rock, and a few of them are in Korosli script; the rest are in Brahmini script, and that script was very quickly forgotten. You must not think that, all those hundreds of years, the people of India were able to read those edicts. They were lost and forgotten. Quite soon after Asoka's period that script passed out of use and no one could read it. In the last century, there was nobody in India, and had not been for hundreds of years, who could read those edicts. The Brahmini script was deciphered by someone called Prinsep, who was a Western scholar, and then the whole story of Asoka became known. Because of Asoka's support for Buddhism the brahmins blotted him out of their records altogether. There is virtually no record of Asoka whatever in Sanskrit literature, apart from some Sanskrit Buddhist texts, which did not, in fact, survive in India but survived in Nepal and were translated into Chinese. They just blotted him out. His name was not known.

: Those rock edicts were written down before the Pali Canon?

S: Yes, indeed, they were; yes. That is a quite interesting point; because the Pali Canon was not written down in India, it was written down in Sri Lanka in the first century AD I think it was AD, but certainly later than Asoka's rock edicts. And one of those rock edicts recommends to the bhikshus a list of seven passages I am not sure what the word is; it would not quite be 'texts' which they should learn and study, and some of these have been identified with passages in the Pali Canon. So that gives us a clue to the fact that, in the time of Asoka, there were at least some parts of the Pali Canon which existed more or less in the form that we have them today. For instance, one I remember is the Monya(?) Sutta or Monya Gatha, which seems to be the Muni(?) Sutta of the Sutta Nipata, which we know as one of the very early parts of the Canon anyway. So it is a very useful sort of check, in the circumstances, when we have no reliable records at all.

Purna: Do you think there were any Persian influences on such figures as Vairocana and the Jinas or Sukhavati?

S: Well, that brings us to a much later period. It is often said that there was a general Iranian influence, not specifically perhaps a Zoroastrian influence but a sort of general Iranian influence, perhaps a Manichean influence, in the formation of the figure Amitabha, and all those Buddhas and Bodhisattvas especially associated with light; because, in many ways, Zoroastrianism was the religion of light. It represented the forces of light being opposed to the forces of darkness, and light imagery was very prominent in Zoroastrianism and in the traditions derived from it, or derived from it to some extent. But that, of course, happened at a very much later period if, in fact, it did happen; at least several hundred years later.

Purna: That would include the description of Sukhavati to some degree, wouldn't it?

S: Possibly. This leads to another line of thought, which I have not yet followed up, but it

seems to me that some of the descriptions of royal abodes contained even in the Pali Canon seem to contain reminiscences of Persian, rather than Indian, structures. It could be that there was some distant knowledge of Persia and its culture, and that that finds its reflection even in the Pali Canon itself. I have [18] got one or two little clues which I have not yet followed up, so I won't talk about them, but I do suspect It does seem well, we know even from Greek sources that the Achimemid empire was of tremendous influence and tremendous repute, especially in the early days of Darius I, and everybody in the civilized world who had heard of it, and certainly people in India had heard of it, especially perhaps those connected with the king and court, with the Mauryan empire. Or even earlier, they had heard of this great monarch Darius, and of his exploits and the tremendous buildings he had put up. I think there is some reminiscence of all that in even the Pali Canon. Where the palaces of kings are described, you don't seem to have anything like that in the case of India. You seem to get actual copies, so to speak, buildings erected in that sort of style, only from the time of Candragupta or perhaps even Asoka. But this is all an unexplored area, and I have only just picked up little bits and pieces of evidence here and there, just in passing. It needs a proper systematic study; I don't think any scholar has done this, to the best of my knowledge. You would have to consult a number of historical works and to mesh them together. Anyway, that's perhaps enough of history for the moment.

Dharmapala: Slightly [on that subject,] I was very surprised when I got copies of Milarepa's Songs to see on the cover a picture of Milarepa with what seemed to be Persian figures on it.

S: Yes. We must not forget that Tibetan Buddhism was fed by many streams from Central Asia, even, and that in Central Asia there were a number of kingdoms which were Buddhist. There was a Central Asian Buddhist art, and in the frescoes of that art, decorating temples, monasteries, palaces, we get figures in Persian dress side by side with more Indian-looking Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. Sometimes even the Bodhisattvas and Buddhas have an Iranian kind of look. But that is of that later period, and of course Milarepa is late, he is what, eleventh century, isn't he? So, yes, by that time some influence from Central Asia, and various traditions originating in that general area, had made their way into Tibetan Buddhism. Even in the frescoes of Ajanta we see some sort of outlandish figures who are clearly not Indian and may be Persian. So you want to stop at nine? What would you prefer to do? There are quite a few questions left. It is probably better not to hurry through them, and have another evening.

: If you would be happy to have another evening.

S: I think I would prefer to have another evening, because we have covered quite a bit of ground, and it would be a pity just to rush through the remaining questions.

: That would be fine.

S: OK, then.

Voices: Thank you very much.

[19]

Guhyaloka 1988

Session II, 2.6.88

Tape 2, Side 1

Sangharakshita: I don't very often get a new dharmic question, but actually there is a new question! So we will start off with that. It is a practical question, actually; it is from Priyananda, and he says:

Q: The traditional order of the brahma viharas is metta, karuna, mudita and upeksa. In actual practice e.g. on the brahma viharas retreat at Vajraloka in 1987 it seems more appropriate to do the practices in the order metta, mudita, karuna and upeksa bhavana. Can you comment?

Well, to begin with, I naturally wondered why Priyananda, and perhaps others, thought it would be more appropriate to do them in that new order, reversing the mudita and karuna. I think I can understand the reasoning behind it, but perhaps I should ask Priyananda just to confirm that.

Priyananda: It happened in the practice in the course of the retreat that it was found more appropriate to go from the practice of metta to the practice of mudita and then from there, on the basis of the momentum of that mudita, to the practice of karuna bhavana.

S: But how is it that one achieves greater momentum in that way?

Priyananda: I think it may have been because the people who were on the retreat were largely newcomers; there were only two Order Members from outside the community and only two mitras, I think. So it may have been that they didn't have enough experience of dhyana and meditation.

S: I still don't follow the reasoning.

Priyananda: It seemed to be that there was an easier transition from metta to mudita than from metta to karuna. It seemed as if there was more difficulty the most difficulty, in fact in the practice of the karuna bhavana.

S: So in what did the difficulty consist?

Priyananda: I think in falling into sadness or in the reflection becoming sadness.

S: So, in other words, you are saying, in effect, that sadness or even pity, in the sense of contempt is a nearer enemy, or a near enemy to which one can more easily fall victim, than the near enemy of mudita, which is exhilaration?

Priyananda: Yes. Yes, that would be fully accurate.

S: Actually, what you are saying is that you are more likely to be able to practise mudita successfully inasmuch as its near enemy is a less dangerous, or less insidious, near enemy, than that of karuna?

Priyananda: Yes.

S: This might well be so in some cases, but do you think it is likely to be so in all?

[20]

Priyananda: I think in a more experienced context, but perhaps if the retreat had only been Order Members then that [might] not have been the case, there might not have been the difficulty.

S: It is an interesting point. It depends, I suppose, to a great extent, on the individual practitioner on temperament, perhaps as much as on degree of spiritual development or extent of meditation practice. Because there are some people who are deeply moved, say, by the sufferings of others, and who could make perhaps the transition from the metta bhavana to the karuna bhavana more easily than the transition from the metta bhavana to the mudita bhavana. Some people may experience great difficulty in rejoicing in the happiness of others, and would therefore perhaps find it more easy to reflect on their sorrows and sufferings and develop karuna. Do you see what I mean? But the point is interesting, because I think it does show that the two are reversible. I don't think that one should think of metta, mudita, karuna, upeksa or metta, karuna, mudita, upeksa as four successive stages of the Path, except perhaps to the extent that the latter will be more deeply experienced inasmuch as it will have the momentum of the earlier stages behind whatever those stages are in the case of the first three. I think one has to see the first three bhavanas as on the same level, and only the upeksa bhavana as being on a higher level. So, looking at it in that way, I don't think in principle there would be any objection to practising in the order metta, mudita, karuna, upeksa if that did seem a more appropriate order for a certain type of person. The question has never been raised in Buddhist tradition, to my knowledge, before, but I see no reason why those two should not be reversed. I think you have to start with the metta, because that in a way is the basic sentiment: metta becomes karuna when confronted by suffering and mudita when confronted by happiness. But I don't think it matters, really, as far as I can see, in principle, whether you go from metta to mudita and then to karuna, or from metta to karuna and then to mudita. But, of course, upekkha is definitely on a higher level, and you develop that, as you probably know, by reflecting on the fact that your metta, and therefore your karuna and mudita towards all beings is equal. You develop that feeling of equality, that all beings are the same to you; therefore you have that attitude of equanimity towards them all. There is a strong positive emotion towards them without as it were any favouritism. So, yes, I am quite open to there being a little experimentation in this respect not for the sake of experimentation, of course, but one could certainly just see what was really suited, perhaps, to different people.

Vessantara: Last year, Bhante, on this course we did the first three brahma viharas. I can't quite remember I think we did them in the order metta, mudita, karuna, but I certainly found that the mudita bhavana seemed to produce a much stronger positive effect on people than the karuna bhavana. They seemed to respond to it much more.

S: That is interesting. I must say this has crept in without my prior knowledge, and really I should have been consulted by whoever conducted the brahma viharas retreat though on reflection I don't see anything wrong in it, but I think people should, as a matter of principle, just refer to me or consult with me in case there is some objection which they haven't understood or haven't foreseen. But, in this respect, I don't think there is inappropriateness in reversing that order, for certain people. But just reversing those two. I had a few further reflections on metta generally. Recently I was rereading a [21] book which some of you already know that is, Professor John Macmurray's Reason and Emotion and he is not to be confused with John Middleton Murry, by the way! John Macmurray. The first three talks in the book are on 'Reason in Emotion', and I found these three chapters, or the main points he was making, very useful and helpful, though I was not so satisfied with the remainder of the

book, the thinking of which seemed quite weak; he seemed to have a quite superficial and over-optimistic view of human nature. But he was writing, of course, in the thirties, before the last world war, before all the Nazi atrocities and the Jewish holocaust, so perhaps that was understandable; we have a different perspective now. We don't have quite such a rosy view of human nature. But anyway, that aside, his first three talks or chapters are really very good. The main point he is making is this: he distinguishes first of all between intellect and reason; he seems to regard reason as definitely the higher, or integrated and integrating, faculty; and he points out that there is not only reason in intellectual understanding, but there is also reason, or can be reason, in emotion. I think this is the really very important and valid point that he makes. And he defines reason in a way that comes very close to Buddhist prajna, because he says [that] reason is that which is adequate to objective reality. When reason enters into intellect, you have an intellectual understanding which is adequate or appropriate to the objective situation, to reality; and when reason enters into emotion, you have an emotional response which is adequate or appropriate to the objective situation, the real situation. He gives several examples: one is quite brief and absurd and irrelevant. He says supposing a woman sees a small mouse and she screams and jumps on to a chair: that is an irrational reaction; the emotion is not appropriate to the object, because the mouse is not really harmful at all, whereas the woman is acting or responding as though well, with terror, as though the mouse was going to eat her, or something like that. So he says here the emotional reaction is inappropriate, it is inadequate to the situation. So you could look at metta in that way. Metta is the emotional response which is appropriate or adequate to other human beings, when we think of them, karuna is the emotional response which is adequate or appropriate when they are in suffering, and mudita is the appropriate or adequate response when they are happy. Therefore, metta, karuna or mudita are rational emotions; reason enters into them. This is why I have sometimes suggested that perhaps you can approach reality, even develop Insight, via the brahma viharas: because the more adequate to reality you make them, the more a matter of Insight do they become. You can eventually transcend the subject-object framework. But, even within that framework, you can lay a very good foundation for the development of Insight along those sort of lines. Do you see what I mean? So one can look at metta very much in this sort of way, in these sort of terms; look at all the brahma viharas as representing emotional responses which are adequate to reality, which are appropriate to reality, and to that extent, therefore, partake of the nature of insight perhaps originally with a small i, but eventually, perhaps, with a capital I. Because, after all, in the Mahayana we do have the mahakaruna and the mahamaitri; those terms are not dropped. They represent a Buddha's or Bodhisattva's as it were emotional response to the reality of sentient beings. So I thought, applying John Macmurray's thinking to the four brahma viharas, one could see them in a quite interesting and perhaps helpful light. Any comments on this?

Priyananda: Could the upeksa bhavana particularly be seen as an Insight practice, then as vipassana in the true sense of vipassana?

[22]

S: Yes, indeed! I think one could carry it to that extent, because one of the five jnanas of the Yogacara and the Vajrayana is samatajnana, is it not? Samata (spells it), the wisdom of equality, seeing all things as metaphysically same though to be balanced by the pratyaveksana(?)jnana, which sees them all in their unique individuality at the same time.

Dharmapala: What would be the relationship between what you have just been saying and the first two factors of absorption, ... thought and sustained thought?

S: In the brahma viharas, of course, those do have to persist in at least a subtle form, because you are reflecting on sentient beings, and you are, for instance, thinking about their sufferings or thinking about their joys; but that sort of mental activity has to persist if vipassana is to be developed, doesn't it? So this again does suggest that, at least potentially, the brahma viharas do partake of something of the nature of Insight. Because you as it were reason with yourself: these sentient beings are suffering, why should I not feel sympathy, why should I not feel compassion and why should I not try to help them? In that way, you try to generate the actual feeling of compassion, or you just call up, quite consciously, images to mind of people suffering people you have heard about or read about or even seen suffering. This all implies a mental activity. So inasmuch as mental activity persists only into the first dhyana, your dhyana level is that, or corresponds to that. So this is an additional reason for perhaps thinking of the brahma viharas to some extent in terms of Insight though it must also be said that a point often does come when you are left, as it were, with the feeling of metta, or whatever it may be, without any accompanying intellection; the intellection has done its work, as it were, and you are now in that state [where] you simply experience metta; you don't have to think about developing it, or even about its objects. So perhaps in that way you have come into a deeper dhyanic state, but possibly and here I am speculating a bit without loss of the Insight, though conceptual activity is not present. Of, of course, your experience of metta, say, flags, you revive it with fresh mental activity pertaining to sentient beings; just as when you are deeply concentrated, say, on impermanence, and mental activity has ceased for a while, but you start flagging, you revive yourself with renewed mental activity on the topic of impermanence. And that sort of process, that alternation of one with the other, may continue for a long time; the aim being eventually to merge the two as a clear Insight with at the same time a very powerful positive emotion. I think metta bhavana, and the other bhavanas, maybe calls for more attention than it is often given in the Buddhist world. It is always spoken highly of, sometimes in a slightly patronizing way 'Oh, it's a good sort of practice for beginners and for the laity, you know!' but I think we need to take it very much more seriously than it often is taken. There was an old Mitrata on the subject, wasn't there? Hasn't that been reprinted? Something to do with positive emotion? Wasn't Vessantara one of the contributors, or was it Manjuvajra?

: It was Manjuvajra.

S: Maybe we should study that more, maybe think about that, somewhere on the preordination course. I think it is useful to be able to explain to people why metta, and the other bhavanas, are so important not just 'Oh, positive emotion is a good thing', but bring out this connection, as Macmurray seems to have done, with objectivity. [23] There is another very good point he makes, while I am on the subject: he says people often simply say: 'Well, that is my feeling, I just feel it.' I am afraid I have heard this in the FWBO quite a number of times. But he says that is not the point. He says: 'Yes, acknowledge your feeling; you feel whatever you feel; no one can dispute that. But the question that must be asked is: does your feeling correspond to reality?' It is not enough that you just feel something. The feeling is not self-validating except just as a feeling. It may be totally inappropriate to the situation. People often use the word 'projecting'; I think it would avoid misunderstanding if, instead of saying 'Oh, you are projecting,' we say, 'Look, I don't think your feeling corresponds to the situation!' You sometimes see people getting so worked up about some quite small matter like the mouse (not that many Order Members are frightened of mice, only one or two are!) and you can just say: 'Well, look, your feeling doesn't correspond to the situation. You are not being objective.' And it is no use saying, 'Well, that is my feeling,' as though feelings had got

nothing to do with objectivity; as though if you can invoke your feelings you are excused from considering objective reality. That is not the case. It is one of the biggest sources of misunderstanding in the FWBO. People constantly invoke their feelings as though their feelings are a fully adequate judgement of the situation. I have even heard people say, in response to someone's remark: 'Well, now you have hurt my feelings' as though that concludes the matter. You must be wrong because you have hurt their feelings; not 'Are my feelings really adequate to the situation? Do they correspond to the reality of things?' Any further point, while we are on metta? We don't often talk about metta, do we? Or do we? Mention it sometimes?

