

General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS WITH SANGHARAKSHITA

Ordination Retreat for Kulasri and Kulaprabha, February 1988

Those Present: Anoma, Parami, Malini, Vidyasri, Vidyavati, Padmavati, Dayamegha, Kulasri, Kulaprabha, Rosy Anderson, Rachel Lovering, Elaine Murray, Maggie Graeber

Sangharakshita: Anyway, we start off with a quite easy question, I think:

Is competitiveness antithetical to the Bodhicitta? We talk of healthy competitiveness, but competition seems to be related to the power mode.

So I suppose the question really is: Is competition necessarily related to the power mode? We know that very often it is, but when one is operating in accordance with the power mode what is one actually trying to do? Any ideas?

Dayamegha: Forcing someone to do something against their will. Forcing them to do your will.

S: Yes. So are you always doing that when you compete? I'm thinking of sports: you want to compete, the other person wants to compete. Supposing the other person loses, have you forced the other person to lose, really? Why does the other person lose?

Parami: Because you're better.

S: You're better, yes! So I think in the case of sports, competitiveness is a means, or a method, if you like, of getting the best out of all those involved. Of course, in a way you could say that the urge to do better than others is perhaps not completely emotionally positive, but in the case of competitive sports you are not trying to do better than others at all costs; you're not trying to win at all costs, unless you cheat, and that's generally recognised as quite unsporting, isn't it? So if you're competing with someone in a competitive sport, in a way you are helping each other to do your best. You are helping each other to test how much he or she is capable of, and I think the best sportsmen and sportswomen in a sense don't mind who wins; the important thing is that you should do your very best, you should give of your best, you should stretch yourself to the uttermost. But you are probably psychologically more likely to do that if you are pitting yourself against another person or persons. Not just, say, running or whatever it is on your own. But clearly, this can get out of hand, because we know that people engaging in competitive sports can sometimes cheat; they can cheat by taking drugs, for instance, or they can cheat by fouling.

But it does seem to me that competition is not necessarily related to the power mode. You may have a competition with someone who can give most. Do you see what I mean?

So I think, especially in view of the fact that human beings seem to be naturally competitive, competitive sports and games and things of that sort are a way of channelling that competitive instinct in a healthier way than it might otherwise adopt. War is essentially competitive, isn't it, in the purely negative sense? It's better to play football than to fight - though unfortunately playing football does sometimes turn into fighting.

So I don't think competitiveness is completely antithetical to the Bodhicitta, taking the Bodhicitta as representing the love mode. I think it helps in making that transition from the pure power mode to the pure love mode. I don't think it is very expressive of the love mode; I think it's a transitional sort of thing. It tames your cruder instincts, or helps to tame them.

Anyone got any thoughts on this, other than contained in the question?

Rosy: To phrase it a bit differently, then: could you say that if you are creating a love mode, there can be an element of competition still?

S: I suppose you can compete as to who can love somebody more.

Rosy: Can you?

S: I suppose so! [Laughter] Depends, of course, again what you mean by love: how do you show that? I think probably if you were very much imbued with the love mode you wouldn't think in terms of competitiveness, eh? - not even in a refined way. If two people were feeling love towards a third person, if it was deep and genuine, they wouldn't think in terms of whether they were loving more than the other person or not. Parents wouldn't normally compete between themselves as to who could love the children more, they wouldn't usually think in those terms, I imagine.

Kulaprabha: If you really think in terms of competitiveness for its own sake, if you're, might you think in terms of using it as a skilful means?

S: In what way?

Kulaprabha: Well, if you were meeting with and spend time with someone who was still working in the power mode, and you wanted to try and help their transition to the -

S: Yes, you could certainly do that. Whether by engaging in sports or in some other way; or even saying, 'Let's see who can meditate longest today' - it might be a very skilful means of getting them to just sit there. They might get so absorbed in the meditation they forget all about the competition. That would mean that you really had succeeded, or that your skilful means had succeeded. One sometimes adopts that technique with children, doesn't one? I'll give a penny - oh, it's not a penny any longer - I'll give five pounds to whoever does such-and-such first.

Parami: Do you think - I don't know whether the questioner was - in phrasing the question originally as 'competition being antithetical to the Bodhicitta', I wonder if the questioner is thinking of it in terms of co-operation being a preparation for the Bodhicitta. And that competition and co-operation seem to be polar ends.

S: There is an element of co-operation in competition, isn't there? Because, first of all, you agree on the game, in the case of games and sports, and you agree on the rules. You agree to abide by the umpire or referee's decision. So you can't compete in that way without at the same time co-operating.

Parami: I wonder if that's maybe the difference between negative unhealthy competition, and something which can be more skilful and more healthy?

S: I think probably the main difference is that in healthy competition the competitiveness is not an end in itself; you're not just out to do better than the other person, but under certain conditions or for a certain purpose. Because if you were just out to beat him or beat her, well you'd just break all the rules if necessary in order to do that. Then that becomes more like warfare, doesn't it? - just trying to do the other person down at all costs, in a barbaric sort of way. So I think we can say that competitiveness has a strong element of the power mode, it has its roots, it has its origin in the

power mode, but it can be tamed. It can be developed into a sort of healthy competitiveness for the sake of mutual development, and it can lead to an experience of the love mode - by which time, of course, it will have been superseded.

Vidyavati: Just thinking back to my cricketing days -

S: Which days?

Vidyavati: Cricket. (*Loud laughter.*)

S: Let's hear this!

Vidyavati: I was just thinking in a game like that, you're often out there playing in a team, but you're extending yourself if you're going out to bat you're actually trying to extend your last, highest batting score or whatever, and that's quite good, because you're extending yourself within - competing -

S: And you extend others too at the same time. They have to extend themselves to keep up with or even surpass you. So as a result of competition everybody does better. They are more themselves, one could say. This is how the ancient Greeks looked at it. That's why the Greeks, for instance, in their games, never had valuable prizes, they never had cash prizes, it was just a garland of leaves.

Vidyasri: But it's interesting, because last week we were studying in the Mitra study group your lecture on the Wheel of Life, and you mention in that that in the *asura* realm, which is characterised by competition, there are very few Buddha seeds.

S: Well, it's not just characterised by competition - it's mutual aggressiveness, isn't it? And business competition can become like that: one firm tries to do down another, even by using dishonest or unethical methods.

Vidyasri: Right - so that's more the mutual aggressiveness.

S: Oh yes, yes. I think the *asuras* - using them as a symbol - are competitive in a purely negative way. I don't think *asuras* have any sporting instincts or any sense of fair play. Is it a practical issue, this issue of competitiveness?