Voices: (embarrassed assent.)

S: It's better to practise it, obviously, but, especially for purposes of communication and explanation, a better understanding of it in full context is very useful, I think.

Dharmapala: One thing that I am finding with my own metta at the moment is quite a strong relationship between my emotions and my thoughts, in directing my thoughts towards the emotion. Also the emotion towards my thinking as well. It seems to be a more subtle meeting of the two, which I think is important in terms of mindfulness ...

S: There is a constant interplay, obviously. Usually, deep down, we are motivated by our feelings, perhaps even before they have reached the stage of emotions; very often intellect comes in later. But if intellect does come in earlier, it should not be to stultify the positive emotion. This happens where people have got quite good, sound, positive emotions, but the intellect sometimes comes in and introduces all sorts of doubts and reservations and all that sort of thing. So the intellect should really help the emotions, and the emotions help the intellect. I think that will happen to the extent that both are infused with reason, in John Macmurray's sense.

Dharmapala: So is reason a sort of linking factor?

S: In a way it is, yes. All right, have emotions; there is nothing wrong with emotions. Have thoughts; nothing wrong with thoughts. But just be sure that both are adequate to reality or at least, if you don't want to use the term reality, to the objective situation in which you find yourself. There is no limit to [24] positive emotion; be as emotional as you like; but let it correspond to the actual situation. Think as much as you like; nothing wrong with mental activity; it is a great thing! But let it be adequate to the situation, let it conform to the situation. There is no point in trying to get rid of emotion, just make it adequate to the situation. You will then eliminate negative emotion automatically. So don't think so much: 'Oh, I must get rid of my negative emotions.' Say: 'What is the objective situation? Let me see that, and then I can feel it, let my emotions be in accordance with that.' Very often we know within ourselves, even when we are indulging in a certain very subjective, even negative emotion, we know in our heart of hearts very often [that] it is not really the way things are; we know it, if we are even just a little aware. You get angry with someone for a very trivial reason; very often you know it is a very trivial reason, and you should not be getting angry; the situation does not justify that emotion. All right, then, let's pass on. It is another practical question; it is a nearly new question not quite new; not brand new, anyway.

Q: If groups like Greenpeace stage demonstrations which, though non-violent, can reasonably

be expected to lead to people using violence against them, do they have a moral responsibility for the unskilful actions which their protests provoke?

S: I would say they do; I would definitely say that. Some of them would probably disagree, and say even that they were forced to be violent, or that they were provoked; but you can't really say that you were forced to be violent. You could say well, human nature can only stand so much. In a way that is true, but if there is a reasonable expectation that violence will arise from your demonstration especially if it is supposed to be for the sake of peace and non-violence and all that sort of thing I think you should not go ahead with it. I think sometimes people organizing these demonstrations are not quite honest. Sometimes they well, they almost look to be provoked; and they often try to blame the police or government unnecessarily; not that the police and government are never to blame very often they are but you should know, in that case, that police and governments are like that, and not allow yourself to be put into that sort of situation where you will very likely react with violence; not if you profess to be a believer in non-violence, as I expect the Greenpeace people would.

Vessantara: Bhante, I am not sure if I am misunderstanding you. You seem to be looking at a situation where somebody goes along non-violently and is then provoked into violence; which is not quite what the question is. The question is: if a non-violent group put themselves into a situation where they know that they are going to provoke the police or

S: To be violent to them?

Vessantara: Violent against them. Do they then carry moral responsibility in having put themselves in the way of ...

S: What does one mean by responsibility, then, in this case? To what extent are you responsible for other people's actions? Basically, you are not. The police, for instance, are responsible for their actions. I would say that, if you could go into a situation where violence will be reasonably expected to be used against you you were determined to go into that situation because you wanted to make a very important point I don't think you could then be held responsible for the violence of the police, because there would be no justification, really, for the police to behave violently if you were behaving non-violently. The police would have no [25] excuse. But you could not grumble afterwards, and criticize them for being violent, when that is what they were clearly expected to be; especially if one knows that, say, a particular police force normally does behave in that way. Well, you have only yourself to blame, as it were, if you are subjected to violence by them. But if you feel it is worth it, and you want to make a moral point, and you are confident that you can behave with non-violence, I would not personally hold you responsible for the violence that was exercised against you. The police might say: 'We had to exercise violence; we were afraid it might spread.' Well, perhaps they were; perhaps it is just their way of looking at things, or their way of putting it. But I think you have the right, as it were, to test the situation, and I don't think the violence of the police can be regarded as your responsibility. If, of course, there is a likelihood that the police would exercise violence against other people, then I think you should not go you have no right to act in such a way that other people are subjected to violence. But if you voluntarily are prepared to suffer yourself, for the sake of your cause, and believe you can do that, I think you don't have a moral responsibility for the violent reaction; unless, perhaps I can't generalize completely you deliberately behave in an unnecessarily provocative way which you know to be provocative and which you can be pretty sure will

excite violence in the other party against you, whether police or not; I think then you have some responsibility. Were you thinking of any concrete instance, or did you just think this one up while you were ?

Vessantara: We had been discussing this a bit in our study group. For instance, I think there was a case where the French were doing nuclear testing

S: Yes, right, I followed that with great interest, that whole series of events.

Vessantara: And the Greenpeace people deliberately entered the testing area and this was ... violently ...

S: I think that was fully justified, and I would say that the French have complete responsibility for that violence. I felt that the Greenpeace people were taking a quite courageous stand, and risking their own lives to make a point which affected millions of other people, probably. I felt at the time they should be fully supported. I could not help feeling, politics apart I felt quite strongly about this that the behaviour of the French Government was completely unforgivable; it was very, very bad. I do not often feel strongly about semi-political issues, but I felt very strongly about this, and that that whole series of events was absolutely deplorable the way they afterwards subjected New Zealand to nothing less than economic blackmail, and got away with it. I think it was completely shameful. So I think, in that particular case, it was a very clear-cut case, and I don't think that the Greenpeace people could be regarded as morally responsible for the violence that was exercised against them rather like Dr Johnson's example, saying he saw a fishmonger skinning an eel alive and cursing it for not keeping still! Yes, I think the French government's behaviour was quite shameful; one of the clearest instances of definitely shameful and immoral behaviour by a government in recent times. But often cases are not as clear-cut as that; this happened to be, I think, particularly clear-cut, because the whole nuclear issue was there. There were just two defenceless people against the military, risking their own lives for the sake of a moral point which was of concern really to the whole of humanity.

[26]

Vessantara: So you think in principle there would be no unskilful karma attached to just being the occasion for someone else to generate negative states, whereas if you had not put yourself in that position they would not have done so?

S: I think that the people who exercise violence against the non-violent in that sort of way are probably dwelling in a pretty unskilful state of mind virtually all the time to be ready, at the drop of a hat, to behave in that sort of way. A very good example of this sort of thing, of course, occurs in the film Gandhi, where the satyagrahis just march up two by two, or whatever it was, and are just beaten by the police and offer no resistance, and two or three more come up. I don't think one can hold them morally responsible for the violence that was exercised against them. They were the occasion, but they were not morally the agents, or morally responsible. I think we should beware of arguments which begin: 'I had to do so-and-so because you did so-and-so.' I don't think that holds good. Unless you deliberately provoke a person past his known threshold then I think you are responsible; but that assumes that the other person is a virtual automaton. Anyway, let's go on.

Q: In the early days of the movement, Bhante was more cautious about OMs being involved

in other groups, whereas now particular Order Members seem to be encouraged to get involved in ecological groups. What are the reasons for this change in thinking?

S: Well, there has been a big change in the Order Members! Hasn't there? Some of them used to be quite swept off their feet by the new lama or Zen master who used to come along. It doesn't happen now. They are not even swept off their feet by the Dalai Lama, believe it or not! And also, in the early days, I was much more concerned with the consolidation of the Order and the Movement and becoming strong ourselves, before entering into relations with other Buddhist groups. But now that we are stronger and we are actually 21 years old and quite mature, I am quite happy that certain Order Members should enter into communication with other Buddhist groups and other groups, even non-Buddhist ones, with which we happen to have something in common. At present we are collaborating in all sorts of ways. We are a member of the European Buddhist Union, though there is a question mark hanging over that, for various reasons which you will read about in Golden Drum in due course. We also cooperate in the Buddhist chaplains' prison visiting scheme; several of our Order Members take part in that and visit prisons. This is organized mainly by Bhikkhu Khemadhammo, who is quite friendly towards us. And then there is the hospice movement we are involved in that, at least to the point of discussion and so on. I am quite happy, if people have the time and energy and any particular qualifications, that we should get involved in other things in that way; exercise our own particular influence or make our own particular contribution. I certainly don't want people to get unsettled by going here and going there and so on. I think it is just the older, more experienced Order Members who should get involved in this sort of thing. But, in principle, we are strong enough, and to the extent that our resources permit I am quite in favour of it. Other Buddhist groups, or other Buddhist individuals, scattered over the world, are beginning to take the FWBO quite seriously now, again as you will see from an article by Manjuvajra in the new Golden Drum. In the early days of the Friends quite apart from the fact that originally, of course, nobody wanted anything to do with us anyway I must take the opportunity [27] to say that I really rather object when people outside the FWBO say, 'Oh, you know, the FWBO is so unfriendly, it doesn't want anything to do with other groups' when we were, especially myself, ostracized by those very same groups years and years ago, who didn't want anything at all to do with us. It makes me really quite indignant when they adopt this pseudo-cooperative attitude, so I don't let them get away with it! We are ready to be quite friendly with other people if they will be friendly with us. Well, we radiate metta towards them, anyway. But I think we need to be very strong within ourselves and go out to others, whether in the form of the world or other Buddhist groups or other Buddhist movements or movements of any kind, from a basis of strength and not in a distracted sort of way.

Q: On page 53, you say that even the word maitri is not altogether satisfactory to express the positive counterpart of non-killing or non-violence.

S: I am not sure what I had in mind at the time, but I rather think that I felt that the word maitri did not have a strong enough connotation of non-violent action. It is not that you just sit on your meditation mat radiating metta towards the world but keeping well out of the way of the world. It is that metta enters into your action and expresses itself in terms of non-violent action for the benefit of others. I think this connotation is not present in the term maitri; perhaps it is to some extent in the Mahayana mahamaitri, as practised by the Bodhisattva. I think this is what I had at the back of my mind. If you want the literal counterpart of non-killing or non-violence, it must be preserving life, protecting life,

furthering life, caring for people; and maitri does not fully convey that, I think. 2 further question about metta; metta is doing rather well this evening:

Q: In the Ten Pillars, you say that metta is essentially the vigorous expression of an imaginative identification with others.

S: This gets a little closer, doesn't it?

Q: What implications does this have for the way in which we teach metta bhavana to beginners and for how we should try to practise it at more advanced levels?

S: In a way, I have gone into this already, haven't I, in connection with John Macmurray's remarks? I think perhaps we should talk to beginners, in connection with the metta bhavana, more in those sort of terms about it representing the normal human response to others, the response which corresponds to reality, the response which is to be expected, as it were, from one human being to another. There should be that fellow feeling: what Confucius called, I think, human heartedness jen, which is a very important term in Confucianism: the feeling, the appreciation, of your common humanity and the reciprocal mutual behaviour that is based upon that feeling. Perhaps we need to go into this rather more; not when you are actually teaching meditation, perhaps, because you need to get on to the practice, but there ought to be some opportunity of going into as it were the philosophy of the metta bhavana, the philosophy of metta. Perhaps we have rather neglected that which means, of course, I suppose, I have neglected it! At least, it is one of the things I have not got around to thinking about until just now.

Colin: Could I ask you to clarify what you mean by the 'normal' human response? because it is obviously not.

S: When I say 'normal', I don't mean the average or the ordinary. The norm is, in a way, the ideal, that to which you should conform. So a normal human response [28] would be the response which could be expected from a positive, healthy, properly developed, balanced human being. Such a human being is the norm for humanity, or the norm of humanity, not normal in the sense of ordinary or what usually happens. Most people are not normal! It is not so much normal as 'normal', norm-oriented or norm-expressing. You may remember that Mrs Rhys Davids and others sometimes translate dhamma as 'norm', 'the Norm'. That brings out this aspect of it the Dharma as something to be accorded with. So a normal human being is the human being that accords with the norm of or for all humanity. As for how we should try to practise it, i.e. metta bhavana, at a more advanced level, I think I have indicated that too; how it can merge into a sort of Insight.

Vessantara: I suppose partly what the question is aiming at, Bhante, is that people often do metta as it were staying within themselves towards someone else, another human being. Your definition of metta seems to suggest that you should much more put yourself in the position of the other person in order to develop metta.

S: Yes. I think you actually do that it comes out, I think, quite obviously in the case of the karuna bhavana: you are feeling with that person, you are as it were putting yourself in that other person's shoes; you are empathizing. It is not sympathy but empathy. So perhaps there should be more of that imaginative identification. Otherwise, even metta can seem a little

aloof. You are radiating it from a safe distance; you are not actually getting involved with other people in a positive way. There is no use teaching metta bhavana pretty effectively, and practising it quite effectively, and then when you go out of the meditation room you behave in a cold and inhuman way or angry way, even. So you have to try and bring that warmth over into your actual relations with people. I wrote a little editorial about that years ago oh, decades ago in the Maha Bodhi Journal, if you want to reprint it. I will repeat the little story with which I illustrated this. I am just hoping that nobody has heard it. I get more and more afraid telling my little stories (Laughter) because you have heard them many times before I think I have said that before too, haven't I? (Laughter.) But apparently there was a very worthy gentleman in Ceylon he was actually Burmese who was practising the metta bhavana, and practising it every morning; and usually, just as he finished his metta bhavana, the servant would come in with a cup of tea because in Ceylon people still have servants. So he was meditating away, radiating metta, and the servant came in with a cup of tea and happened to trip over the carpet; and the cup dropped and smashed, and the person was roused from his metta bhavana and said 'You fool! you idiot!' and he seized a stick, gave a few blows 'What do you mean, interrupting me when I am practising metta bhavana?' (Laughter.) Oh, you haven't heard it before! I am sure Dharmapala has heard it before! It was a long time ago, but no doubt it will bear hearing after 20 years! But yes, it encapsulates some of the things we do.

[29]

Tape 2, Side 2

This brings me to another general point, which is quite important. Though I have made it quite a few times in the last couple of years, I will make it again. It connects with what I have said about carrying over the feeling or experience of metta into one's ordinary everyday life, and especially one's relations with other people. It has struck me quite a few times in recent years, that there isn't still really enough warmth between people in the Movement, or in the Order. I sometimes feel that people are not nearly kind enough to one another. When I say kind, I mean in concrete action the things that they do for one another or their attitudes towards one another. And sometimes people still do behave quite unkindly or speak quite unkindly, even to the point of quarrelling with others; and it really means that basically metta is lacking. So it is one thing that really needs to be cultivated, and not just within one's own mind in the meditation room, but really brought out into one's dealings with people. I think very often we don't have enough faith in the Path of metta, for some reason or other. It is as though we very easily just forget it, just leave it in the shrine room, and walk away without it though we may have quite genuinely experienced it while we were meditating, but it doesn't seem to have enough strength to carry over into our dealings with people. So for that reason, as I say, sometimes people do behave in a quite unskilful and unkind way towards one another. Anyway, maybe that is enough by way of reminder. Let's go on to something rather different; also a question from Vessantara.

Q: In his book *Rebirth and the Western Buddhist*, Martin Wilson cites evidence suggesting that, in some cases at least, human consciousness only becomes associated with a physical body at, or even after, birth, rather than at the moment of conception, which is the traditional Buddhist belief. Could you please comment on this? If we accepted that consciousness may not associate itself with physical form until birth, would it necessitate any changes in the Buddhist view in the relation between rupa and vijnana, and of the unskilful nature of abortion?

S: It would to some extent, but there are various points to consider. Let's grant, for the sake of argument, that in certain cases the human consciousness the consciousness that is, so to speak, reincarnated enters into a human body after birth. So what exists before that, or up to that time? Clearly, whatever it is, it is alive, isn't it? Well, according to this particular book, that is what one gathers. So what is its status? If it is not a human being, because the human consciousness hasn't entered, what is it? Is it an animal? Or is it still human in some sense? At the very least, it is sentient, so you should not kill it. It is sufficiently developed to be a receptacle of human consciousness, even if it is after birth. So it would still no doubt be unskilful to abort it, even if you were sure that a specifically human consciousness had not yet entered into it, because you would still be destroying a sentient being, of perhaps an undetermined nature; but certainly not an animal, because as far as one knows, human consciousnesses don't enter into animals, or only under very exceptional circumstances. Also, as regards the question of abortion again, how could you be sure, at any given time prior to the act of abortion, that the consciousness was not going to enter in? How would you know that it was going to enter in, if it was going to enter in, two days after birth or three days? It might enter in at the very instant that the operation of abortion was being performed. So I don't think it would really make any practical difference, from the point of view of abortion, even if it was shown that in certain cases the specifically human [30] consciousness did not enter into what was admittedly a human body until after physical birth. Also there is the point that here, no doubt, there is someone to correct me if correction be needed not all babies are born, as far as I know, at exactly the same number of days after conception. Isn't it so? So there is a margin. It could be here I am speculating a bit, I am considering possibilities that in those cases where the human consciousness enters into the human body, the body of the baby, after birth, the birth may have been slightly premature. One has got to consider that, and Martin Wilson does not consider that. So there are all sorts of things to be considered before we can come to any definite conclusion, but it doesn't seem to make abortion any easier.

: Does it have any implications for Buddhist philosophy and consciousness determining being?

S: I am not sure. I have not given the matter sufficient thought. I would need to think it over and be sure of one's facts first, before one started trying to explain this fact(?). But it did seem to me, reading the book, on the face of it, fairly well attested that that did happen in some cases; which is interesting. One would then have to look at Buddhist tradition and see whether there was any provision made for such exceptions or not. Certainly it is a generally held belief that the rebirth the human consciousness, the vijñāna enters into connection with the body before human birth. But one would again have to look at the whole matter more closely. Vajrananda, Purna's group:

Q: In the Duties of Brotherhood seminar, you mention two circumstances in which it is acceptable to talk about a person not present: readiness for ordination and whether to employ them for a job. These appear to be quite narrow criteria ...

S: I can give broader ones, I think, if we would like to talk about other people are there other circumstances in which it would be acceptable? I didn't give too much thought to this, I must admit, but I did think of one instance, which probably would not concern you anyway: that is, if a young lady receives a proposal of marriage, she is fully justified in discussing the young man in question with her parents and other good friends! (Laughter.) Well, isn't she? ... I would advise any such young woman, even though she was a modern young woman: 'For

heaven's sake consult your parents or other people. You are almost sure to make a mistake.' I once asked a woman Order Member: 'What do you do if you have married, and you find out after all that it wasn't Mr Right who comes along?' So she sighed and said: 'Mr Right never comes along!' But he might do, if you consult your parents. Can anybody else think of any other occasion when you might be justified in discussing other people without them being present?

Dharmavira: I would have thought that within the Sangha, if you were discussing something to clarify your own ideas about them, for their welfare, that would be OK.

S: Right, yes. To discuss whether they were really suited to being chairmen?

Dharmavira: Yes.

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S: I think there is no harm if we keep the criteria fairly narrow. Surata's group: a question from Bodhiraja:

Q: Could you substitute aversion for grasping on the nidana chain and end up with a hate-type Wheel?

S: Yes, you certainly could, because where there is grasping there is sure to be aversion, because you won't always succeed in grasping, or someone may prevent you from grasping what you want to grasp. So where there is lobha there is always dvesa, at least the possibility of dvesa. So when one says that in dependence upon feeling there arises craving and in dependence upon craving there arises grasping, dvesa is to be understood as included in the process all the way along. With some people it may be more prominent than others, but it is always there. The nidana chain doesn't always spell out all the mental factors involved in the process, but just the more prominent ones. In a way, the craving and the grasping precede aversion, because if there was no craving there would in fact be no aversion.

Bodhiraja: So the craving is primary to the aversion?

S: Yes, it is more primary. But certainly one can substitute aversion for grasping in the case of those persons in whom it is well developed. As I say, it is implied anyway, or to be understood as being that.

Bodhiraja: Have you ever come across such a Wheel of Life?

S: No. But that is not to say that one can't bring out that particular factor. There is another question of Bodhiraja's, connected with a later question of Vessantara's that I am not actually going to deal with. This question is very brief:

Q: What is your current thinking on the formless dhyanas? Are they Transcendental?

S: I haven't carried my thinking aloud on this subject any further, so I am not really able to say much about it. All right:

Alan: Tibetan translators ... and pioneers of the Dharma were explicitly forbidden to coin new

terms. If this were unavoidable, they had to report to a special tribunal called the Tribunal of the Doctrine of the Blessed One that was apparently formed in 1817 AD. Do you know whether this still applies to modern work of Tibetan translators, and is it a good way to prevent degeneration of established traditions?

S: I don't think the tribunal still sits. It was established by the king of those days, that is to say by the government, and modern Tibetan translators I assume that means, now, translators from Tibetan into English and other languages and not translators from Sanskrit into Tibetan don't seem to observe any uniformity of terminology. Perhaps that is not a bad thing in some ways, because certain translations do bring out the meaning more fully and clearly than others, and very often just one English word will not represent one Tibetan or Sanskrit word. But it is a bit confusing for beginners. For instance, *prajna* I am looking outside the specifically Tibetan field now is usually rendered by English translators as wisdom; but Guenther renders it as 'analytical appreciative understanding'. So if a newcomer just happens to read Guenther, he will not always realize that 'analytical appreciative understanding' is his old friend 'wisdom', unless of course [32] in both cases the translator puts *prajna* in brackets after his translation. I think one should always do that sort of thing if the meaning, the source, of the English term is not clear, so that that connection across different translations by different people can be made. But, no, there is no tribunal now, and no uniformly accepted system. Some translations are really quite wrong. For instance, I see some modern translators from Tibetan into English, both Tibetans and American scholars, translate 'skilful means' as 'technique'. I think this gives a completely wrong understanding. Why do you think that is?

Vessantara: Well, it implies something worked out beforehand that you apply, rather than somebody's just spontaneous expression of

S: Yes, indeed. It has become almost a standard translation for the term *upaya kausalya*; I think it represents a dangerous misunderstanding. So we should be on the watch for things of that sort. Another famous one is Mrs Rhys Davids' 'musing' for *jhana* or *dhyana*. That was very misleading, but you can't blame her too much; she was an early pioneer and never actually practised meditation. A question from Dharmapala concerning the difference between chanting and singing:

Q: When is it appropriate to chant but not sing? Should singing be restricted to verses but not used for mantras?

S: There is some more, but I will deal with it bit by bit. Chanting is usually considered to be on just two or three notes; do you understand what I mean? The vocal range is not very extensive. Whereas, in singing, you can cover the entire gamut and there is usually a melody. That is the difference. When you chant *Iti'pi so bhagava araham sammāsambuddho*, that is chanting, it is not singing. Singing is when we sing 'God Save the Queen' or something like that, that's singing. So you understand the difference? When is it appropriate to chant but not to sing? I think this is quite difficult to determine. The Theravadins normally only chant; *bhikkhus* are not supposed to sing anyway or to indulge in music, so *bhikkhus* only chant. Sometimes, as a sort of concession, I am told, in Thailand *sramaneras* do actually sing at some stage in a *Puja*. I have never actually heard it or heard any recording of it, but this is what I have heard. Tibetans, of course, both chant and sing, and they have some very beautiful melodies, as do the Chinese, and I think it is a question really, so far as we are concerned, of alternating chanting and singing and getting a nice balance. Should singing be

restricted to verses but not used for mantras?' It is traditional in Tibet to sing some mantras, and we have taken on that. Our tune, say, for the Padmasambhava mantra, was introduced by Ananda. Some people think I introduced it, but no, it was introduced by Ananda, who heard it up at Samye Ling in the very early days, and he brought it back; and I thought it was really quite beautiful, I liked it very much, so it was introduced into the FWBO usually with Ananda leading at that stage; and then it caught on. So this is an example of singing rather than chanting. The Tara mantra, I think, is chanted really rather than sung; it is just, I think, on two or three notes. So I think so far as we are concerned there is no objection to alternating singing and chanting, and a mantra, where appropriate, can certainly be sung rather than chanted. Obviously we need to do quite a lot of experimentation to find out what is suitable and sounds well, and is inspiring. I can't do much in this way myself, not being technically very musical, not having any musical training.

[33]

Q: Although chanting Pali, doing the Tiratana Vandana, monks from Thailand and Sri Lanka chant it differently, with different rhythm and breathing patterns. Is this caused by the differences in each country's language, or some other factor?

S: So some extent, it is language, because some of these languages are monosyllabic. Tibetan is monosyllabic. That to some extent determines the pattern of the chant. Tibetans go: (chants) It sounds quite good when a lot of monks do it together. But their language is monosyllabic. Chinese is monosyllabic. Thai is monosyllabic. But Sinhalese, which is an Indo-Aryan language, is not; they chant, therefore, in a different way. In all these different countries, there are many, many different ways of chanting. Burmese and Thais and Cambodians and Sinhalese all Theravadins have got different ways of chanting, and the Sinhalese have got many different ways of chanting. Perhaps I should make it clear that the way we do it is not Bhante's own special way of chanting, personally invented by him, because he is not nearly musical enough to be able to do it; but it is one of the Sinhalese ways which I learned in India, which my Sinhalese bhikkhu friends used to chant, and I learned it by doing it with them, mainly in Sarnath, where the chanting actually was very good. Bhikkhu Sangharatana, if I may mention this, was a particularly fine chanter, with a very fine bass voice, almost like a Tibetan, and I followed that style or tradition. But I must say I am not particularly good at it. I am quite happy for people not to follow that, or to introduce some better style of chanting or singing or whatever. I don't mind. Those were my original sources, and there is no reason why they shouldn't be transcended. I am quite keen that we should in fact get a sort of library on tape of chantings by monks or Buddhists of different kinds in different parts of the Buddhist world, and learn them and adapt them where it seems suitable. There is a lot of rich material. I think we have got a group of Order Members, or we have had, doing some research into liturgy as it were, Puja and chanting; I would like to see more of that sort of thing done. But, again, it is one of the things I am not able to go into personally. One needs to get a few musicians together who know really what they are talking about and who can discuss the whole thing in technical terms, which I can't. We have made a few experiments, not very successfully. We used to have a woman Order Member she is still around, but she doesn't do this any more who used to chant or sing in Pujas to the accompaniment of the mutton bones! It wasn't very popular with everybody. She did it rather sweetly, singing like this with the mutton bones. I didn't quite like the associations of the mutton bones. Though I must say she wielded quite a nifty mutton bone! (Laughter.) Has anybody here ever listened to the mutton bones? Maybe that represented the Tantric element creeping in a little song of 'Listen to the mutton bones'! Anyway, passing over some rather

abstruse questions from Vessantara's group, which I will probably deal with in his discussion group, there are just perhaps a couple more. Again, this is Vessantara's group:

Q: Our group could not understand how secondary elements of rupa, such as colour, were derived from the four primary elements or mahabhutas.

S: According to Guenther's Psychology and Philosophy of the Abhidharma, the Abhidharma nowhere explains how they are derived. He seems to take it as self-evident. (Laughter.) We could have quite a discussion on this whole matter not so much derivation, but the bhutas and mahabhutas. That is one of his earlier, more useful and more readable works: one could just look that up. Here is something a bit practical from

Vessantara: [34] I find the association of the Ten Precepts with 10 precious substances very helpful. It would be useful to use this imaginative approach to the Precepts with Mitras and Friends. Can you suggest a suitable precious substance or other image to associate with surameraya majja pamadatthana?

S: That's interesting; again, I haven't thought of this. I think it would be a good idea to have a suitable precious substance for this Precept, this eleventh Pillar, one might say (also, you could even say, it is the central pillar. There is a Tibetan story to that effect, which I won't repeat now you must have heard it.) But which precious substance? I have a vague recollection I would have to look this up in a book I have at Padmaloka on precious stones that traditionally a certain stone is believed to protect from drunkenness? Does anyone remember?

: Amethyst.

S: Ah, but we have used amethyst already, haven't we? Does it work? (Laughter.) I mean, does the purple shine through just as well? I must say I have never tried it. But, yes, I will think about it, since amethyst is ruled out.

Vessantara: Is amethyst the same as one of the ones you have already used?

S: I think did I not use the amethyst? (Voices.) Oh, I didn't?

: Sapphire, you have used.

S: Not amethyst? Oh.

: You said: quartz tinged with either pink or blue, so that's just an amethyst.

S: Yes. Anyway, there are lots of other precious stones, and one would have to have the right associations. Any suggestions? I am quite open to suggestions; I don't have to do all the work myself, so to speak. Anything suggesting sobriety, clarity? of course, there is crystal, but we've used that, haven't we? Mica? No that won't do! We could say glass, because it is quite brittle!

: It holds liquids.

S: It holds liquids, yes. I'll give it thought. But if anyone else has any bright ideas, let me know. I think it is quite a good piece of symbolism; I did think it up myself. I do know that, on certain occasions, people have offered the Ten Pillars, haven't they? perhaps in Tuscany? with maybe a little sort of almost like a little circular temple, with ten pillars of these different colours, and a little roof, offered.

Vessantara: Not the real substances?

S: No, I'm afraid not. But who knows? We might have little models. These substances are available, and one might have little models eventually; like little stupas, to offer. Why not? Yes, I will give it some thought and maybe others too. What prominent precious stones have we not used, then?

: Did you use lapis?

[35]

Voices: No. No, it's not used.

S: Well, that might be a good idea, because lapis is associated with the Medicine Buddha; and drunkenness, according to the Buddhist tradition, is supposed to be the source of the vast majority of diseases. So we could consider vaidurya(?), lapis. Lapis lazuli has little golden flecks, doesn't it? indicating the very great preciousness of that particular Precept. We'll think about it. That is certainly a candidate. Any others?

Voices: Turquoise.

S: That is one of my favourite stones, I must say; yes, turquoise. A very beautiful stone. I have got some pieces of it.

: Turquoise also goes off colour if you don't keep it in touch.

S: Is it so? Oh.

: Yes. It will go green, away from the blue spectrum, if you don't wear it on your hand. It will go off.

S: Are you sure? Because all my turquoises have stayed blue.

: Oh.

S: I will look at them more closely when I get back.

: That is always what we were told.

S: Well, if it is a traditional belief, that will do, even if it isn't scientifically valid! Because you need to refurbish your mindfulness, which is the positive precept, constantly, don't you? As I say, I like that. Well, I like lapis too. But turquoise is a beautiful stone; you get it in Tibet. The Tibetans are very fond of it, in combination with gold. Most of it seems to come from Persia, though also South America, now. But very beautiful, turquoises. The colour of

your shirt. All right, then, perhaps we'll end there. I suppose our next session will be in some weeks' time, and it will be on The History of My Going for Refuge. Right-ho, then.

Voices: Thank you.

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Guhyaloka 1988 / 3

Session III, 24.6.88

Tape 3, Side 1

S: Right-ho. I haven't counted the number of questions, but there are quite a few. I hope to get through them all in, say, the course of an hour and a half. Any left over we will probably go into in the relevant discussion group. But I am going to take the questions in the order in which I see the groups, which means in a way that we work up to a sort of crescendo, from relatively modest beginnings! Anyway: questions from Surata's group. Here is a nice easy one for Bhante:

Q: What was U Chandramani's response to Dr Ambedkar's break from tradition in himself leading his followers in the Refuges and Precepts? Did he know about this in advance and consciously go along with Dr Ambedkar?

S: To the best of my knowledge, he did not know about it in advance, and I don't actually know what his response was. But, after all, I did know U Chandramani, and from my personal knowledge of him I can imagine what his response would have been like. After all, he had spent, by that time, well over 50 years in India, and he was well aware that Indians, even Indian Buddhists, did not do things in quite the same way that they were done in orthodox Burma, orthodox Ceylon. I think he might have been a bit surprised, but I don't think he would have been all that bothered. I think he would have said to himself: 'Never mind, the main thing is that they will become Buddhists.' I think that would actually have been his response. He was, in some ways, a quite liberal-minded old man. He certainly was not a strict follower of the Vinaya, and was genuinely concerned that Buddhism should spread in India. So I imagine that, though he probably was taken by surprise, he did not really mind all that much, if at all. He probably was so pleased that so many people had become Buddhists that he considered that a quite minor point. This is not to say that all Theravada bhikkhus would have shared his point of view, by any means; but I am pretty sure that that would have been the measure of his response. Then comes a slightly more difficult question:

Q: Would you like to say something more on this occasion about your relation to the Order and the relation of the Order itself to the rest of the Buddhist world?