Rosy: Yes, I suppose it is. It feels like -

S: Do you feel that you're competitive, or that people compete with you?

Rosy: Well, I think in myself I can see that my competitiveness comes from insecurity, which I feel also when I'm in the power mode, that comes from insecurity in myself. So I suppose I don't trust it very much. It's interesting to know, because I suppose if you've got energy tied up you don't want to compete back, just - because if results it's got heavier. (?)

S: Some people, of course, won't compete because they're afraid of losing. (*Agreement.*) So for them to be competitive would be a step forward. Sometimes they'll spiritualise it: 'Oh, I never compete, I don't believe in these rough games' sort of thing.

Vidyasri: So do you think that then, if that's how you feel, that actually you may have to go

through being competitive, come out with it?

S: Yes, in the healthy, positive classical Greek manner.

Dayamegha: Playing 'Trivial Pursuit'.

S: What's that?

Dayamegha: Oh, Bhante! You'd be very good at it, I think. [Laughter] It's a general knowledge game.

S: Oh! Ah.

Rosy: Which kind of brings out the worst in people. [Laughter] Some people.

S: Someone once said that when one has the courage to baptise the worst in oneself as the best, it makes an epoch in one's life. I think Nietzsche said that.

Anyway, let's pass on. Enough of competitiveness. This one's about death.

Our attitude to death affects the way we live, i.e. we fear death. Could you say something about why the arahants did not cry when the Buddha died? I've heard a story of an Enlightened Zen master who wept inconsolably when his young son died

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what's an Enlightened Zen master doing having young sons anyway? Anyway -

- to the confusion of his disciples. Are these two responses incompatible?

I would have thought it was obvious why the arahants did not cry when the Buddha died. What is it that makes one cry when somebody dies?

Anoma: Attachment.

S: Attachment, or - why is there the attachment? [Pause] Well, you've lost something, haven't you? But when the Buddha died, had the arahants lost anything? The arahants were Enlightened beings. So far as we can tell from the earliest parts of the Pali scriptures as they seem to be, the arahants were Enlightened just the Buddha himself was Enlightened. So when the Buddha died, had they lost anything, really?

Dayamegha: Just his physical presence.

S: They'd lost his physical presence. And was that of any importance to them? Presumably it was of no importance whatever. So they had lost nothing, therefore they had no cause for grief; they had no attachment. In any case, whatever the Buddha possessed they possessed, so what cause for grief? As for the Enlightened Zen master, I haven't heard about this Zen master who wept inconsolably when his young son died. He couldn't have been an Enlightened Zen master in the original sense of Enlightenment; the only possibility is that he was trying to test his disciples, because the question says that 'who wept inconsolably when his young son died, to the confusion of his disciples'. So why were the disciples confused? They were confused, presumably, because before they had thought a Enlightened person wouldn't have cried; and they believed that their

teacher was an Enlightened person. But when his own son died, he cried 'inconsolably'; so what does that tell you about the disciples?

_____ : That they weren't Enlightened.

S: They weren't Enlightened. They didn't know what Enlightenment was. They were depending for their conception or understanding of Enlightenment on the teacher, so the fact that they became confused when the teacher behaved in a way that they had been led to understand was inconsistent with Enlightenment pointed to the fact that they did not themselves have any experience of Enlightenment. And perhaps the teacher's action was meant to awaken them to that fact. Perhaps they were under the impression that not only that the teacher was Enlightened but that they knew themselves what Enlightenment was all about, and knew how to recognise an Enlightened person, they knew how an Enlightened person would behave, etc.; knew that he wouldn't weep even if his son died. So they were confused as to whether their teacher was Enlightened or not, but they could not possibly be confused about that if they themselves were Enlightened; there would be no question of confusion, they would know either that the teacher was Enlightened or that he wasn't. So perhaps it was the teacher's skilful means. We don't know.

Vidyasri: Would you not feel sadness if one was Enlightened - would one not feel sadness in that?

S: Presumably not. Not as we experience it, anyway. You can feel compassion, you could say there's an element of sadness in compassion when you see the sufferings of others. But there isn't perhaps the sort of identification that we would normally experience with the suffering person. I quote sometimes that phrase of Tennyson's: '*a painless sympathy with pain*'.

Vidyasri: Is that different to missing? Because doesn't it say in the Pali scriptures that the Buddha missed - was it Mogallana or Sariputra, when one of his disciples died, that he missed them?

S: I don't recollect that he missed them. I'd need to check that and see what the original Pali word was. He might have missed them in a practical way, inasmuch as they were teaching and training disciples, possibly. He was getting old, after all. I think we probably find it difficult to conceive of an Enlightened person as being as it were from our point of view 'devoid of human feeling'. I think this is what it is; because we perhaps have very little sense of what one might call the supra-human feeling. We have very little sense of what a Buddha's *maitri* or a Buddha's *karuna* might be. We don't have much of an inkling of that, even. So if there's no grief we tend to think there's no positive human feeling, either. Not realising that any grief or possibility of grief is swallowed up in the *maha-maitri* and *maha-karuna* - which are highly positive states, the most highly positive states that we can imagine. It's probably easier to envisage the Buddha's wisdom than his *maitri* or his *karuna*. Some people who go to the Buddhist scriptures, especially the Pali scriptures, say, from Christianity, find the Buddha as a personality rather cold, or at least a bit cool, a bit sober, not carried away.

Parami: I think it's also from our point of view very difficult to understand an identification with a person, or a relationship with a person which isn't based very much on personality and *rupa*.

S: Yes, indeed.

Parami: There's quite a bit of confusion. What is it that they still had after the Buddha's body and personality went? What did they continue to have? You said the Buddha didn't have anything which they didn't have; but how did they have it when they didn't have him? I think it's very hard

to comprehend.

Rosy: It just feels like a very big shift in perspective.

S: Right.

Rosy: I think I can get a feel for letting go of different kinds of attachment, different kinds of dependency in some way, which is quite hard to imagine being free of.

S: Yes, you usually think in terms of getting rid of attachment and not loving people any more, rather than thinking in terms of getting rid of attachment and loving them more than ever; because the attachment represents a limitation.

Parami: Because it's self referential.

S: *As the Puja becomes an increasingly important part of our practice, do you envisage an extended use of ritual in the FWBO?*

I hope so; we've been talking about this quite a bit in the Order, and I believe some people are exploring possibilities. It's quite a notable feature of some retreats, especially of the Il Convento and Guhyaloka retreats, that very elaborate and lengthy Pujas are part of the proceedings. I think that is also the case among the women, isn't it, on occasions?