S: In a way, this is a quite complex question. First of all, the nature of my own relation to the Order. In some ways it is not really quite like that; it is not as though the Order is a sort of block, just one thing, one entity, with which I have a relation, because after all, as you know very well, the Order is made up of Order Members. So I think of it more in terms of my relation to individual Order Members, at least initially even though those Order Members do add up to something which is not a group, something of a quite different character, something that we call the spiritual community, which is of course the Order itself. So let me say just a few words about my relation to individual Order Members. I think the most important point to make here is that there should be a relation, if you see what I mean. If an Order Member

does not write to me for several years and does not come and see me for several years, I begin to wonder what sort of relation there is between me and that Order Member, and even whether there is much of a relation at all. So I think this is the important point here: that there should be an effective relation, in the sense that the individual Order Member should at least keep me informed how he or she is getting on even if they only write a couple of times a year, or see me a couple of times a year. Some Order Members, I am sorry to say, don't even do that. It could be that they do have a [37] relation with me on a lofty spiritual plane: I am not necessarily aware of that! I would have more confidence in the relation on the lofty spiritual plane if it was reflected in some way on a more mundane level. So I think this is the most important point, as I say that there should be an effective working relation. Not that I necessarily see that person very often. That may not be possible, just due to circumstances. But at least individual Order Members should keep up their relation with me, either directly by writing or coming to see me, or making their presence known in some way at events of various kinds, or at the very least through their reporting-in to the rest of the Order, which of course I always read. It is very disappointing to turn to Shabda some of you may have felt this and see that there is only one person, for instance, reporting in from a particular chapter of perhaps 14 or 15 Order Members; sometimes none at all. I personally find this really disappointing, and it is one of the themes I am going to return to, so far as all of you are concerned, before the end of this retreat, so I won't say much more about it now. So my relation to the Order, one must not forget, is really the sum total of my relations with individual Order Members, and the weaker my relation to individual Order Members the weaker my relation to the Order as a whole, and vice versa. I won't say anything more about that now, because sooner or later I am going to write a paper in continuation of The History of My Going for Refuge. You may remember the question perhaps arises out of that particular passage that I promised to say something more in the future about my relation to the Order and the relation of the Order itself to the rest of the Buddhist world. So I want to give that some thought. I have made quite a few notes on the subject, and I shall be reading a paper about that by way of continuing The History of My Going for Refuge. It won't be such a long paper, I promise you. But I do have quite a bit to say on that topic. Coming to the second part of the question, on the relation of the Order itself to the rest of the Buddhist world, this is a much, much more complex question. I think people do not always realize that the Buddhist world itself is a very complex phenomenon. Well, you know that, to begin with, there is the Hinayana, Mahayana, Vajrayana; there is the Theravada, there is the Tantric Buddhism of Tibet, there is Zen or Ch'an; there are all these different traditions, all these different Buddhist cultures. There are even different branches of the Sangha, the monastic order or the non-monastic order, too. In Tibet you have the Gelugpas and Nyingmapas and the Kargyupas and so on, and in Japan you have the Tendai people and the Shin people, the Zen people, the Ritsu people and so on. Sometimes people have asked me in the past: is the Western Buddhist Order, for instance, recognized by the Buddhist world? Well, the question really is quite meaningless, because there is no Buddhist world as a whole. There is not even one Buddhist Sangha. The Sangha in the East is subdivided into quite a number of different branches, many of which are mutually exclusive. For instance, in Sri Lanka you have got three main nikayas among the monks, the bhikkhus: you have got the Syama Nikaya, the Amarapura Nikaya, the Ramanya Nikaya (?), and they don't perform official acts of the Sangha together. They are not in communion. For instance, when a bhikkhu is ordained he is not ordained into the Sinhalese Sangha; he is ordained into the Shama Nikaya or into the Amarapura Nikaya the Amarapura Nikaya, by the way, is divided into 14 different nikayas. And if someone is ordained into the, say, Shama Nikaya, it means that he there is no question of 'she' here, of course is ordained only by bhikkhus of that nikaya; bhikkhus of other nikayas are not permitted to sit and take

part in the ordination. Nor do they perform the patimokkha in common, or any other official ecclesiastical acts. So you cannot speak of one Sinhalese Sangha, even though they do have many [38] features in common. There are a number of different bhikkhu sanghas. So one of them might have a very happy relationship with the Western Buddhist Order, another might not. Do you see? And it is the same in, for instance, to take a more extreme example, Japan. In Japan you don't have bhikkhu sanghas, you have you can't even call them orders, but the Shinshu people, for instance, have their, as we would say, ordained people, but they are quite distinct from, say, Zen ordained people or Tendai ordained people, and they also do not perform ecclesiastical acts together; they are quite separate and independent sanghas. So, again, we might have one kind of relationship with one of them, another kind of relationship with another. So there is no question of Western Buddhist Order on this side and the rest of the Buddhist world, or rest of the Buddhist Sangha or spiritual community, on the other. The Western Buddhist Order is one among a number of spiritual communities or Sanghas, and obviously we will have more in common with some of those sanghas and less in common with other sanghas. Do you get the idea? In the West we seem to have developed closer and more friendly relations with the Arya Maitreya Mandala, partly because of my own friendship with Lama Govinda, and with, of course, the present head of the Arya Maitreya Mandala, Advayavajra, whom of course I knew in India, with whom I stayed several times and whose son who is also a member of the Arya Maitreya Mandala stayed with me in Kalimpong. So we have much in common with the Arya Maitreya Mandala. We seem to have, as far as I can make out, quite a bit in common with the Korean I am not sure if I should say monks or use some other term in America. I think his name is Soen Sunim has been in very regular correspondence with us and we with him, and there does seem to be a certain accord between our ideas. Similarly in the case of Philip Kapleau; we are in regular contact with him, or at least I am personally, and he recently invited me to go and stay with him for some time at Santa Fe in New Mexico, where he has a small centre now he has retired. So I might be able to gather a few tips from him on how to retire! It might be interesting. But I think one thing he did which I probably won't do; some years ago, I think when he was 65, he handed over his movement in Rochester which is where his main centre is, Rochester, New York state to one of his, I think they call them, Dharma successors; it happened to be a female Dharma successor; and no sooner did she become head of the movement than she did something which apparently, without anyone realizing it, including Philip Kapleau, she had been wanting to do for a long time: she abolished all Pujas and rituals! So this resulted in quite an upheaval, and he the poor Roshi had to emerge from his retirement and go back to Rochester and apparently put it all right. He had, I believe, to depose her and restore Pujas and rituals, because so many people found them helpful. So that is a little warning to me! be very careful about handing over to anyone who, in his or her heart of hearts, does not really approve of Puja or ritual! There is another point which perhaps I should mention in this connection: it may be a lesson for us. Quite recently I received what I regard as very, very sad news about the Arya Maitreya Mandala, and that is that it seems it is going to split. So you can imagine I am not at all happy about that because of my friendship with Lama Govinda, and thinking how he would feel; thinking it is not good for the Arya Maitreya Mandala to split. I don't know the full story, but some of those members who are splitting off from the main body have circularized other Buddhist groups, including ourselves but in German; at present I am getting the circulars translated, and then perhaps I will have a clearer idea of what has been happening, and that also may contain some lessons for us. It seems that the split is along [39] geographical lines, but I won't say any more about that because I don't really know. But whatever the cause may be it is very unfortunate. They are a much smaller movement than we are, with far fewer members. A factor which I think may be relevant is that they don't meet

together to the extent that we do. They tend to be rather isolated and not to attach as much importance to meeting together in large numbers as we always have done. So if that is so, that could contain a lesson for us that we should be very careful that we do, as much as we possibly can, meet together in large numbers: for the weekly chapter meeting, the (what is it now? three-monthly or four-monthly?) national Order weekend, the regional Order weekend, and so on. Perhaps I will have more to say about that whole situation when I know the facts better. But when one considers Lama Govinda has only been dead for five years, and already these sort of things are happening, it is really very sad. So I think, coming back to the relation of the Order itself to the rest of the Buddhist world, it won't be a monolithic relation, because the Buddhist world is not really monolithic; it is a term that covers a very great diversity of belief and practice and organization, and many, many, many different Sanghas or Orders or spiritual communities, which are not all necessarily (to use the Christian expression) in communion with one another. Those were the questions from Surata's group. Now let's go on to Purna's group.

Q: In the section on the Diamond Sutra and the Sutra of Wei Lang you say: 'To me, the truth taught by the Buddha in the Diamond Sutra was not new. I had known and believed and realized it ages before.' You also say that in your diary at the time you wrote two possible explanations for your feeling that you had always been a Buddhist. Could you say more about that feeling of recognition what those two possible explanations were and what your current explanation would be?

S: That is assuming I have a current explanation different from those two! First of all, there is the obvious explanation that I had been a Buddhist in a previous life. That is quite possible. I can't say that I have any recollection of having been a Buddhist in a previous life; I can't really say that I have any definite recollection of a previous life at all. With just one possible exception: I have quite often had a sort of recollection, or a semi-recollection, that I died a violent death. But I can't say anything more than that. I have no clear or distinct recollection of a previous life or of being a Buddhist in a previous life. None the less, that might be an explanation, since obviously one does believe in rebirth, and it could be that when I first came in contact with Buddhism I sort of took up a thread that had been broken when I passed away the last time. In my unpublished memoirs, I have written about some other early experiences. For instance, when I was very small in fact, since I was probably a few weeks old, certainly a few months old I used to be taken over to see my grandmother that is, my father's mother who lived in another part of south London, and she had a number of objects which had been collected by my father's stepfather, her second husband. And many of them were Buddhist, and from a very early age, ever since I can remember, I was quite fascinated by these things. Among them, for instance, in the hall, there was a framed, I take it to be Buddhist, painting; I remember what it looked like: it depicted a figure that I always used to call 'the giant', seated on a sort of throne cross-legged it was of Chinese origin and he was surrounded by a number of very small figures who seemed to be playing on musical instruments, and he had a halo. This must have been some kind of Buddhist divinity, if not a Bodhisattva a guardian king, something of that sort. And when I was a baby, even before I could walk, I used to insist on being lifted up to look [40] at this figure. And then again, behind the door my grandmother kept a large Tibetan bell, of the type that we are very familiar with. This apparently came from the Lama Temple in Peking. And my father told me that, as a boy, he had always rung it on New Year's Eve; and I always used to ring it whenever I went to see my grandmother. I could not pass this bell without giving it a ring. I used to be quite fascinated by these things. And then there was a small Kuan Yin figure on the mantelpiece in the dining room. So these

things very much attracted me and fascinated me from my infancy. That may be because of some connection in a previous life; I don't know. I can't say for sure. But that is a possible explanation of my feeling that I already knew the teaching contained in the Diamond Sutra and so on. The other possible explanation is that the experience to which the Diamond Sutra pertains is an experience out of time altogether, so that when you have that experience, when you have a sort of experience of Insight, you don't experience that you are having it now. In the experience itself there is no past, present or future not that the experience itself belongs to the present, and from that experience you look back into the past; no, the experience itself has nothing to do with time. So it is as true to say that you did experience it as to say that you do experience it, or that you will experience it. That is the other possible explanation. Of course, they don't exclude each other. I can't think of any third alternative. Also there is Plato's doctrine of reminiscence, isn't there?

: I was just recalling your poem 'Messengers from Tibet'.

S: Ah, right, yes.

: You seem to suggest even stronger links.

S: Yes. But there, of course and it is a poem I pose a series of questions: 'Were you?' Do you see what I mean? But it certainly felt like that; when I came into contact with Tibetan Buddhism it felt very familiar. Perhaps I could say that about all forms of Buddhism. On the other hand, I must also say that when I read the Greek and Roman classics they also seem very familiar! Maybe I was a Greek or a Roman in one or another of my previous existences! Maybe I wasn't always a Buddhist, maybe just once or twice, with luck. But that is simply a possible explanation of the fact that I felt as I did when I read that particular sutra. It certainly seemed extremely well, more than familiar: as I said, quite literally, as though I knew it already; it was not new. But, as I said just now, Plato has a doctrine of reminiscence: he believes that all higher spiritual knowledge is sort of innate in the human soul, so to speak that is not quite his language, but that is more or less his meaning and you don't so much learn as recover what you once knew. There is Socrates's famous demonstration of that in, I think, the Meno, isn't it? where he cross-examines the slave boy and demonstrates, at least to his own satisfaction, by asking the slave boy a number of questions, that he was well acquainted with certain principles of geometry! He elicited them from the boy by a process of cross-examination. All right, then, let's press on with questions from Purna's group.

[41]

Q: In chapter 19, 'Levels of Going for Refuge', of The History of My Going for Refuge, on p. 103 you say, in the context of the cosmic Going for Refuge, that 'each form of life aspires to develop into a higher form, or so to speak went for Refuge to that higher form. This might sound impossibly poetic, but it was what one in fact saw.' Could you please expand on this poetic vision and on what you mean by 'a non-self-conscious form of life aspiring to a higher form'?

S: I think I won't try to go into this in detail; I think it needs to be treated systematically in writing, but I will just make one or two comments. I don't personally believe [in] I don't think there is any evidence for a purely, so to speak, mechanical process of natural selection. Do you know what I mean? Does that convey anything, or something, to most of you? I don't believe in the monkey-and-typewriter theory of evolution that is to say, if you keep enough

monkeys banging away at a sufficient number of typewriters over a sufficiently long period of time, automatically they will eventually produce the collected works of Shakespeare. That is a bit of a parody of the theory, but this is actually what it maintains that (what shall I say?) circumstances produce variations in the members of various species, and those which are most fitted to survive and adapt themselves do survive and do reproduce; but [that] there is no sort of vital process going on, there is no overall direction, there is no kind of spirit behind it all; it is a purely mechanical, automatic and, in a sense even, predictable process, given a sufficient number of variations, given certain conditions and given a sufficient length of time. This sort of theory I think there is no evidence for, though it is believed by quite a lot of biologists. To me it seems that there is a sort of, for want of a better term, life force don't take me too literally when I say life force which pushes through, which works through the different forms of life and which has, or which exhibits, a sort of evolutionary tendency in the sense of a tendency to move from lower to higher forms of life; so that, when the lower form of life develops into the higher form of life, it is not the result of any mechanical and automatic process, but on account of that urge which is behind the whole evolutionary process. So, inasmuch as, as a result of that urge, the lower form of life passes into the higher, I speak, poetically, of 'the lower as taking Refuge in the higher'. It is as though, on that level, there is almost a reflection of the more conscious and deliberate process of Going for Refuge which we find on the higher level, the human level, the spiritual level, even the Buddhist level. This is rather obscure, I know, and it needs spelling out in a lot more detail. Perhaps I shall do it one day. I have gone into it a little, I think, in *The Bodhisattva, Evolution and Transcendence*, haven't I? But is that reasonably clear?

Vessantara: Except, Bhante, when you say there is no evidence for a purely mechanical process of natural selection, do you presumably a lot of biologists who have come to the conclusion that that is the case base themselves on evidence of some description?

S: Well, of course, biologists do differ. It does seem that some biologists come to biology with presuppositions of a materialist order. Probably one could not say that biology, considered just as a science, points in either one direction or the other; but then you have to take what are generally agreed to be the facts of biology and interpret them from, so to speak, a philosophical point of view. There is a vast amount of material on this subject, but there are some works that I have read by biologists or philosophically inclined biologists, or biologically inclined philosophers, which do, as far as I can see, show quite clearly and conclusively, on [42] purely mathematical grounds, that evolution cannot be a random and mechanical process. To me their arguments seem quite conclusive, quite apart from any purely philosophical arguments. I am trying to remember the name there is a well-known work yes, it is called *Human Destiny*, by a French author, I can't remember his name now which I found very satisfactory and convincing in this respect. He does show, on purely mathematical and statistical grounds, that if the processes which we know have taken place had taken place purely mechanically, they would have taken many, many, many million times longer than they actually have taken; and this suggests that other factors are at work. One must also, of course, remember that developments and changes in biology, I think, [take place] every five years at least, and I must say it is 10 or 15 years since I read any of this sort of material at all seriously. Ratnaprabha has been reviewing it more recently, because he is writing a book to some extent based on my own lectures on *The Higher Evolution of Man*. I think he is having some difficulty in spelling out the actual transition, or mode of transition, from the lower to the higher evolution, but he seems, having surveyed the material and consulted quite a number of books on biology, convinced that what for want of a better term I

have called a sort of vitalist way of looking at the evolutionary process is relevant. But, again, just a few weeks ago I saw a review of a very new book on biology which is along the old Darwinian lines, the author of which is totally convinced of the validity of a purely materialistic, mechanical, random sort of approach to evolution. That may well be just because of his general scientific and philosophical assumptions. I probably will have a look at this book. But books are being published all the time, and biology has become a very, very big subject. But one has to attempt some sort of synthesis, some sort of generalization. After all, biology is concerned with life, concerned with the process of which we are a part. We are concerned, really, with the whole evolutionary process. So I think I won't say anything more than that, for the time being. Perhaps some time I will get around to writing something more about this. I am rather hoping that Ratnaprabha will have done the job for me; he is much more widely read in the sciences, especially in biology, than I am myself, and he may be able to do quite a good job.