_____ : Yes.

S: It's just another of those areas that we have to develop. I believe there's a sort of working party within the Order, isn't there? - or was on the Convention - dealing with these sort of matters or putting forward suggestions.

Parami: Yes, there was a workshop on the Women's Convention, and I think there was one on the Men's Convention. There hasn't been much crossover yet.

Vidyavati: We were hoping to have a retreat this year at Taraloka. Just the Order, focusing on ritual. I don't know what happened.

S: And we need to experiment a little with, say, colours, don't we? With colours. If, for instance, there was a Green Tara Puja, having everything as far as possible green: green flowers - oh sorry, green leaves, rather - well, there are green flowers, aren't there? - green carnations! [Laughter] Well, just green leaves, lovely green leaves, and green cloths and maybe green garments, hangings. And also alternative Pujas - well, not so much alternative, more elaborate, with more readings and prostrations, offerings. Elaborate offerings are quite well known on some occasions, aren't they?

Vidyasri: Do you think - I wanted to ask you yesterday, and I forgot - on such an occasion as that, like I'm doing a Tara day at the LBC - do you think there would be a place for doing, if you're making lots of offerings, a very simple visualisation of Tara? - this is beyond the Order, I mean not as yourself but kind of imagining Tara present on the shrine?

S: I'm not so sure about that. It may be quite new and unfamiliar to some people. But I think there's no reason why one shouldn't read something describing Tara; so, if people are sitting and listening quietly and attentively they will, to some extent, visualise. You needn't tell them that you're doing a visualisation exercise, but if they are sitting quietly and you are reading a beautiful

description of Tara they will surely form a mental picture.

Vidyasri: And that's all right - but not to actually introduce, saying visualise?

S: Yes. For one thing, that'll make them a bit self-conscious and so on. And similarly for other deities.

Rosy: Do you think we could have a more musical aspect of the Puja, like in Tibet they have the yak horns and gongs etc?

S: I think music is a quite difficult area. It may take a long time to develop something of that nature. Again, this is something that has been discussed quite extensively. I don't think it's a question of having musical items in the midst of a Puja. I think we just have to experiment and see what happens, and try and understand why we're doing it, what sort of effect people want to produce. Maybe use simple things to begin with, maybe a few drums or gongs; try a more melodious chanting, like the 'Last Vandana', for instance; that is now in general use, isn't it? But before we can introduce music seriously we need to have musicians, people who have the technical capacity to experiment or just to follow certain guidelines that may be suggested.

Vidyasri: There you are, Maggie! [Laughter]

Do you think there is room for another level of formal involvement in the FWBO, at a pre-Mitra level?

S: This again is something that is being discussed. I really don't know, because we've already got ordination, and one has got the Mitra ceremony; but isn't it - the level before that of the Mitra is that of the Friend, which is by its nature, by definition, non-formal, do you see what I mean? So one doesn't want to have too many levels and too many initiations, I suppose. Or does one?

Rosy: I wondered that because I've been attending the Tuesday class, and I see regulars coming along to the Centre, and I've noticed that people are quite excited by the Friends and wanted to make big changes in their lives, yet they were a bit daunted once they realise how long it's going to take them to be Mitras.

S: Mm. But is that because it's intrinsically difficult to become a Mitra, or just that there are not sufficient Order members to meet their needs?

Rosy: I think obviously it's a lot to do with numbers, isn't it?

S: Well, perhaps; I'm not sure.

Vidyasri: Partially that, I think it is partially that.

S: But what it amounts to is that you would then have sort of nominal members; because people do like to belong. So in some ways - well, a basic principle of the FWBO is you can't just belong nominally.

Vidyasri: What do you mean, like if they became a Mitra but didn't have the Order members to make it make a difference, would that be?

S: Well, we've laid down four guidelines for becoming a Mitra, so there's no point in anyone becoming a Mitra for the sake of being able to call themselves a Mitra if they were not prepared to follow those guidelines. All right, supposing you are wanting to have a level of involvement even lesser than that, there would have to be some definite as it were undertaking, because people couldn't just join and be purely nominal members; that would undermine our basic principle. So it's not that they could belong to the FWBO but at the same time disregard all the principles of the FWBO, and just come along when they felt like it. What is the sense in which they belong, in that case? So sometimes people want the sense of belonging, but without any corresponding responsibility. It's like 'I'm C of E' - but what does that mean? It doesn't mean anything at all. You just want to belong to something, have a feeling of belonging. So perhaps that isn't really good enough.

Kulaprabha: We were having a discussion about this in Glasgow, and it was the same sort of question, but more from the point of view that if someone has asked to be a Mitra, even if they can't be one there and then for whatever reason, whether it's themselves or lack of Order members, that doesn't there need to be some way of acknowledging that they have asked and they really mean it when they ask, even though they might have to wait a little while, and that perhaps with a sort of pre-Mitra system, that is the sort of way of acknowledging their genuine desire?

S: Well, when people ask for ordination they get an acknowledgement. It usually comes from me, and an announcement is made in *Shabda*, though they don't actually see that, but they know that their request is being discussed, and there have been some cases, perhaps there are special study groups or special retreats for them. So perhaps there should be something like that for those who ask to be Mitras but who for practical reasons can't be accepted, but it couldn't be very much because, if you were in a position to do very much for them, they could become Mitras. So there should be some formal acknowledgement of the fact that they have asked to be Mitras; that does seem quite reasonable. At least a signed letter from the Chairman of the Centre or the Mitra Convenor; maybe that point could be raised somewhere. I have known cases where people asked to be Mitras and, for one reason or another, they weren't accepted, and they've been quite upset. So clearly it's meant something to them. I know of cases where people have asked twice or even thrice and still haven't been able to become Mitras for one reason or another. Sometimes because they - in a very few cases - they didn't want to accept the four guidelines.

But if someone does make a request of that sort, it is important psychologically that it is properly acknowledged, which means in one way or another a formal acknowledgement. I am not familiar with these things now, but what is the formal procedure for someone asking to become a Mitra? What happens? Do they write a letter to the Mitra Convenor or the Chairman, or do they just express it verbally, and then in what way is that acknowledged, if any?

Vidyasri: I think it varies. At the LBC it varies. Some people just ask an Order member, and I think formally that's what we say, they just have to ask an Order member who then communicates it to the Mitra Convenor. But actually quite a lot of them write to the Mitra Convenor anyway.

S: So it comes to the Mitra Convenor, obviously. So perhaps it should be acknowledged by the Mitra Convenor. Even if it's only a printed form which he or she then signs.

Vidyasri: That's a good idea! (*laughter*)

Parami: Or if they had an assistant they could.....

S: No doubt a personal letter is always greatly appreciated. Perhaps something in writing is a good idea; it makes it official, doesn't it?

Vidyasri: That's true.

S: Yes. And then there's no confusion as to whether their request has been acknowledged or not.

Anoma: I think sometimes what can happen, Bhante, is that somebody asks to be a Mitra, and maybe it's not going to be discussed for some time, and perhaps that doesn't get communicated back to the mitra so they think, 'well I've asked'

S: Yes, just been forgotten.

Anoma: and they don't know, but a letter at least saying it's acknowledged and we will be discussing it -

S: Right, yes, yes. Perhaps someone could bring that up at the next meeting of the Mitra Convenors.

Vidyasri: Because in fact we've had no system, so in a way it's been completely ad hoc, and actually, nothing, sometimes nothing does happen.

S: Sometimes people say to me, would-be Mitras: 'I asked if I could become a Mitra about two or three months ago, but I haven't heard anything yet.' It does occasionally happen. A particular Mitra Convenor may be away on holiday, so doesn't go along to the Mitra Convenors' meeting, and then there isn't another one for a month - and all that sort of thing happens, doesn't it? Though it shouldn't!

Vidyasri: Do you think it is crucial that, if somebody in themselves is fulfilling the four criteria to be a Mitra, the Order feel they can respond and if they can't, like if they can't provide a study group or they can't provide Order contact, do you think it is better then that the person waits until they can?

S: It's difficult to generalise. I wouldn't like to say. For instance, one of the guidelines is that the Mitra should have frequent contact or regular contact with Order members; but then they've got to be available for that, otherwise the Mitra will say, 'Look, I've become a Mitra and I've been told I've got to have regular contact with Order members, but where are they? I can't get hold of them!' One often hears this complaint, I'm afraid. Well, it's not quite a complaint, it's a regret: that 'Where are these Order members?' Someone told me just a couple of weeks ago that - I'm not sure whether it was a he or a she now, but it doesn't matter, the principle is the same - made an appointment to see an Order member three times, and it had been broken. Perhaps for a good reason, but three times it had happened, and that Mitra got a bit disappointed or a bit downhearted that this Order member was so elusive. (*Giggles*)

Kulaprabha: If it was just a question of not being able to provide a study group in the Mitra study course, given that they're not going to start up all that frequently, would that be a reason for someone not being

S: I'm not sure about that, but clearly if one accepts someone as a Mitra one recognises a degree of seriousness, and really one should be responding to that, which means a special arrangement of

some kind for the Mitras which is not available to those who are not Mitras. So really there doesn't seem - well, it would seem if one accepts someone as a Mitra one has a corresponding responsibility or obligation to provide the facilities which a Mitra needs. It's not just onesided that a Mitra pledges to follow these four guidelines, but the Order must make it possible for the Mitra to follow those guidelines. So I incline to think that Order members should just give more attention to that particular matter: rather than keep prospective Mitras waiting, just see if by any means they can't provide them with the facilities that they need - maybe by roping in extra Order members, those who aren't doing very much perhaps at present.

And the only long-term solution, of course, is a higher proportion of Order members to Mitras. But to some extent that depends on the Mitras themselves, doesn't it? But that also depends in turn upon their receiving a certain amount of co-operation from the existing Order members. But there's a lot one can do on one's own, all the same. And I suppose, from the Mitra's point of view, it's just a question of making it so obvious by whatever he or she does, that they are ready to be Mitras that the Order members feel that they've just got to accept them, they've no alternative.

In the Amitayur Dhyana Sutra, Amitabha is accompanied by two Bodhisattvas, Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta. Is the latter Vajrapani? If not, is anything known about him?

He is not the same as Vajrapani, though he is the same kind of figure. He represents strength or power or energy. *Mahamsthamaprapta* means 'he who has attained to great strength': *maha* is great, *sthama* is strength, *prapta* is 'one who has attained'. The other Bodhisattva accompanying Amitabha is, of course, Avalokitesvara, so you've got love and you have energy.

Dayamegha: In the long practice, you get Avalokitesvara and Vajrapani. I guess that's why I thought he was the same.

S: Well, they both represent energy or strength. You often get these pairs of figures flanking a Buddha. There's Ananda and Kasyapa, or there is Sariputra and Moggallana; or Bodhisattva figures. But it's usually either Wisdom and Compassion or Compassion and Energy.

Dayamegha: When you get a long list of names, sometimes for particular sutras, you get a lot of lists of names that are all of the same person, but different names, like 'Lovely Light' and 'Beautiful Light' and Light'. Is it just a way of enumerating qualities, or - ?

S: You can regard them as qualities or you can regard them as independent personalities. In a sense, they're both, because on that level, in the case of a Bodhisattva - one Bodhisattva is not as it were separate from another Bodhisattva in the same way that a human being is separate from another -

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S: - human being, so you can regard those names as representing qualities of the one Bodhisattva or you can regard them as names of different Bodhisattvas, it doesn't really matter. In a sense you could say it's neither one nor many, nor both nor neither. You see?

Dayamegha: Does he appear in others?

S: He's not a very prominent figure. As far as I know, he appears mainly in that sutra. But he is nearly always included in lists of the eight chief or great Bodhisattvas.

Vidyasri: He's, Bhante, isn't he?

Parami: It's interesting that *sthama* - *stamina*?

S: I don't know whether there's any etymological connection. I'd have to look that up. It could be. I think it's the sort of energy or strength that manifests in firmness, as far as I remember. Stability. The one who has attained great stability, because if you're stable you can't be moved, you've got that sort of strength. It's a sort of passive energy, if you like.

In an introduction to Shinran's 'Hymn to Amida', the editor talks about Amitabha's Pure Land in terms of the Trikaya doctrine as applied to an environment rather than a person/being. Do you think this is a useful way of explaining the existence of the Pure Land?

I'm not sure what this editor means by that, but I imagine that it's something like this - that if you think, for instance, of the *dhyanas*, the *dhyanas* represent certain levels of consciousness, certain levels of higher consciousness; and corresponding to those *dhyanas* there are various realms or worlds, the *devalokas*. So in much the same way, if you think in terms of the three *kayas* of a Buddha, there must be three worlds corresponding to those three *kayas*. So *Sukhavati* would be the world corresponding to that level as it were of a Buddha's personality which is called the *samboghakaya*, hence the *samboghakaya* dwells in *Sukhavati*. Just as his *nirmanakaya* dwells in the physical universe, so to speak, his *samboghakaya* dwells in *Sukhavati*, and his *dharmakaya* dwells in - well, the *Dharmadhatu*, you could say. I don't know whether this is actually what the editor meant, but this is a possible meaning, anyway.