Q: We were discussing, in our study group, the position of someone leading the Refuges and Precepts either as a formula in themselves or within the Sevenfold Puja, and their symbolic role as a preceptor. Could you please say what you think about this with regard to: (i) performing the Sevenfold Puja with beginners, who may not know the relevance of the Refuges and Precepts i.e. whether and in what sense they are taking the Refuges and Precepts; (ii) whether Mitras should lead the Sevenfold Puja or Refuges and Precepts in communities or classes, since they have not effectively Gone for Refuge?

S: Well, obviously it is desirable that Pujas and so on should be led by someone who has effectively Gone for Refuge, i.e. by an Order Member. But I suppose, in some smaller situations and smaller groups, even smaller centres, you can't altogether rule out the possibility of a Mitra taking the lead. A Mitra, sometimes a senior Mitra especially, may have a very strong feeling for the Refuges and Precepts, even though he or she has not yet effectively Gone for Refuge. Also one must say that sometimes it seems that a Mitra is very near to ordination, [so] it is very difficult to say in some cases that that person, though not technically ordained, hasn't in a sense effectively Gone for Refuge, and just through force of circumstances has not yet actually been ordained. So one can't be [43] too rigid about this though, at the same time, I feel one should preserve, as best one can or to the extent one can, the principle that someone who has actually effectively Gone for Refuge that is to say, been ordained should lead on such occasions. I expect there are some of you here present who have led on one or other occasion, as Mitras?

Voices: Yes.

S: And presumably you did not feel you were doing anything wrong? You just probably felt you were stepping into the breach! Yes, there is this question of different levels of understanding and involvement, because you may be having a Sevenfold Puja, and there may be Order Members present who have a full understanding of what it is all about, especially about the Refuges and Precepts; and you may have Mitras present with some understanding, Friends perhaps with a little understanding, and newcomers who are either astonished at what they see or who are quite overwhelmed and impressed! We have talked about this sort of thing in one of the discussion groups, haven't we? It would in some ways be nice if everything was really tidy, and you just had Refuges and Precepts and Sevenfold Puja recited when only Order Members were present. But we can't ignore the rest of the Buddhist world, where people recite, at least, the Refuges and Precepts and who regard themselves as Buddhists

without at the same time realizing the significance of the Refuges and Precepts, and especially not realizing their central position in Buddhism. So it is as though we are having to function on a number of different levels; and, in our centres at least, we have to encourage everybody at least to try to understand what the Refuges and Precepts mean, and what the Sevenfold Puja means; and perhaps try to see to it that no one has the Sevenfold Puja, so to speak, thrust upon them without some degree of preparation, without some explanation of what it is all about. In the case of some people coming to it newly, the Sevenfold Puja can be very off-putting, but others participating for the first time take to it very much, and I have known cases of people being more impressed by the Sevenfold Puja than by the meditation or the Dharma study or anything else in the FWBO at least for a while. So we just have, I think, to keep a very close eye on the situation and on the response or possible response of individual new people. I know that there are many Mitras who would be deeply disappointed and upset if they were not allowed, so to speak, to take part in the Sevenfold Puja. In any case, you couldn't stop them going home and doing it by themselves there you couldn't sort of excommunicate them for performing the Sevenfold Puja! Anybody got any comment on this, from their own personal experience working around centres?

Priyananda: I think it is the case that the Refuges and Precepts, and especially the Sevenfold Puja, are not introduced properly, or the whole meaning and significance of ritual are also not introduced and discussed properly. There are not courses or talks on the meaning of

S: Haven't I given a talk on 'The Psychology of Ritual'? That used to be played quite extensively. I don't know about now. Anybody not heard it? 'The Psychology of Ritual' given about 15, 16, 17 or more years ago. You have all heard it, or heard of it?

[44]

Voices: Yes.

S: Maybe more use should be made of that. I have spelled it out there, spelled out the general principles, haven't I?

Vessantara: Even with leading study on the Sevenfold Puja on the Request Retreats, I still find Mitras who in a way have quite wrong assumptions about some aspects of the ritual, mainly Christian ones which have got smuggled in and need sorting out. Quite a number of people seem to have difficulty still with the fourth stage, the Confession of Faults, for instance.

S: Ah, right. Yes, we call it faults now, don't we, and not sins? You sinners! Though I must say 'faults' is not really quite strong enough; it is letting people off the hook rather too easily. What if you did commit a murder? after all, it is only a fault! Any other comment?

Vajrananda: I have a question. I suppose what I am wondering is: is there any particular significance to assuming it is an Order Member leading the Refuges and Precepts? Is there some way in which it is more than just a practical ?

S: Well, in the Buddhist East at least, in the Theravada Buddhist East the monk usually gives, and is regarded as giving. It is not simply that the lay people repeat after him, but that he gives them. But, so far as I know, what that giving implies, or what the significance of it is, has never been investigated. I have certainly never seen any reference to the significance of

that giving. I am just trying to think of the Pali expression yes, it is actually called *ti sarana gamana* and *panca sila gahana* that is, Going for Refuge; in the formula itself there is no reference to giving but only to going that is with regard to the Refuges and with regard to the Precepts it is a taking. But that does not necessarily mean taking from the monk. You take in the sense of undertaking to observe. So I would say, if one goes by the actual formulas used, that the monk is only a leader in the sense of he repeating it first and then everybody else, so that they repeat it in unison. I remember a rather dreadful occasion this little reminiscence has not come into my mind for many years one of those dreadful little happenings that I experienced shortly after my return to Britain. This was at the time of my first Wesak celebration in Britain; and Wesaks were always organized by the Buddhist Society, which meant that Mr Humphreys played quite a prominent part. I was there on the platform with him and a few other Buddhist dignitaries, as we were called, and I forget quite how it happened I think I had assumed that someone would be leading; and, of course, in India it would always have been me, being in the robes rightly or wrongly. So Mr Humphreys announced at one point: 'Now we will recite the Refuges and Precepts.' So I said: 'Who's leading?' So he said: 'Oh, no one will lead; we will recite them all together.' So [I thought] all right, that's the way they do things. But it was dreadful, because no one they were all English people, after all they had no real confidence; they didn't really want to chant it out loud, and it was very, very ragged; and very few people actually knew the Refuges and Precepts properly, so it was a really awful performance. I really shuddered. So I think, originally, at least, the main reason for having a monk leading was just to remind people of the wording, those who didn't know, and just to keep everybody [45] together. I think probably it was no more than that. Even in the Theravada countries I doubt if anyone would insist that only the *bhikkhu* has the right to lead in that way, even though that is generally the practice. For instance, when Dharmapala, who was not a *bhikkhu*, went to the States, he administered the Refuges and Precepts to at least one person, and no one seems to have minded at all. And, of course, in Buddhist countries there are always a lot of *bhikkhus* around, and *bhikkhus* are highly regarded, so obviously they are expected to take the lead. But I don't think there is any sort of mystical 'giving' of the Refuges, if you see what I mean, within the context of the Theravada at least.

Vajrananda: So would it matter particularly if, say, a Mitra led a Puja which was leading the Refuges and Precepts and there were Order Members present?

S: I think that would be quite inappropriate, yes.

Vajrananda: Even in a regular community situation, where it was just a practical rotaed detail?

S: No, I think it would be desirable for the Order Member

Tape 3, Side 2

It sounds almost like the Order Members shirking their responsibilities, because they have effectively not that they have, but that they do, on that occasion they do effectively Go for Refuge, and to go effectively for Refuge is a higher or deeper level of commitment that just, so to speak, provisionally going. So the one who effectively Goes for Refuge leads the way, so to speak, in relation to someone who is only provisionally Going for Refuge.

: So in that way there is a sort of sense in which he leads or

S: Yes, he does lead, in the sense of showing the way. 'Here am I, I Go for Refuge; I am effectively Going for Refuge. This is what you aspire to do, so, in a way, at least to some extent, following my example.' So the Mitra cannot provide that sort of example in respect of the Order Member, and therefore cannot lead in that sort of situation.

Vessantara: Would it be fair to say that that is sort of symbolic in that way, that the Order Member should lead?

S: Well, it is more than symbolic, because when he says 'To the Buddha for refuge I go', he goes effectively; whereas when the Mitra says 'To the Buddha for refuge I go,' unless it is an exceptional Mitra and it is difficult to know he is Going for Refuge only provisionally. Of course, the Order Member may be experiencing a weak moment; that is another matter!

Vessantara: That does suggest there is something being given, in a certain sense, then?

S: No, I wouldn't say that. It is just a question of the nature of the act. When the Order Member repeats the words 'To the Buddha for Refuge I go', it means, or it is, something that it does not mean or is not when the Mitra repeats those same words. So the Order Member is taking the lead. He may not be even conscious of that Mitra. He is himself Going for Refuge, and the Mitra should be conscious of him as, so to speak, leader, Going for Refuge in a deeper sense than he is able to [46] go, and wishing to Go for Refuge, possibly, in that deeper way. In that sense the Order Member takes the lead.

: Is it a sense in which the bhikkhu leads the Refuges and Precepts is it that

S: They have never discussed this, to the best of my knowledge, so it is impossible to say. I think it is more that the bhikkhu always takes the lead, anyway, on all religious occasions, because in the Theravada there is that great gulf, usually, between the upasaka and the bhikkhu. It is the bhikkhu who always gives the blessing, or whatever it may be. But is that clear?

Ratnaghosa: Is there a case for Mitras leading Pujas and things as a training ground for Mitras who have asked for ordination? in communities and ?

S: I think that can be left until the ordination retreat. It is something one can learn to do quite quickly and easily. In any case, a Mitra can certainly perform his or her own Puja by himself or herself, so at least one can easily in that way learn to recite aloud.

Ratnaghosa: Would there be, then, any sense in which in a gathering of just Order Members, the more experienced Order Member would take the Puja, and in that way take the lead?

S: When you say experienced, you mean just reckoning by length of service or actually more experienced?

Ratnaghosa: I don't know; I suppose actually experienced.

S: I think probably, ideally, that would be best. But it is probably not practicable, for two

reasons. First of all, it may mean that that particular Order Member always has to lead, and that may be expecting a little too much of him. He may prefer to have, not exactly a rest, but just to be led by someone of, say, comparable experience. On the other hand, it may be difficult to tell which Order Member is the more experienced. It doesn't go just by length of service, or number of years since your ordination, necessarily. A relatively new or young Order Member may have a greater depth of experience, but it isn't easy to tell. I think, broadly speaking, it is the older, more experienced Order Members who should normally lead. I think that does give a greater depth to the Puja itself, or whatever else is being conducted. They can do it, ideally speaking, more fully, more wholeheartedly. There may be exceptional occasions on which a younger Order Member is asked to take the lead, but, broadly speaking, I think the senior, more experienced Order Members should do that. But not if it means that that responsibility always devolves on just one or two people. Is this a practical problem or difficulty in any centre or chapter, do you know? Has anyone ever experienced it as a difficulty?

Ratnaghosa: There was discussion, I know, in Sukhavati about whether Mitras should lead Pujas as training. Some people seem to think it is OK, and some think

S: I don't see it as part of a Mitra's training at all. I am sorry to say it sounds a bit like a rationalization on the part of Order Members, because Order Members should take it as part of their responsibility to lead and to inspire the Mitras, and not just so to speak unload their responsibility on the Mitras. No, I [47] think especially, say, in a community like Sukhavati with a number of Order Members they should definitely have a rota among themselves, not depend on the Mitras.

Ratnaghosa: That is the case.

S: I don't think it is necessary for Mitras to have that sort of training at that sort of stage of their career; no, not at all.

Aryaguna: I think the initiative was from the Mitras rather than the Order Members.

S: In that case, I think the Order Members should not have allowed it.

Aryaguna: They didn't! (Laughter.)

S: That's good. I think it is another of the things I have to go into when I pay my visits to the chapters. Any further point? I think I have more or less covered that. Now we have got quite a lot of questions from Vessantara's group. Perhaps I will have to leave some of them to the discussion group. Perhaps, at least to begin with, I will deal with the simpler, more factual ones. I think this comes from Vessantara himself:

Q: Why do you refer to the Ten Precepts taken at the time of ordination as vows? as, for instance, in your first lecture on the day of the Order's founding (see p. 86).

S: They are referred to as vows in the ordination ceremony itself, aren't they? Well, I suppose they are vows or does anyone stumble at that particular word? What is a vow?

Vessantara: A vow I understood, Bhante is something which you undertake to do, a vow is

something that you feel you can keep; whereas with a precept it is something which you understand as a training principle which you are working on but which you accept, under certain circumstances, you may break, human nature being what it is.

S: Vows can be broken, too.

Vessantara: A vow to me always has a much more serious and irrevocable feeling to it than a precept.

S: But, surely, when one takes a vow one is aware that one might conceivably break it?

Vessantara: Yes, whereas when one takes a precept one is more aware of that. So, if you take the Ten Precepts, you are aware that, say, you are not going to totally abstain mentally from covetousness virtually until Enlightenment, for instance. If that was a vow, I don't see how you could take it.

S: I take 'vow' to mean something much more like a solemn promise. But, even if you think too literally in terms of undertaking a precept, it might mean that it isn't given the weight that it really needs to be given for you to be able to take it really seriously and not break it, if you can possibly avoid breaking it.

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Vessantara: I suppose I thought that, as you were using 'vow' here, it was rather different from the way in which we use 'vow' say somebody vows to do a Puja every day for six months or something as far as I know, we are always very clear that they should be very specific about what would constitute a breach of that vow, and if they were to break it they should take that very seriously and bring it up in chapter meeting and talk about it with their spiritual friends. I can't see how the Precepts which we take can be considered to be vows in that sense.

S: I think perhaps they ought to be, to some extent. Take even in a way the most problematic the last three of the Ten Precepts. For instance, take the question of anger. I think if you have a sort of spontaneous reaction of anger, or an angry thought passes through your mind, I wouldn't regard that as a breach of your vow or of the precept. But if you dwell upon it, if you make no effort to get rid of it, you allow yourself to indulge in it then I think that is a breach of the precept or vow, and should be taken seriously and brought up, say, at a chapter meeting and confessed that 'I indulged in that' not that you just had that passing reaction, but that in a sense you almost encouraged it; or even if you took no positive steps to overcome it.

Vessantara: I suppose I've got two views of what an ethical observance can be: one consists, as you say, in the Ten Pillars you talk about the third precept it's almost as if it's a path, you can never be practising it you can never completely be breaking the precept, your practice could always be worse, but equally it could always be better, so in a sense there is always further to go with the precept. Then there is perhaps the way in which people take the Bodhisattva Precepts, where it is almost clearly stated that if you make no attempt if you break one of the precepts and you are not concerned about that and perhaps other factors, then you have actually broken the ordination precepts, you have to be re-ordained. And those two I can't fit together. How you are talking now is a bit closer to the second one, isn't it?

S: Perhaps we need a sort of intermediate term, which is perhaps not as strong as 'vow' but

stronger than 'undertaking precept'. I don't know whether there is any such English word. But even if you take vow for instance, in the Catholic church, poverty, chastity, and obedience you could always imagine yourself being more poor and more chaste and more obedient than you actually are. It isn't quite an absolute, in the sense of being something that either you are observing or that you are not. In the case of the ordination ceremony, which is of course adapted from the pabhajja ceremony in Pali, I took an existing translation, so I am not so sure that I would not have used the word 'vow' if I had translated it myself I am not sure. How do people usually understand the word vow, in a more ordinary context, not necessarily the FWBO? For instance, there is that well-known poem 'I vow to thee, my country' how would one take it in that sort of way?

: ... in a more ordinary context it does seem to be something quite serious, like you talk about the marriage vow for instance.

S: Yes, well, that means, I suppose, you hope and trust you will be faithful to your spouse, but you are aware at the same time that you may slip occasionally; not that you would regard that as right but that you are going to try not to slip in that way, you are going to try to stay faithful.

[49]

Dharmapala: I take a vow as more than a promise or an intention. I try to make that really correlate with my highest aspiration, as from that sort of basis, so it does have a much deeper feel.

S: Should not one feel like that about the precepts?

Dharmapala: I think, if I am in touch with that side of myself when I take the precepts, it is. But if I am not in touch with that I see it more as a sort of training towards.

S: I am just afraid that people may feel, consciously or unconsciously, that they are let a little off the hook by this sort of weaker terminology or phraseology do you see what I mean? 'I know I'm not non-violent, I am just working towards it. I have undertaken to try, say, not to commit adultery, but I am just working towards it' ! People seem so easily to let themselves and others off the hook. So perhaps vow is not an appropriate word, but I think we need a strong word none the less: more like a solemn promise, perhaps.

Priyananda: The term precept seems to have been undervalued. It seems a very weak term.

S: Right. It is not a literal translation of siksapadam, anyway. It is more like 'a training principle'. 'Precepts' is the old, I think probably Rhys Davids, translation. Perhaps we shall have to rethink our terminology in some respects. Also, of course, recently, the suggestion has been made that we need a stronger ethical emphasis, that we should study the precepts more and perhaps take them more seriously; not think so much in terms of something towards which we are struggling but something which we are actually trying to do here and now, as wholeheartedly as we can. I have been thinking I think someone has mentioned about the speech precepts, or perhaps it was in a letter that the speech precepts are especially a case in point, because they are so easy to break. Have you come across this point before? I know I have made it. You are unlikely, except under exceptional circumstances, to break the other

precepts to any great extent, but the speech precepts often get broken all the time. You put two Order Members together and let them talk for five minutes, and the chances are that at least two or three speech precepts may be broken! They are as easy to break as that yes? So I think we need to be much more aware of the importance of the precepts, these particular precepts, the need not to break them, the need to keep them, actually to speak truthfully in the full sense, actually to speak kindly and not harshly in the full sense. In this connection, by the way, I must share with you a little saying of Dogen which I came across recently. It is not quite in accordance with the precepts, in a way, but you must just take the spirit of it. He says somewhere that people have sometimes gained Enlightenment as a result of a harsh word; but no one ever gained Enlightenment as a result of idle gossip! I thought that quite a good little saying. But speech is not often subject to that sort of rigorous examination, is it? But perhaps it ought to be.

Dharmapala: Just something that you said earlier, Bhante, about we should be more ... or more positive. I think that would add quite a weight to the way we do them.

S: You mean stress the positive precepts more than the negative ones?

[50]

Dharmapala: No, but in both negative and positive form, the principle that you [should be] more positive or more generous than before, rather than just 'be generous'.

S: Yes, right. Otherwise you may rest satisfied with a certain standard of generosity, even a certain standard of truthfulness. [Like] 'everybody knows you have to tell little white lies in business', sort of thing. Anyway, perhaps enough about that. Let's pass on to a few more factual questions.

Q: How far did your vision of the Order extend at the time of the first ordinations? Did you envisage it expanding beyond Britain?

S: I can't remember that I thought about that at all. I neither thought, as far as I remember, that it would not expand beyond Britain, nor did I think that it would. It is, after all, 20 years ago, 20 years ago.

Q: And what concept do you think the first Order Members had of Sangha?

S: I really don't know. A few of them are still around; you must ask them. Ask Ananda. He might not remember, of course, but you could try asking him. I suspect it was a little weak. People certainly realized that, in being ordained, they were not just joining an association or society; they certainly understood that. But whether they realized the implications of spiritual friendship and brotherhood, to anything like the extent that people realize them now, I would not like to say. This is something I can answer:

Q: Your new Buddhist movement in Britain was first called Friends of the Western Sangha. What led you to transform it into Friends of the Western Buddhist Order?

S: Well, I wanted, right at the beginning, to call it the Western Buddhist Order, but there had been a Western Buddhist Order in the fifties, which had only lasted a few months. I had written about it in my unpublished memoirs. It was started by someone called Robert Stewart

Clifton anyone heard of him? No, I thought not; he is not even mentioned in *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, though he was an American Buddhist. That was a real fiasco, I am sorry to say, and I didn't want there to be any association between what I was starting and that old Western Buddhist Order of which, in fact, I had been made, without being asked whether I wanted to be made, an honorary member. This was 1952, I think yes. Ancient history. But anyway, once we had established ourselves as quite separate, and also because some people said they didn't like the term Sangha no one knew what it meant I think, after a year, I changed to Western Buddhist Order. I think that, when the ordinations were held, I changed then, as far as I recollect. So that, for the first year of our existence, the FWBO was the Friends of the Western Sangha, and then after the ordinations it changed to Western Buddhist Order in both cases.

Q: What happened to U Thittila? Did you ever have any contact with him after taking pansil from him in 1944?

S: Yes, indeed. He lived a very long time. He lived to be well over 90, and died only very recently. I met him several times in India when he was on pilgrimage, and had friendly contact, and met him when I came back in 1964 I can't remember whether he was in Britain then or arrived soon afterwards but he came to work on a translation of a Pali text for the Pali Text Society, and he was staying with a member of the society in the country. He didn't take any part in Buddhist activities; he was already very old. I went to see him more than once, and again had very friendly contact. He was a very affable old man, who was mainly engaged in scholarly work, editing and translating Abhidharma texts. He was professor of [51] Abhidharma in Rangoon University for many years; but for many, many years the government, for one reason or another, did not allow him to travel abroad. The policy of the Burmese government was then, and still is, to have as little to do with the rest of the world as possible, and for many years he was unable to travel abroad. He visited Britain a few years ago. I didn't meet him then. But that was his first visit for many, many years. Another factual question:

Q: Who was the Tibetan incarnate lama who was present at your bhikshu ordination?

S: It was Kushur Bakwila(?). He was the head lama, the chief incarnate lama, of Ladakh. I have a photograph of myself with him. It might appear in *Peace is a Fire*, possibly; I am not sure. But anyway, I have got one somewhere. I remained in contact with him for many years. He is dead now. For many years he was a deputy minister in the Kashmir government for Ladakh affairs. A quite strange person, quite strange in appearance. He had a completely triangular face, the most triangular face I have ever seen, and a very quiet, gentle manner. But I had contact with him off and on for quite a long time. He was quite a saintly figure. Here is a slightly more personal and practical question:

Q: Your History shows your sharp awareness of the limitations of the Theravadin monastic sangha, its formalism and triumphalism. Also, as your story unfolds, you seem to see yourself less as a monk than as simply a human being who Goes for Refuge. Have you ever thought of disrobing?

S: Well, there are two points here, really. First of all, I have been rather critical of the poor old Theravadins, but I have indicated also, in the Preface to, I think, the last edition of the Survey maybe the previous one, too that some of my criticisms of the Theravada apply to

other forms of Buddhism as well. Japanese Zen can be highly formalistic, and if I do not refer to Zen as often as I refer to the Theravada in this connection, it is simply that during my very formative period in India I just did not have any contact with Zen, whereas I was constantly in contact with Theravadin bhikkhus. I have even seen some formalism in Tibetan Buddhism. So it is not so much that I am criticizing just the Theravadin monastic sangha, but that sort of attitude which I saw personally exemplified in many Theravadins but which is certainly exemplified in some followers of other forms of Buddhism too. 'Also, as your story unfolds, you seem to see yourself less as a monk than as simply a human being who Goes for refuge. Have you ever thought of disrobing?' I have thought about it often! But, fortunately or unfortunately, I have got a foot in two different cultural camps, one being the Western, the other being the Eastern; and I would be quite happy disrobing in the West, but I have also to consider how it is going to be taken by people in the East, especially the Untouchable Buddhists not so much our Order Members but others. I think they would be completely confused, because many of them do still think in bhikkhu-cum-upasaka terms. This was the case in Britain, even, until a few years ago. So that, say, if one disrobes, people take it to mean you are no longer a serious Buddhist; you are 'just an upasaka'. Do you see what I mean? So they can't realize that you are no less committed than before you as it were disrobed. Now I think it is possible in the West, because we have established the Dharmachari as a definite category of Buddhist. I think people in Britain other Buddhists in Britain belonging to other groups are well aware that Dharmacharis are not just upasakas in the sense, say, that Theravada upasakas are just upasakas. So if I was to [52] officially disrobe in Britain, it would not be thought that I was any less serious than I was; it certainly would not be so thought by people within the movement, and probably not even by others outside. So, even though I do really regard myself as a human being who has Gone for Refuge, I have not made any public declaration that I dissociate myself from monasticism. In fact, I do quite like monasticism and the monastic way of life, but I don't like monastic formalism, with which monasticism has become confused. But it may be that, even in India and that is what I am mostly concerned [with] the situation changes, because some years ago Lokamitra was not even able to show Order Members photographs of me not wearing my robes. I don't mean without any clothes at all! I mean in ordinary civilian dress. But now he can. Now Order Members at least have seen videos of me giving lectures wearing ordinary dress. They quite accept this. They understand it. It is not that they merely accept it; they understand that commitment is primary, lifestyle secondary. In fact, one Order Member wrote to me saying that he preferred me like that, because many of our Friends look rather askance at the bhikkhus, who are not really on the whole a very worthy group of people in India. But the masses still think in terms of the yellow robe, and they would be very confused. But that could change, because the Order Members have changed; probably the Mitras are changing in this respect, and bhikkhus in India don't have, on the whole, a very good reputation, especially those from among the ex-Untouchables, some of whom are converted sadhus and who follow much the same way of life as before don't know very much about the Dharma. So a time may come when I don't have to wear robes even in India; but it may take rather a long time. Meanwhile, I have to keep, so to speak, a foot in either camp, which is not necessarily a very comfortable position; but that, I am afraid, is the fate of all reformers because one is brought up in, so to speak, the old tradition and you create a new tradition, a reformed tradition, and to some extent you belong to both. Order Members don't have that sort of problem. They have been in contact with the FWBO from the beginning, so for them things are comparatively simple and straightforward. There was one other question slightly connected with that ... Yes, or at least half the question. I think this will have to be the last one. This is also from

Vessantara: Bodhisattva precepts take precedence over the monastic Vinaya, and in Chinese Buddhism monks take Bodhisattva ordination after bhikshu ordination. Bearing this in mind, why, in your original conception of levels of ordination in the Order, did Bodhisattva ordination precede bhikshu ordination?

S: First of all, there is a little question. In what sense do Bodhisattva precepts take precedence over the monastic Vinaya?

Vessantara: Well, let's say that in a certain situation you see that your following in the Bodhisattva principle will involve you in breaking the Vinaya in some way, [whereas] if you have taken the Bodhisattva vows you happily leave aside the Vinaya.

S: Right. Mr Chen always used to quarrel with that, and used to say: 'You don't break, you transcend.' (Laughter.) But that doesn't necessarily imply precedence in time, or otherwise. A bhikkhu can take Bodhisattva vows; one who has taken Bodhisattva vows can become a bhikkhu. So it is true that in Chinese Buddhism monks take the Bodhisattva ordination after bhikshu ordination as part of one and [53] the same ceremony. In Tibetan Buddhism it isn't like that, because it seems everybody takes the Bodhisattva vow, at least, let us say, in our terminology, provisionally. But certainly not everybody becomes a bhikshu. That is, as it were, more specialized. So I think I put the Bodhisattva ordination first because more people were likely to take it, and I expected that very few would want to become bhikshus or sramaneras, and that they would form a quite small minority, and therefore that that ordination should come last. I think this was my reasoning, or the way I looked at things. Is that clear?

Vessantara: Yes, thank you.

S: Maybe another question just a very brief one.

Q: After reading your History, I am still not clear at what point you finally realized that Stream Entry and the arising of the Bodhicitta were different aspects of the same vital spiritual experience. Do you remember coming to this conclusion, which drastically redraws the conventional Mahayanist map of the spiritual path?

S: I can't remember the exact moment of day, or even year, I am sorry to say, but I suspect that if people were to go through the tapes of all my seminars it would be quite clear. I think you would be able to find that there were two or three seminars where this idea emerged for the first time. I suspect it is 10 or 12 years ago, when I was giving a lot of seminars. It may seem strange that this was so. I think the reason is that over the years, in my case, a lot of thought processes have been going on; I have been investigating a lot of ideas, investigating different aspects of Buddhism, and very often those trains of thought had nothing to do with external circumstances. So there is no point of anchorage for them in external events, no external events with which I can associate them. Do you see what I mean? So there is just this stream of thoughts and reflections and so on. But, yes, as I said, if you were to go through the study seminars I took, I am sure I would give expression to that particular idea, and you could at least find out when I first did this, when I first referred to that idea. And I think that would bring you very close to my actual discovery of that idea, because at that time I was taking so many study seminars, almost every month, perhaps.

Vessantara: It is another of those ideas which just got lost didn't get circulated through the Movement at that time.

S: Yes, at that particular time. And I must say, also, that sometimes I am surprised, reading through some of my own early writings, at what an early period certain ideas did emerge, but I didn't make anything of them at the time, nor did anybody else take them up. For instance, I used to think that I first started using the term 'the Higher Evolution' and speaking in those sort of terms in the late 60s at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara; but then I discovered, writing my memoirs, a report of a lecture I gave in Kalimpong in 1950, where I very clearly set forth Buddhism in terms of the Higher Evolution; and I had forgotten all about it. And I had only done it on that one occasion in 1950. I was afterwards under the impression that I first started presenting Buddhism in those terms in 1965 but no, I had presented it in those terms 15 years earlier quite clearly, because there was a little summary of the lecture and I had forgotten all about it! [54] So you might even find this idea of the Bodhicitta being the positive aspect of Going for Refuge in a very early talk or piece of writing. I don't know. I wouldn't be surprised, but I can't think where it might be located, but it is not impossible. So to some extent, this makes things quite difficult, because, as I said, I couldn't write a history of my thinking. I have been able to write a History of My Going for Refuge by anchoring it to certain actual occurrences and experiences which I remember, but I couldn't write a 'History of my Thought' in that way, because it has gone on from day to day and month to month and year to year, over the years, and I haven't kept any sort of record or journal. It is just reflected in my writings. But not everything that I have thought about is reflected in my writings, by any means. For every ten topics that I have thought about, I have perhaps written about one, and I don't know when I am going to get down all the things I have thought about and I probably would not be able to say when I started thinking about them, and through what stages that thought had passed over the years, because it has been going on for so long now. Some people can remember the sequence of their thoughts and the way in which they developed. I can't do that. I just have the end product, usually. I am not always sure where it came from or how I arrived at it. Anyway, we will leave it there, and questions not dealt with this evening we will take up in Vessantara's study group. If there are any points of very general interest, he might write them up. Righto, then.

Voices: Thank you very much, Bhante.

[55]

Guhyaloka 1988 / 4

Session IV, 15.7.88

Tape 4, Side 1

Sangharakshita: We have a moderate number of questions, and I expect we shall be able to get through them all. First of all, of course, the lion's share of the questions, I think, is from Vessantara's group. This question comes from Vessantara himself:

Q: You have said that it is never appropriate to question the commitment of another Order Member per se, though you may question how they are expressing their commitment in a particular situation. Is it ever appropriate to question your own commitment as such?

S: I suspect that the word 'question' is used in two somewhat different senses. Yes, I have indeed said that it is never appropriate to question the commitment of another Order Member

per se. What does one mean, in this context, by 'question' the commitment of another Order Member, or what did I mean? I meant by this 'throw doubts on it altogether' just say to another Order Member: 'You are not really committed at all.' This, I think, is not appropriate, really, under any conditions. First of all, you are attacking the basis of his spiritual life. You are also really destroying the possibility of communication, in the true sense, between you, because the basis of your communication is your common Going for Refuge, so you are destroying that. The sort of questioning I am thinking of is when perhaps two Order Members, have a disagreement and tempers get a little bit frayed; and one Order Member questions the other Order Member's commitment, not only as a means of expressing his disagreement but even as a means of attacking him, in a way that is not really desirable at all. But I think this very rarely happens. I have only ever heard of it happening two or three times. Once I heard it expressed in the form [that] one Order Member said to another, 'I don't think you should ever have been ordained,' which amounts to the same thing; which, again, one should never say, because it not only questions the commitment of that Order Member, which is bad enough, but it also questions the people who ordained him, or who thought he was ready for ordination. So, yes, one should never question in that way the commitment of another Order Member. Then the question goes on: 'Is it ever appropriate to question your own commitment as such?' I think here the word 'question' has a slightly different meaning, because you can certainly examine your own commitment; ask yourself 'Am I committed deeply enough? Could I not make a greater effort to commit myself?' Do you see what I mean? So, in this sense, you would be questioning, but you wouldn't be, as it were, cutting at the very basis of your own spiritual life in the same way that somebody might be doing to another Order Member in the first part of the question. Do you see what I am getting at?

Vessantara: Yes. I suppose what I was really trying to get at was whether, having Gone for Refuge, there would ever come a point supposing that you are going through a very difficult time when it actually occurred to you to wonder 'Am I really committed? Do I really Go for Refuge? Is it actually what I want to do with my life?', even. So should it be that, having Gone for Refuge, even to yourself as it were you just sort of take it, right, you have taken that step, and it would have to be an expression of a negative state to question it per se. Obviously, you could always say, 'Is it going deeply enough?' but that is different from actually saying 'Am I doing it at all?' Do you see what I mean?