Dayamegha: Is that the - when you were talking about *jnanasattvas* and *samayasattvas* - can you apply that to the Pure Lands as well?

S: I'm not sure what you mean by that.

Dayamegha: Ah, no, I'm a bit confused.

S: Because in the case of the *sambhogakaya* it is transcendental, it is a body of a Buddha, whereas a *samayasattva* is not transcendental, it's a mental construct.

Dayamegha: So I suppose meaning that you could imagine the Pure Land, the -

S: Mm. But you can certainly imagine that the Pure Land, you can have a sort of mental construct of the Pure Land which would correspond to the *samayasattva* in relation to the *jnanasattva*; yes, you could as it were picture or imagine *Sukhavati*, and that would correspond to that level, the *samayasattva* kind of level.

Parami: Would the *jnanasattva* then be more corresponding to the *Dharmadhatu* or *Dharmakaya*?

S: Hm - it depends what one is comparing with what; because the three bodies of a Buddha are all transcendental. So you can't say that the *jnanasattva* would correspond, say, to the *Dharmakaya* but not to the other two.

In the Mettā Bhāvana practice, how important is it in the last section to go around

each country by name? I sometimes find this method a bit abstract and laboured, and usually end the practice by trying to radiate out whatever mettā I've generated to all sentient beings, allowing the feeling to expand increasingly. Would it be better to apply this to beings country by country?

I think it is important, in the early stages of the mettā, to be directing your mettā towards concrete persons. This of course you do in the four stages and in the fifth stage; and when you go round country by country, say, from the fifth stage, if you adopt that method, I think it's important not just to think of, say, France, Germany, Australia, etc., but to think of people whom you know or about whom you know in each country. In other words, to stay with the concrete beings. Similarly if you are radiating out in any other way: stay with concrete beings. You can only drop the concrete beings and just expand your mettā when you've got a good momentum going. So stay with the concrete human beings when you radiate out in that way, for as long as feels necessary. When you feel that your mettā is flowing quite strongly, it doesn't need the support of the concrete beings. You can then, paradoxically, have a mettā which is not explicitly directed towards any living being. But if you were to happen to encounter any living being in that mental state, that mettā would automatically be directed to them.

Dayamegha: So the form of the mettā, in a sense, is a vehicle - it's just the vehicle for generating the

S: The thinking of the beings?

Dayamegha: Yes.

S: Yes, right. Then 'rather a mundane question' - this is what the question says.

My sense of direction in terms of finding my way about is poor. I have found that with increased mindfulness it has improved slightly, [Laughter] but it still causes me difficulties and doesn't help me to feel confident and outgoing when I go to new places. Do you think it is possible to improve this faculty, and if so how?

I think it's very simple: you should make more use of maps. (Laughter) Yes, that's the first thing to do, isn't it? People's capacities in this respect do differ widely. Someone used to drive me around some years ago who had been a travelling salesman for a couple of years, and he was astonishing, because we'd only be in a place literally - no exaggeration - five minutes, and he'd know his way about as though he'd been there for years, even the short cuts, the little back alleys and passages. In some uncanny sort of way, he knew it all. I suppose in his case it was just sheer experience, having been a travelling salesman, and perhaps having a knack for that sort of thing; though how one has that knack I really don't know. My own sense of direction, I must say, is moderately good; I can't say it's very good, it's moderately good, but I'm afraid I must confess I've made no effort to improve it - maybe because I rely on maps and things. But, yes, I think for practical purposes maps do really help. I don't know whether any of you attempted to get to this place without the help of a map, just relying on your sense of direction? It wouldn't have been very wise. What is this sense of direction? It could be a basic instinct, because some animals have it, birds have it, insects have it, don't they? Birds especially have it, in some of their migratory instinct - they fly thousands of miles every year, in some cases. They nest each year within a few yards of the place they nested the previous year. It's not fully understood even now, I think it's got something to do with their picking up on the position of the sun and all that kind of thing, we don't really know. So perhaps there's something like that deeply built into our organism and it seems to be more active in the case of

some people than others.

I believe the aborigines of Australia (laughter) have it really well developed. And perhaps we don't try to use our sense of direction, maybe that's why it doesn't operate very well. I'm sure the aborigines have got a very well-developed sense of - they don't lose their way, do they?

_____ : It's because we rely on maps too much!

S: We could try doing without them, if it didn't matter too much whether we reached our destination this week or next week. I think it's also a question of taking note of landmarks and things of that sort. For instance, if you go along a certain road or series of roads, and you know that you are going to have to retrace your steps - I don't know whether ladies do this, but gentlemen usually find their way around by the pubs. There's a pub on the corner of this road, and a pub in the middle of that road, and all that sort of thing. Maybe in the case of ladies it'll be beauty parlours or hairdressing salons? - (laughter) - or hat shops? Even confectioners! It doesn't really matter, but it's an exercise in mindfulness, isn't it? There's a pillar-box on the corner, all that sort of thing. Some people take these things in almost automatically, and can refer to them on the way back. So maybe mindfulness or awareness is part of it.

Anoma: Yes - it's my question. Well, that's what I've found: that if I take note of landmarks, that's where my comes in. But even somewhere like Norwich I can find my way about there now, but I sometimes just get a blank about where things are in relation to something else. And then I kind of intuitively follow my nose and find something, but I don't have an overall sense

S: Perhaps it's something to do also with a spatial sense. Some people have a better spatial sense than others, don't they? By spatial sense meaning an awareness of the relation between things in space - that this is here and that's over there, so it means that something else that you are aware of must be there. There are things like, for instance, being aware of the position of the sun, when it is visible; so you can tell roughly which is east and which is west, and north and south.

Parami: Sometimes I can find my way around really complicated country, the landscapes really easily, and I can find my way around towns..... somewhere and I got completely lost, walking in totally the wrong direction.

S: Well, in the urban landscape there are more landmarks, aren't there? Maybe one should just be more aware, and try to be aware of those things which do help you to orient yourself, whatever they may be - whether it's an awareness of the position of the sun or whether it's landmarks in the form of buildings or trees. Some people just follow their noses; dogs find their way around by scent. [Laughter] And human beings can do that with regard to certain places - you can usually find, say, a fish and chip shop by just following your nose, can't you? An Indian restaurant?

Kulaprabha: Maybe not a beauty parlour!