[56]

S: Well, when most people Go for Refuge, it is an effective rather than a real Going for Refuge. And, as I have said, your effective Going for Refuge will at some times be more operative and at other times will be less operative; and a moment may come when your effective Going for Refuge is so weak that at that particular moment you may feel that you don't really Go for Refuge at all. In that sense, you question. But there is not only that moment. Even though your effective Going for Refuge at this very moment is so weak that you might even question whether you are in fact Going for Refuge at all, you cannot but recollect that there has been a time when your effective Going for Refuge was very strong and vigorous indeed, and you would also recognize that, by virtue of the fact that it is just an effective Going for Refuge, those variations are bound to take place. That simple recognition does not really constitute, I would say, a questioning of one's own commitment as such. It is just a realistic recognition of the fact that your Going for Refuge is simply an effective Going for Refuge, and therefore subject to fluctuations; and might even be as it were suspended for short periods, before again continuing. Do you see what I mean? So, when that happens, probably the best thing to do is to remind oneself that this is how it is going to be until such

time as your Going for Refuge becomes a real Going for Refuge. You cannot expect it not to fluctuate. But you will, even when it fluctuates or becomes very weak, have the recollection of periods when it was very strong indeed, and you will have the confidence that you will recover yourself and that you will reaffirm, as it were, your effective Going for Refuge.

Vessantara: I suppose I didn't make this very clear is it ever productive to actually question whether your Going for Refuge has not ceased as such, or may not have ceased?

S: Well, I doubt whether it is productive simply to question whether that is true or not, but it is always productive to take a realistic view of oneself and to know where you really do stand; because it is only then that you can go forward. I don't think it is appropriate to question one's own commitment out of a sort of feeling that you ought to be questioning it. If it so happens that for the time being it is very weak or even seems to have ceased, well, that is the situation and you have to deal with it; and presumably, as I said, you deal with it initially by reminding yourself that it was once very strong, it is only an effective Going for Refuge, it is bound to fluctuate; and, secondly, reminding yourself that the sooner you make that effective Going for Refuge a real Going for Refuge the better.

Q: Could you see our public ordination ceremony as a promise to the world corresponding, on the effective level, to the Bodhisattva's public vow to gain Enlightenment for the sake of all beings?

S: I suppose you could. I see no reason why one shouldn't see it in that way if one wanted to. But I think it might be a bit too much for some people. Some people might not like the idea of sort of making a binding promise to the world at large. They might feel that perhaps it is rather too much to try to live up to, and they might think that if they weren't doing very well, and their Going for Refuge happened to become a bit weak, they would feel very guilty about 'letting down all those people'. One mustn't forget that people in the West, even within the Movement, are rather prone to feelings of guilt or is that not so? You don't have to agree with me! (Some embarrassed laughter.) I suspect that that is the case. It is perhaps bad enough thinking or suspecting sometimes you have let yourself down and your close spiritual friends, but what about having to think that you have let the whole world down? But, in a sense, you have, and perhaps it is better not to dwell on that! (Laughter.) I think if you do see your public [57] ordination ceremony in that way, you cannot but have, perhaps, that dreadful suspicion at some stage of your career that you are letting just about everybody down very badly, and you might feel very bad about that indeed.

Vessantara: But it would be fair to say that in theory that is implicit in your Going for Refuge? If you are Going for Refuge and you are saying 'I am committing myself to gaining perfect Enlightenment for the sake of all beings'

S: Well, you do say that at the end of the public ordination ceremony, don't you? 'for the benefit of all beings I accept this ordination.' But it isn't stressed or emphasized. There are other things also you say at that time. So, yes, in a sense you have made a promise, at least by implication, but perhaps it isn't an aspect of the public ordination ceremony that should be dwelt on or insisted on too much though if anybody does by any chance find it very inspiring to think in those terms there is no reason why he shouldn't do so. A question now from Priyananda: What are the likely karmic effects of falling away from your Going for Refuge?

S: The question says 'likely karmic effects', because I don't think the karmic effects of falling away from your Going for Refuge are actually spelled out anywhere in the scriptures, so one would have to proceed by analogy. And I would imagine, going by analogy, that the likely karmic effect of falling away from your Going for Refuge would be that you wouldn't get a chance, in your next life, to Go for Refuge. You wouldn't make contact with the Dharma, you wouldn't meet with spiritual friends, you wouldn't meet with the Sangha; because it is said that if in this life you meet with the Dharma but you neglect the Dharma, you don't put it into practice, in your next life very likely you won't meet with the Dharma at all. So on that sort of analogy, one could say that in the future life you may not have the opportunity of Going for Refuge if you have fallen away from it in this life. That would seem to be pretty obvious. Or you would meet with obstructions in a future life, when you wanted to Go for Refuge.

Q: On p. 103 you say you can make out a case for Buddhism being a metaphysical dualism as easily as for its being a non-dualism. How would you explain the case for this metaphysical dualism?

S: Obviously I can't go into this in great detail and great depth, but you should notice that I say 'can make out a case for Buddhism being a metaphysical dualism' I don't say 'make out a case for metaphysical dualism' 'as easily as for its being a non-dualism'. Actually, I would say 'far more easily', if one bases oneself on the Pali scriptures; because, in the Pali scriptures, what do you have? You have the conditioned and you have the Unconditioned; and the spiritual path is a path from the conditioned to the Unconditioned, and nowhere in the Pali scriptures is the conditioned derived from the Unconditioned. And, of course, much less still is the Unconditioned derived from the conditioned. You are left, as it were, with these two great principles, so to speak: the Unconditioned, which is beyond space and time, and the conditioned for which no perceptible beginning in time exists. And one is not reduced to the other, and both together are not reduced to any third principle; so you are left with a quite stark dualism. But that is, in the Pali Canon, at least, metaphysically, the last word. The Buddha in the Pali Canon doesn't seem to care to go beyond that; so that is quite clearly a dualism, and if the dualism is taken as ultimate, as in fact the Pali Canon seems to take it, it is a metaphysical dualism. It is very clear in the Pali Canon itself. [58] Even in the Abhidharma there is no attempt to go beyond that. Here is the conditioned, there is the Unconditioned; you go from the one to the other. Here is samsara, there is Nirvana. Neither can be reduced to the other, nor can they both be reduced to any common principle with the possible exception of the pratitya samutpada; that is, one might say, a different story. This is what I would say, but I would also go further than that, and say well, I have said many a time that the basis of all spiritual practice is dualistic, because you are trying to get from A to B, trying to get from a state of imperfection to a state of perfection; from a state of defilement to a state of Enlightenment, and so on. So a dualistic outlook is implicit in all that. Then there is a further question:

Q: On the same page you say that sometimes Zen and Tantra profess to have a non-dual basis, but in fact it is not true. What do you mean by 'basis' here, and how would you refute their claim?

S: 'Basis' means a basis for practice. Sometimes in the Vajrayana, sometimes in Ch'an, it is said that you practise basing yourself on the non-duality of things. But, if you base yourself on the non-duality of things, how can you practise? Practice means trying to achieve something, presumably; so you might say that you base yourself on the fact that you are

Enlightened already, and you only have to wake up to that fact. But even there there is a duality, because there is the state of being Enlightened but not knowing it, and the state of being Enlightened and knowing it, and you have to pass from the one to the other; in exactly the same way, there is a dualism. So you can't get around at least an implied dualism in practice, whatever you end up with.

Q: What was the paper you wrote in 1949 (p. 106), and has it been published?

S: I think that was the paper on I think the topic came up in a discussion group Philosophy and Religion in Original and Developed Buddhism. It has been published or republished in the Dhammamegha series. It should be available at all centres!

: I think the Dhammamegha title is Buddhism as Philosophy and as Religion.

S: Ah, right.

Q: Though you have sometimes said that 'uncompounded' or 'unconfected' would be a more literal translation of *asamskrta* than 'unconditioned', the latter term is still commonly used in the Movement. Using 'unconditioned' leads to the kind of confusion in which the Transcendental stages of the Path are taken to be outside the *pratitya samutpada*. Would it be best to stop using the terms 'conditioned' and 'unconditioned' altogether?

S: It might be, though I suppose it doesn't matter if you use them realizing what in fact you are referring to. What we speak of as the Unconditioned is in fact, as the question points out, the 'not put together', it is the uncompounded, or if you like the *impartite*, or even the Absolute. And the *samskrta*, of course, is the conditioned. So where does the confusion arise? I am afraid I have lost it.

Vessantara: Well, if you talk in terms of conditioned and unconditioned, for the Transcendental stages of the Path you talk about the Unconditioned -

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S: Yes, you can't really speak of them as 'unconditioned stages'; in a sense they are conditioned, though Transcendental. So it really amounts to saying that the Transcendental can be conditioned in the sense that you can have a sequence of Transcendental stages or factors, the latter one of which arises in dependence on the preceding, but in a spiral and not in a reactive order. Have you actually found the terminology confusing, when we speak of the Unconditioned?

Vessantara: It seems as if there was some confusion in the original seminar, when people were trying to understand how there could be a conditionality in the Unconditioned.

S: Ah, it is not a conditionality in the Unconditioned, but a conditionality in the Transcendental, i.e. in the non-reversible spiral order. I think it really is clear, if one just thinks a little. I think the idea at that time was rather new, and people had to get used to it. The seminar was about 10 years ago. Yes; further confusion:

Q: On p. 167 you seem to be saying that even a Stream Entrant has not necessarily established once and for all the continuity of his Going for Refuge. Will you please clarify what you are

saying?

S: No, actually I wasn't saying that. The discussion was about continuity of Going for Refuge, so there were two kinds of Going for Refuge here: the effective and the real. The real Going for Refuge can be continuous from one life to another, but not necessarily the effective. That is why let me refer to the text: page 167 Lokamitra says: 'So it is not necessarily the case that one has this sort of continuity, i.e. continuity of Going for Refuge, established once and for all?' And I say: 'I think one could say that it would be fair to say that it is not necessarily the case, not necessarily because it would be so if the Going for Refuge was real, but not if it was effective only.'

Vessantara: The preceding comment of Lokamitra's seems to set that in the context of people who have attained the Transcendental Path.

S: No, I think I am referring back to the original discussion simply about the continuity of Going for Refuge, it not being specified at that stage whether it is the effective or the real. I seem to be harking back to that. So 'Until that continuity is established,' Lokamitra said, 'once and for all, one has to really make that decision, I suppose, that commitment?' In other words, you have to continue making that effective commitment, [you have to] effectively Go for Refuge, you can't just rest on the laurels of your real Going for Refuge, so to speak. One of the things I notice, editing seminars, is that people very often aren't clear in their questions, or the way they put things in their questions. Here is something more philosophical from Purna's group:

Q: In the Mitrata Omnibus you say that 'as phenomena are perceived under time and space, when we enter the dimension of eternity we go beyond phenomena. Presumably a Buddha continues to experience phenomena. Is it simply that his interpretation of them changes, i.e. their significance for him, or is his actual experience of them different from that of an [un]Enlightened person?

S: I don't think there are really two alternatives there. I am reminded of what Blake says about the wise man doesn't see the same tree that a fool sees. So, all right: [60] a wise man doesn't see the same tree that a fool sees; put it back into the terms of the question the wise man continues to experience the phenomenon of the tree; he doesn't cease to see it because he is a wise man. You could say his interpretation of his experience changes, or you could say that the experience itself changes; but does that really make any difference? Blake says 'The wise man doesn't see the same tree that the fool sees.' Does that mean that they see two completely different trees? No! There is a common tree, apparently, that they both see; you can either say they don't see it in the same way, or, putting it more vigorously, you can say they don't see the same tree. But I don't think Blake literally means that they don't see the same tree, in the sense that one sees one tree and the other sees another tree. There is something different, but there is something the same. There is the common locus of the experience, but I think it would be true to say that the experience is different in the sense that the interpretation of the tree each experiences is different. A fool may just see a load of firewood there, but the wise man may see a symbol of life. But it would not be true to say that there were two trees that they see; there is only one tree. Or perhaps you could say there is one tree and there are two trees.

Vajrananda: Would it be useful to describe the change in experience, or change in interpretation, in terms of significance for the Buddha?

S: I suppose it depends what you mean by significance. It is more a question, perhaps, of context. Take an experience like that of pain: two people might have what is in a sense the same experience of pain, but the significance might be different, the context might be different. For instance, it is well known that people who are martyred, say, people who are burned at the stake, sometimes do not experience the same pain that you would expect an ordinary person to experience, because the whole experience, including the experience of the pain, is invested with what we might call a completely different significance; that is, they might feel that they are sacrificing their lives for their faith, for the sake of God, and that even seems to alter the experience of pain itself, so that it is not felt as pain in the same way that it would be felt outside that particular context.

Vajrananda: So if you used the term 'significance', you would have to use it in quite a deep sense, not a superficial sense?

S: Yes. Because, from many records of martyrs of various kinds and for various causes, who are so absorbed in a way in the significance of their action, and in some cases so overjoyed to be dying for what they believe in, that they don't feel the physical pain that normally they would feel. So, as I say, the significance with which they invest the experience, to use that word 'significance', even transforms, as it would seem, their actual physical sensation. So, in the case of the tree, it is as though there is a sort of common object, but different people can invest that common object, which from a commonsense point of view at least is there for both of them or for all of them, with different significances, but not to the extent that you have as it were two different objects, two different trees. For instance, you would be looking, say, at the same tree; you see two people standing at looking at the same tree; and you ask one, 'What do you see?' and he would say, 'I see such-and-such', and you would ask the other one, 'What do you see?' He would say, 'I see such-and-such,' he would give a completely different description. But you would not have the first man saying, 'The tree is over there,' and the second man saying, 'The tree is over there.' They would be looking at the same tree, you could see that that they had a common object, namely the tree even though, when you questioned them, they gave completely [61] different accounts of it. Blake said much the same thing with regard to the golden guinea: do you remember that? He said, 'When I see the sun rising, do I see something round, rather like a golden guinea? No,' he said, 'I see the heavenly host, singing and praising the Lord.' That was his actual experience. He didn't see something round and shining, rather like a golden guinea, as a lot of people might have seen. But he would be standing and looking in the same direction, at what seemed to be the same object, as everybody else. There is another question about conditionality; we have really dealt with that. Purna's group still:

Q: Does Transcendental attainment result in karma vipaka? What is the distinction between karma vipaka and pala?

S: To deal with the second part first, karma and karma vipaka are usually terms used within the context of the mundane, the samsara, whereas magga and pala are terms used within the context of the Transcendental Path. Then, coming back to the first part of the question, 'Does Transcendental attainment result in karma vipaka?', it would be more correct, at least terminologically, to say that it results in pala. Is that clear? It is as though, within the Transcendental order, you have a distinction corresponding to the distinction in the mundane order between karma or action and karma vipaka or the result of that action. Magga represents the as it were striving for the Transcendental state, and pala represents the Transcendental

state as actually attained as a result of that striving. I think there is going to be another question about that in a minute. All right, a different question:

Q: Does the level of self-awareness determine how subtly or grossly your vipakas manifest, e.g. can the same karmic action have physical or mental vipakas depending on the level of development of the person?

S: I am not quite sure what the question is getting at. This is Varaghosa's question: would you like to elaborate a bit?

Varaghosa: Er

S: So there is a level of self-awareness; so 'how subtle or gross your vipakas manifest' ?

Varaghosa: Yes, the idea is if you are quite developed your vipaka will come back in terms of remorse, but possibly, where there is

S: But remorse is not a vipaka, remorse is a karma, it is a mental state, isn't it, including volition?

Varaghosa: Well, say, in terms of just mental anguish, say, whereas if you were less, well, it would come back in terms of physical pain

S: Yes, you seem to be speaking more in terms of sensitivity, degrees or levels of sensitivity. I think one probably could say that: that if you were on a relatively low level of awareness or evolution generally, the vipaka would take a form corresponding to your level a comparatively gross one if you were gross, comparatively subtle if you were subtle. Because if you were a very gross person, the very subtle vipaka wouldn't register! It is rather as though if you were a really stupid, violent person, you would do a really crazy, violent action and someone just [62]

comes up and says, [very gently] 'No, no, you shouldn't have done that' it doesn't register at all; you need someone to come and shout at you and really tell you off, otherwise it doesn't register. I don't remember this being discussed in Buddhist literature, but I would imagine that that would be what would happen, in this particular case. A grosser person would attract a grosser vipaka, just so that he could experience it. He wouldn't experience it otherwise. And in the case of a very sensitive person, a very subtle vipaka would be enough, just because of his sensitivity. It is like the princess who felt the pea under a couple of dozen mattresses: your conscience should really be like that.