S: Well, you usually take note, don't you, are more aware, of things in which you are interested, things which are relevant to your life. If you are teetotal, you may not register the presence of a pub on the corner at all. But if you were going through a strange city and you noticed a sign which said 'Such-and-such Buddhist Centre', you'd really take that in, wouldn't you? You'd remember that, and probably be able to find your way there years afterwards. I always remember bookshops. I suppose also one could ask what one means by 'sense of direction' - does one mean being able to remember a place which you visited before and find one's way round, or whether one means being

able to follow directions which one has been given and find a place which one has not seen before?

Anoma: I think what I meant was more getting about in a spatial sense, because I can follow directions and I can, I can follow landmarks. But it's as if every time is almost like the first time, I still can't get a sense of where something is in relation to something else, although I can follow directions But it makes me feel a bit lost in a place when I don't know where things are in relation to other things. If I get to a certain mark, I know that something is there in relation to that mark.

S: Well supposing in the case of Norwich, if the Cathedral is there and you come down this street, then you've gone up that one, then you come down here, by the time you get to here you should know that the Cathedral is now there; or if you are coming that way, that it's now there. Do you see what I mean? You should be able to make the necessary adjustments.

Anoma: Yes - I can just about now, but it's taken me a year and a half.

S: So it may have something to do with something quite physiological, I don't know. I've not really looked into this. Your sense of balance is physiological, isn't it? So maybe one's spatial sense has some connection with something physiological. Could be something to do with early childhood experience, I don't know, it's something I've not investigated. Maybe it's worth investigating. I don't know where one would find information.

Anoma: I suppose if I just accepted it which is something that I find difficult, but then I wondered whether there was something I could

S: I think also that in times of stress one is literally disoriented. That expression itself is significant. You don't know where the east is, because you can usually orient yourself usually by the east, where the sun rises, but you are disoriented, you don't know in which direction the east lies. So I think when you are mentally disoriented, very often you are also physically disoriented. You don't know in which direction to go. So it may be symptomatic of some - here's me just getting away from your particular question - but it could be that a literal physical disorientation has got something to do in some cases with a psychological disorientation; you're acting out the fact that you just don't know where you are, you don't know in which direction to go.

Dayamegha: Jung would have it that you were a sensation type,

S: There's that aspect also, yes. And some people are just not aware of the world around them, anyway.

All right then, let's press on.

This seems to be an Abhidharma-type question:

*The five **niyamas** are described as a progressive series from physical/chemical interactions upwards.*

I take it everybody has got these five *niyamas* at their fingertips? [Laughter] Anyway, we'll take that as read.

*Thinking in terms of an evolving consciousness, do the different **niyamas** come into operation effectively at particular stages of the lower/higher evolution? For*

*instance, does the operation of the last **niyama** need an individual aware of and acknowledging a spiritual direction in their lives?*

As they are usually enumerated, the five *niyamas* are clearly a progressive series, so one therefore imagines that they could be correlated with the lower and higher evolution; so that leaves the question as to exactly how. I don't think it's too difficult, because you've got - what do you have first? You've got *utu-niyama*, which has been described as the physical inorganic order; well, clearly that is lower evolution, isn't it? Then there's *bija-niyama*, which is the physical organic, which as such belongs to the lower evolution. then you've got *citta-niyama* - *citta* meaning mind or consciousness in the broader sense; that seems to span both the lower and the higher. It, as it were, links the lower and the higher, because even animals have got some consciousness, but they don't have self-consciousness. So it would seem that *citta-niyama* is half in the lower evolution and half in the higher evolution. And then you've got *kamma-niyama*; so *kamma*, the capacity to create karma, implies personal responsibility, therefore individuality. So here it would seem you are, on at least the human level, you've just entered upon the higher evolution. And obviously *dhamma-niyama* means, yes, not only must you be a responsible individual but you must have some sense of what we call spiritual direction in your life. So it would seem, therefore, that the first two belong entirely to the lower evolution, the last two to the higher, and the middle one spans both, straddles both.

*People with a scientific background have an understanding of cause-effect operating within the field covered by the first **niyama**. Assuming these people to have an appreciation of these systems of cause-effect which isn't only intellectual but also emotional, do you think the formulation of the **niyamas** could be an effective way of introducing them to the wider dharmic perspective of conditionality, or do you see pitfalls?*

It might be a way of introducing them. I think the main point, the basic point, that one really is trying to put across is that there are different levels; there are different levels of being, different levels of consciousness, and it's possible in the case of those human beings to pass from a lower to a higher level by way of a deliberate effort in a systematic manner. This is what one is really trying to get across. It may be that the five *niyamas* will help; it may be that talking about the lower and higher evolution will help; maybe talking about the seven *bodhiyogas* will help; maybe talking about the principle of hierarchy and the different orders of devas and angels will help. But what we are really trying to put across is that there is a whole series of levels, especially levels of consciousness, which people can experience and which are progressive. That's the real point. Sometimes I think that this is the first point that one really needs to get across to the newcomer - that you are not just what you are, there are various potentialities, and these potentialities can be expressed in terms of a whole series of experiences and so on which are available to you if you only make the effort. And if you point out that already humanity has ascended through various levels, it makes it more convincing that they can ascend through further levels; that the level they at present occupy, that of, say, an average human being, is not the final one. This is really the point you are trying to put across, whether we put it across in modern terms, in terms of evolution, or whether we put it across in traditional terms, in terms of the stages of the Path.

But if people can see that they, so to speak, have grown and developed, they are more likely to be able to see that there is a possibility of further growth and development - especially if they do feel some sort of discontent within themselves with what they are at this moment. In other words, it's the principle of hierarchy, not as an organisational principle, but as a psychological and spiritual

principle: that there are higher levels to be attained. So it may be that the fact that Buddhism does have this teaching of the five *niyamas* may help some people to understand that.

Kulaprabha: I thought that - friends of mine who were also scientists - in some ways have quite a deep sort of idea about impermanence, but it's very limited, so that they focus down on particular areas, and - I suppose it gets left behind when they leave the lab at five o' clock. They don't sort of take it in themselves, and -

S: They still grieve when they are bereaved, eh?

Parami: Maybe people of a scientific background, maybe that's something we could do at some point is explore and write something about it. It's a bit like they have to use their talents sometimes,

S: Yes, but you also say in your question: 'Assuming these people to have an appreciation of these systems of cause-effect which isn't only intellectual but also emotional' - I think this is very important, that they are able to make an emotional connection and apply it to themselves: that they can grow, that they can develop.

_____ : And that link is made too rarely, the emotional.

Kulaprabha: I don't know - I wasn't thinking of it so much in terms of ... themselves but just that there's a lot of exhilaration in seeing through into how cause and effect works, and actually it's a very emotional and exciting experience, and I don't think it's that rare among scientists. It's just that it doesn't get taken further and you don't ask

Dayamegha: Yes, they don't take it into themselves, that's true. Or not

S: Then the question goes on:

This question arose after I read the first draft of Ratnaprabha's book *The Evolving Mind: Buddhism, Biology and Consciousness*. He seems to need a way of linking the first half of the book, about evolution in general, to the second half, about the Bodhisattva Ideal.

I think this is a point which several people who have read the draft have made, so he is now aware of that. I don't know how he's going to fill in the gap; I haven't given it any real thought myself.

Parami: It just strikes me it's quite exciting that people who have got a particular background and training, when they make connections themselves, like they obviously do, that if there's then a kind of catchment area of people that they can talk to that say I couldn't talk to because I don't have that background. I think that's quite exciting.

S: Because in the FWBO as a whole we are rather weighted on the arts side, aren't we? So we need to be aware of that, and have to try and open channels of communication with people who are not perhaps especially interested in the arts, but who have a scientific background. A group of in a way scientists whom we do have is, of course, the doctors, who in some ways do have a scientific background, don't they?

Kulaprabha: (laughing) I'm being non-committal!

S: How are we getting on? Oh, we're nearly at the end.

In the lecture on 'The Tibetan Wheel of Life' in the Tantric series, you say: 'The potentiality for Enlightenment from the god realm is very limited.' This is presumably because it's more unlikely that Insight will arise among beings who are complacent about their state and who aren't very aware of impermanence. Is that it?

This is certainly the traditional explanation; because usually, if you're very satisfied with what you have, and are quite happy and comfortable, you are less likely to make any effort to evolve. So then the question goes on:

*Could Insight not arise in the god realms as a response to beauty, to happiness or pleasure? Could it not arise out of **sukha** or **pṛiti** - two of the five factors of absorption - or at least on the basis of these?*

In principle, it could, but it seems that people are more likely to start thinking as a result of a painful than as a result of a pleasant experience; because when people suffer, or when some suffering befalls them, they say: 'Why should this happen? Why has it happened to me? Why did it have to happen?' But if some happy experience befalls them, they take it for granted. They don't say 'Oh, why should I be happy? Why not somebody else? What have I done to deserve this?' They don't look at it in that way, usually; they just take it for granted that's the way things are, the way things are meant to be. But I think in principle it's not impossible, and there is an approach, a whole approach, to the spiritual life, in this way, in terms of higher and higher degrees of beauty. You only have to raise your eyes a little bit, as it were, to see, well, above the grade that you are at present enjoying there is another one which is even more enjoyable, and which is nearer to the Absolute, as it were.

But that seems to be a path which relatively few people follow. They are more likely to remain attached to the lower level because it is unsatisfactory. It's a pity, because in Buddhism, according to the Buddha's teaching, you don't have to suffer. The Buddha did say somewhere in the Pali *Tipitaka* - I think I've quoted this before - that there are four kinds of disciples: those who, in the course of their spiritual life, go from happiness to happiness - they experience nothing but happiness the whole way up to Nirvana; others who go - I'm not sure I've got the phraseology right - from happiness to suffering - that is to say, the beginning of the spiritual life is easy but it gets very tough towards the end; and then those who have it very tough at the beginning and they're happy towards the end, they go from suffering to happiness; but there are some who have it (**groans, laughter**) tough all the way, I'm afraid.

But I don't think the Buddha means that it's determined. These are just four possibilities, and to a great extent it depends on you which possibility you actualise. Supposing at present you are enjoying very blissful states, so don't settle down in them, don't wait for some painful experience to come along and knock you out of that blissful state; just think to yourself: 'This is pleasurable, this is highly enjoyable, I have reached a high state, but there are other states beyond. Let me make an effort for those.' So you don't wait, as it were, for the painful experience. You continue in a more happy way, but that requires quite a bit of awareness and understanding. But it is possible. You don't have to suffer at all.

Vidyavati: So would you say that it would be like if someone was to have an experience of

Insight based on a very pleasurable experience, would it be more like an experience of one of the five factors of absorption - quite an elevated experience of pleasure within the mundane?

S: You could develop actual Insight, because you could say to yourself: 'This pleasurable experience, this dhyanic experience, is very pleasurable, but it isn't going to last.' So you can develop an awareness of the impermanence of the happy state, and that awareness will, or could develop into, a state of Insight. You don't have to develop Insight on the basis of a painful experience, although that can certainly happen. You can also develop it, if you're sufficiently aware and mindful, on the basis of a thoroughly happy experience - and perhaps you should do so.

Parami: Otherwise it's ... crisis management.

S: Right, yes, or stress management. Yes, yes. There should be happiness management too.

_____:

S: But only too often, what happens is that when people experience a blissful, happy state, for whatsoever reason and in whatsoever form, they tend to get a bit carried away and a bit intoxicated and therefore unmindful, and to that extent they fall away. You can see people being quite profoundly shaken by painful experiences, but they can get over them with remarkable rapidity and just be as they were before, apparently; which is a great shame.

But yes, though we often, or even usually, do learn through painful experiences, that doesn't mean that we can learn only from painful experiences; we can learn from pleasurable experiences too. We can make those a basis for the development of Insight. So it doesn't have to be tough going all the way.

So that seems to be it. I don't think I've missed any. Any follow-on point, or is that clear? We can develop Insight while having a very happy time on retreat. You don't have to go off and flog yourselves somewhere. [Laughter] But usually, I think when you are in a happy state a reminder is helpful. If there's a sort of voice coming from without, saying 'Well, yes, what you experience now is fine, and it's good that you're experiencing it, and it's good that you're in a happy, positive, blissful state, but just look beyond.' OK, then.

Voices: Thank you, Bhante.

(End of session and of tape)

[Next Tape and next session]

Those Present: Anoma, Malini, Vidyasri, Vidyavati, Padmavati, Dayamegha, Kulasri, Kulaprabha, Rosy Anderson, Rachel Lovering, Elaine Murray, Maggie Graeber

Sangharakshita: All ready? All right, first question.

I have heard someone quote, or misquote, you, Bhante, saying that within the integration process masculine qualities are harder to develop than the feminine. It is possible they meant that women find it harder to integrate their masculinity than men find it to integrate their femininity. Can you explain, please?