Q: How soon after the action [does] the vipaka manifest?

S: That depends, so to speak this is all worked out in the Abhidharma's doctrine of karma: it depends, so to speak, on the weight of the karma. The more serious the action you commit, positively or negatively, in terms of skilfulness or unskilfulness, the more quickly the result manifests. In the case of very skilful or unskilful actions, it must manifest, according to the Abhidharma, either in this life itself or at least in the next life. Full details are given, I think, in *The Three Jewels*, where I speak about karma, so you had better look up there.

Varaghosa: I think we were wondering whether, in the case of a spiritually advanced person,

that karma would come back more quickly than [for] a less advanced person.

S: That is not stated in the Abhidharma, but would appear to be suggested by the passage in The Perfection of Wisdom. Do you remember the one? I don't remember the exact wording, but I have discussed it at length in a seminar on the Diamond Sutra, where I say the text has something like 'One who is thoroughly grounded', or some such expression, 'in this perfection of wisdom will be humbled; he will be truly humbled.' And I have discussed this, and I have come to the conclusion that it is as though the Insight itself helps to speed up the process of retribution. I don't remember all the details of the discussion. It is quite a lengthy one. Maybe you should look that up. It was a discussion in a Tuscany with Subhuti. I remember Subhuti played a prominent part in this discussion.

Vessantara: The basic argument seemed to be that, through listening to the Diamond Sutra, you acquired a huge heap of merit, as the Diamond Sutra says, but also you are now in a position of some tension which ... which you gained from the Diamond Sutra and the rest of your being; but, having gained this great heap of merit, merit doesn't just produce pleasant results, it produces the results you need, and so

S: Yes, it says it is good that you should be purged of those previous unskilful karmas. So, yes, it does seem if one looks at that passage that that is a possibility; but, as far as I know, it is not a possibility considered by the Abhidharma. Surata's group:

Q: If the Theravada believe that the age of the arhant is over, what is their goal of the spiritual life? Is it a heavenly rebirth, or do they believe in the coming of Maitreya, or are they just confused? (Laughter.)

S: I think it is not really correct to say that all Theravadins believe that the age of the arhant is over. This belief seems to have started in Sri Lanka, very much over 1,000 years ago, and seems to have spread to other Theravada countries. But, more recently, partly as a result of the revival of what I called [63] the so-called vipassana practice meaning thereby not the classical Buddhist vipassana but the distinctively Burmese form that has now spread to all the Theravada countries and to several parts of the world due to the revival of that tradition, quite a few Theravadins do nowadays believe that it is still possible to attain arhantship, and there are bhikkhus in Burma, at least, who are believed to be arhants. So it is not correct, I think, any longer to say that nobody in the Theravada world believes that it is possible to attain arhantship. But none the less, they do still believe it is a very, very rare attainment indeed, and the vast majority of Theravadins, even monks, believe more in accumulating merit and thereby being reborn when Maitreya Buddha is on the earth, and gaining arhantship under him as his disciple. This is still the very widespread attitude. So, in a way, they are not confused, because they are quite clear about this, usually. They are performing meritorious actions, like in the case of the lay people supporting the monks by giving dana and building temples and monasteries, observing the Precepts, especially on uposatha days, and they hope thereby to attain a high heavenly world and after a long sojourn there be reborn on earth at a time when the next Buddha, Maitreya, is alive and teaching. They believe this usually quite firmly, and the belief is even embodied in their prayers and recitations and chants. But just a few do nowadays believe that it is possible to gain arhantship. But I think they would all say that you would have to become a monk; [it would not be] possible for a lay person. Most Theravadins, I think, just don't think about it very seriously. It is just in the background of their thought. They don't really give thought or give attention to it; it is sort of just taken for

granted. Just as the average nominal Christian well, he just takes it for granted that if he is reasonably moral and goes to church occasionally, he will go to heaven when he dies. It is not that he has given it any really serious thought. It is just sort of in the background of his thinking, it is what he sort of takes for granted, without having sat down and worked it all out at all. If you were to ask the average, say, Theravadin: 'What are your eschatological beliefs?' he or she probably could not tell you anything, but if you were to cross-examine them you could elicit their beliefs. You would say: 'Do you believe in rebirth?' They would say, 'Oh yes, of course.' So 'What sort of rebirth would you like?' 'Oh, I'd like to be reborn in heaven.' 'What do you think you would have to do to get there?' 'Oh, I must make merit.' 'And how would you make merit?' 'Oh, I suppose I would have to give lots of dana to the monks and observe the Precepts on uposatha days.' So then you would say, 'Would you stay in heaven for ever?' And then, if it was a sort of instructed Theravadin, he or she would say, 'Well, no, I wouldn't stay there for ever.' 'Well, when your time in heaven finishes, what do you think would happen? What would you like to happen?' 'Well, I suppose I would be reborn.' So 'Would you like to be reborn at any particular period?' 'Oh well, I would like to be reborn when Maitreya's on earth.' 'Why is that?' 'Well, it is much easier to gain arhantship if you are the personal disciple of a fully Enlightened Buddha.' 'So that is your aim, to make merit, be reborn in heaven, and then come back to earth during Maitreya's time and gain arhantship?' 'Oh yes, yes, that's what I would like.' Do you see what I mean? But they wouldn't be able to spell it all out off their own bat initially, unless they were quite well educated in the Theravada, which the ordinary Buddhist would not be. It is a little bit like that with some not very articulate members of our own Movement!

Bodhiraja: Would the monk say a similar thing?

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S: Usually, the monk would be better informed, and he might in some cases be able to just explain, as it were off his own bat, from the very beginning. And he might even say, 'Well, as a monk I ought really to be aiming at arhantship, but it is very difficult now. It isn't really possible any more. The best we can do is to make merit and hope to be reborn when Maitreya is on earth.' Many monks would be conscious of the fact that that was not really the proper goal for a monk, but that due to the degeneration of the times that is what it had become. And a very few might even say that they were in fact aiming at Enlightenment in this life; just a very few. It would be interesting to as it were capture a Theravada lay person and just cross-examine them in this way. I think Asvajit does this sometimes, and really gets some quite extraordinary results.

Q: We have read your discussion of the difference between magga and pala, aspects of the Four Holy Persons, but what is the purpose of dividing them in this way or analysing the four into eight?

S: I suppose it is because later Buddhism, the later Hinayana especially the Abhidharma has a mania for dividing things, for analysing things. If there are four of something in the scriptures they will certainly want to make it into eight or sixteen or thirty-two. It is this whole analytical approach. It is a somewhat late subdivision, but has it any practical use or benefit? I was thinking about this. Magga, as I said, represents the stage of actually striving for the higher Transcendental attainment, but when you are actually on the brink of it, not striving at it or towards it from a remote distance but when you are very nearly there, and it is right in front of you and you are straining all your efforts to reach that Transcendental stage. That is

the path. And the pala, the fruit, is when you actually get there and actually have that experience, and your striving Ceases, your willing ceases, because you are there.

Tape 4, Side 2

So it might conceivably be useful, from a practical point of view, to know when you were just still striving and were on the brink of the Transcendental experience, and when you were enjoying the Transcendental experience itself. It is a bit analogous to meditation: sometimes we speak of someone meditating when what we really mean is that they are trying hard to get into the meditative state. So if you cannot make that sort of distinction, you may imagine that you have reached the Transcendental state because it seems very near, when actually you are still striving to experience that Transcendental state. That is the only practical advantage I can think of. But that distinction is made, and all the textbooks of Pali Buddhism speak of the eight aryasavakas(?) according to that subdivision, though it does seem to be a later one than the original fourfold one.

Vessantara: Could it correspond, say, to the very top of the Spiral Path, where you have freedom and then you have knowledge of the destruction of the asravas; and it is as if there is a knowledge that you are free, but then you know that you are free? Could it correspond to that in some way, that you reach the

S: Yes, very roughly, but I think not in strict Abhidharma terms. One would have to look at exactly what the Abhidharma teaching was here. I suspect that what you say would be an oversimplification, though broadly true.

Vajrananda: Do you think it could have referred, for the Hinayana terms for wisdom and compassion, in terms of experience of first of all wisdom and then the fruit of that being compassion, playing itself out?

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S: No, because wisdom is a Transcendental experience, so would be included in pala, wouldn't it? It is fruit in the technical sense that I explained. It is when you have reached, or touched, the further shore, and you just rest on your oars; you are not as it were rowing any longer; you have got there at least with regard to the next stage of the Transcendental Path, even if you haven't reached the highest stages of it. There are actually many further subdivisions in the Abhidharma, even of magga and pala, but we won't go into those. You can look them up in the textbook. I think that's all, actually, unless any supplementary question has occurred to anybody.

Dharmapala: Mine isn't(?) much concerned with the text, I think. Could you say anything about the significance of the deerskin stole that you see in Avalokitesvara ... ? It seems very inappropriate for a compassionate being.

S: This is generally considered to be the dress appropriate to an ascetic. This is, of course, according to the general Indian tradition, not specifically the Buddhist tradition, that the ascetic, the hermit especially, who lives in the forest, wears either a deerskin garment or a bark garment, or a grass garment. I don't know whether the animal was slaughtered especially for that purpose, or whether it is just the skin of a dead beast, but it does have that connotation of hermitlike asceticism, and Avalokitesvara is supposed to be a hermitlike

figure, in a way, an ascetic figure. In Indian tradition or legend, many rishis are represented as wearing the deerskin in that way. Sometimes they have the deerskin as a seat in a sedana(?) sometimes even a tiger-skin; that is usually in the case of Tantrics. But that is the general significance: it indicates that Avalokitesvara is a sort of hermit ascetic. I believe Shiva sometimes wears it also, in Hindu mythology. Is there any reason why this occurs to you, or have you just looked at the ?

Dhammapala: Well, it just seemed very inappropriate in terms of Western ... it has different associations.

S: Right. Yes, you think of Hercules and his lion skin and all that.

Dhammapala: Or fox stole and so on, it has that sort of connotation.

S: Yes, a lady's fox fur. When I was a boy ladies always used to wear these dreadful fox furs round their necks, with the tail hanging down. It looked really barbaric. Well, I think some of them still do, don't they? Silver fox furs, not to speak of mink coats? Really dreadful. So perhaps in our Western Buddhist iconography we should not invest our Avalokitesvaras with a deerskin; it might give the wrong ideas, or the wrong impression about Buddhism itself. In India, I never felt like using any deerskin or tiger skin. There was a time when some of my friends wanted to present me with a tiger skin, but I couldn't agree to accept it! That was as a sort of rug, not to sit on in ascetic style. I don't like to see heads of animals mounted on the wall, and things like that. Or pairs of antlers; again it looks very barbaric.

Aryaguna: I was wondering about the distinction between pala and karma vipaka. Is there a distinction because, in some way, the result of a Transcendental action occurs outside the rule of karma in some way?

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S: Well, the Transcendental action itself occurs outside the karma vipaka sequence, so naturally the vipaka occurs outside that sequence. Not that you stand as it were completely separate; they are sort of intermingled, but they are two quite distinguishable strands, as it were.

Vajrananda: I don't really understand what the essential difference between them is.

S: Well, the one pertains to what we call the positive nidanas not just to the positive nidanas but to the non-regressive positive nidanas and the other pertains to the Round, including the regressive positive nidanas.

Paramartha: This is in a similar sort of area. In The Awakening of Faith, they talk about the conditioned being perfumed by the Unconditioned, and the Unconditioned being perfumed by the conditioned. I can understand, perhaps, the idea of the conditioned being perfumed by the Unconditioned, but the other way round seems a bit odd. Could you say something about that?

S: Well, initially, Asvaghosa or whoever composed that treatise was not satisfied, from a metaphysical point of view, with what seemed to be the unmitigated dualism of the Buddhist position, with samsara on this hand and Nirvana on the other. How did they interact? Was

there no common factor? What was the relationship between them? He seems to have asked himself that sort of question. It seems he was not content just to stop at the dualism. So he therefore got the idea, so to speak, or had the insight, or the vision, that Nirvana itself was reflected in the samsara; or rather, to use his own special terminology, samsara was perfumed by Nirvana. In other words, there is some trace of Nirvana even in the samsara; and, as evidence, he adduces the fact that even in samsara people do aspire to Nirvana. So if samsara was entirely samsaric, how could anyone ever aspire to transcend samsara? There must be a nirvanic element in the heart of samsara itself which makes it possible for a sentient being to have the conception of Nirvana and to wish to aspire to realize that, and thereby to rise above the samsara. Do you see what I mean? That is how he arrived at the idea that the samsara was perfumed with Nirvana. But what about the other way round? How come that Nirvana should be perfumed with samsara? Here he seems to have contemplated the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, because here they are: they have realized the truth, they have gained Enlightenment, they are immersed in the Transcendental; why should they bother about people in the samsara? Why should they bother to teach them? Why should they bother to do anything for them? The reason is that Nirvana itself is perfumed by the samsara. In Nirvana itself, which is not a one-sided experience or state, there is some trace of the samsara, some trace of the suffering of the samsara. And because it is there, in the heart of Nirvana just as there is an element of Nirvana in the heart of samsara the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are impelled, out of compassion, to help beings in the samsara. So this is how he seems to have arrived at his particular conclusions. In other words, you can't have a complete dualism, otherwise there would be no spiritual life. If samsara was wholly samsara, no one would ever even wish to gain Nirvana; and if Nirvana was as it were wholly nirvanic, no one who had attained Nirvana would ever wish to help anybody else, anybody in samsara. That seems to have been his line of reasoning. You could say, putting it in more psychological terms, that he saw that at the [67] heart of Wisdom there is Compassion, that Compassion is inseparable from Wisdom; Wisdom being identified, of course, with the so to speak one-sided Nirvana or one-sided realization of Nirvana. He saw there was another side to the coin, which was Compassion, and it was through Compassion that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas were connected with the samsara. But other Mahayana texts speak as it were of the mystery, as it appears to be, of someone aspiring to transcend the samsara. There is a passage regarding the Bodhicitta where the Bodhisattva says: 'How was it possible that this Bodhicitta should have arisen? It has arisen just like a blind man on a dark night finding a jewel in a dung-heap.' And there is also the question: how is it that this happens for some people and not for others? Here are all of you, especially the nine who have just been ordained. How is it that you are here, and how is it that you have Gone for Refuge, and not hundreds and thousands of other people? What happened? It seems extraordinary. These are the sort of questions that some of the Mahayana thinkers tried to solve. The Awakening of Faith is a very difficult treatise. It is very short, very condensed, but the more philosophical portion is very difficult to follow. I believe there are more than 100 commentaries in Chinese on this text. But it certainly repays study, and I think it is an attempt on the part of a very powerful mind whether that of Asvaghosa or somebody else whom we don't know to achieve a sort of synthesis of Buddhist thought and spiritual experience. It seems to reflect a strongly Yogacara-type line of thought rather than Madhyamika. There are three translations in English, if not four at least, I've got three at Padmaloka.

Vessantara: Is there one you recommend?

S: I think the latest one, the one by the American scholar I think it's Hakeda(?), isn't it? I think

that is the best one. Suzuki's is also useful in part, and there is one by a Christian missionary, Timothy Richards. He tries to give a Christian slant to the text. He was well-meaning; it is very interesting, he was trying to effect a synthesis of what he called the higher Buddhism and Christianity. (Laughter.)

: What date is that work?

S: Oh, that was I think it was around the end of last century. But I have a copy of it.

: I mean the original.

S: Oh, the original; well, it is attributed to Asvaghosa, who is well, the Asvaghosa, the author of the Buddhacarita, is fourth or fifth century. But this work seems to be a little later than that. It doesn't seem to be really a translation from the Sanskrit, though it professes to be such, and it could not have been by that original Asvaghosa anyway, because there is no trace of Mahayana teaching in the Buddhacarita, whereas this is a very definitely Mahayana work, reflecting the latest developments of Mahayana philosophy. So, if it was by someone called Asvaghosa, it could not have been that Asvaghosa, anyway. It is quite late; it is fifth, sixth century, even a little later. I forget the date of the Chinese translation, if it is a translation, but it has been a very, very famous and influential work in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, and well worth studying. It was, incidentally, the very first text which I studied with Order Members in the very first chapter meetings, and people were very much impressed by it, especially, [68] strange to say, those with a more scientific training. One in particular was Vajrabodhi; it appealed to him very, very strongly from that point of view. Unfortunately those sessions were not tape-recorded; we didn't tape record things in those days. I don't think we had a tape recorder, actually. I have sometimes thought of doing it again. I have thought of doing so many things. But, yes, I certainly would not discourage people from reading it, even though it is rather a tough nut to crack. All right, let's leave it there, shall we?

Vessantara: Thank you, Bhante.

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