I think it's a misquotation, actually, because if it's the occasion I think it was that the questioner is referring to, I did say exactly the opposite. [Laughter] What I actually said on at least one occasion was that, at least within the context of Western culture and Western civilisation, it was more difficult for men to develop feminine qualities - 'feminine', of course in single inverted commas - than it was for women to develop 'masculine' qualities. And I gave a reason for that. I said that modern Western culture and civilisation seems to emphasise masculine qualities more than feminine, so that if as a woman you step out into the world, the nature of that world encourages you to develop the masculine qualities; it almost requires you to develop them in order to survive. But a man who, having developed the masculine qualities, then wants to develop his feminine qualities, in a way doesn't have that advantage, because the world into which he steps or into which he is already immersed doesn't encourage the development of those feminine qualities. This was my reasoning on that particular occasion.

Vidyasri: It's interesting -

S: But I must say this was a sort of thought which occurred to me at the time - this is some years ago, when someone asked a question. I don't think I've followed up this line of thought particularly since. But thinking about it just now, it does seem to me to be very much the case that the world, the public world, so to speak, the world of public life, is governed much more by masculine qualities than feminine ones; so that if one wants to function in that world as, say, a woman does when she steps out of the home, for instance, you have to develop those masculine qualities. So society helps women to develop masculine qualities - that is, our modern Western society - more than it helps men to develop feminine qualities. If anything, a man is discouraged from developing feminine qualities by the very nature of the world in which he is required to function. Any comments on that?

Rosy: Yes, Bhante. In that case do you think that the modern Western world doesn't encourage feminine qualities *per se*, even in England?

S: It does seem that public as it were organised life is *per se* of such a nature that it has to be carried on in a masculine way if carried on at all. It's rather difficult, say, to imagine fighting an election in a gentle, feminine sort of way. You'd have to abolish that whole system, wouldn't you? Dare I cite the famous case of Mrs. Thatcher, who seems to have developed all sorts of qualities which are usually regarded as masculine qualities; without those she could hardly have survived. She seems not, as far as one knows, to bring her feminine qualities into play in her public life at all, even though one is assured she is a very affectionate wife and mother, but those qualities remain in the home - it would seem. I hope I'm not being unfair to the lady, but she seems to function politically almost entirely with the help of masculine qualities, in fact masculine qualities of a quite pronounced type.

Vidyasri: Do you think that's really helpful to women, or men - ?

S: I think up to a certain point, because sometimes I think if one speaks, say, of masculine and feminine qualities at all, you can speak of them as occurring, both of them, on two levels. There are what one might call the more positive masculine qualities and more positive feminine qualities; but it seems as though there's a sort of caricature of each of those, which often passes for masculine or passes for feminine. For instance, in the case of masculinity, some of the extreme macho attitudes one encounters; they're not really - at least it seems to me - really masculine, they're almost caricatures of masculinity. Sometimes they are almost comic. And in the same way, so-called feminine qualities seem like caricatures of real femininity. When you see, for instance, the

typical female siren - how shall I say? - fluttering her eyelashes and all that sort of thing, it seems like a quite comic caricature of genuine femininity. So I think, if one isn't careful, our modern Western society very often encourages those less positive masculine qualities, not so much perhaps the genuinely - in all cases, at least - the genuine masculine qualities. And perhaps it also encourages some of the less positive feminine qualities. So it's a question of developing real masculinity, real femininity, and harmonising those; not some sort of uneasy compromise between this caricature of masculinity and caricature of femininity.

Vidyavati: So would you say it was still true of the Sangha within the FWBO that - well, to some extent we have brought those conditionings in with us, but it might still be difficult to develop the masculine - ?

S: Well, one must bring outside conditionings in with them, I think it's inevitable. Some bring more of conditioning than others, and we have to face up to that. And perhaps even within the Movement itself, women tend - perhaps, at least in some cases - not to assert themselves sufficiently; and men perhaps in some cases tend to assert themselves more than perhaps is justified. One needs to try to achieve a proper balance. Quite often, if there's a meeting of men and women, if one isn't careful - especially if the women are in a minority - the men will do all the talking, and the women will just sit quietly, either thinking their own thoughts or whatever. But especially within the spiritual community one needs to encourage an equal participation, both in discussion and also decision-making.

Dayamegha: Would you say that that - there was this thing about women perhaps depending on men collectively ?

S: Mm, yes, I did speak in those terms some time ago. I think this is a possible danger. I don't say I necessarily see it happening a lot, but I think it's something one needs to keep one's eye open for in the case of women, that they may have, say, emancipated themselves from dependence on one individual man, but they might none the less still be dependent on men as a whole - I'm thinking within the Movement; the men Order members around their Centre, for instance. It is perhaps a subtler form of dependence, because it isn't connected with any personal, sexual or emotional dependence.

Dayamegha: Do you think this might be connected with a lack of assertiveness on - ?

S: Yes; also, to be fair, it's due in some cases just to sheer lack of numbers. If there were an equal number, say, of women Order members, they might be more inclined to raise their voices; but if there are one or two women Order members and twenty or thirty men Order members it's perhaps a bit more difficult.

Vidyasri: It's interesting, because I think there's also - this is my perception at the LBC as well - a tendency for men to want to have the support of the women, and that's quite conditioned too as far as I can see, it's like it's not all the time, but I see it as a tendency, that if the women don't turn up for something I can feel they feel the lack because there's this tendency to want

S: Well, there is a lack, even quite objectively, because the women also are part of the scene.

Vidyasri: Yes, but it's more this - it's just in the same way as women tend to look to men to lead, I can notice a slight tendency for men to want women to be there to be supportive emotionally.

S: Well, it comes down perhaps to the sort of situation one finds between individuals, that you can only believe in somebody if they also believe in you; so there's a sort of mutual dependence. He can, say, support her, but he has the strength to support her only if she supports him. One does see that sort of pattern. So what really is necessary is when each individual tries to stand on his or her own feet and give whatever objective support is necessary to the other person or other people.

But anyway, just coming back to the original question: it's a question of the support or help that one receives from the surrounding society, and I think there's more help given to those who wish to develop their masculinity, or masculine qualities, than to those who want to develop their feminine qualities. So in a way, even though sometimes the masculine qualities, or the type of masculine qualities that society thinks desirable, are not completely positive, a woman therefore in a way has an easier time of it than a man; that is, a woman who is trying to develop masculine qualities, more than a man who is trying to develop feminine qualities. He will receive from society at large, usually, no encouragement at all; if anything, discouragement, even ridicule.

Anoma: I think it also applies to women in developing their own feminine qualities. A lot of women feel they shouldn't do that, or they'll be too vulnerable if do that. And they feel they've got to work on ...

S: In the public world, yes; in the world of, say, politics and competitiveness, yes, it does seem as though feminine qualities place you at a disadvantage. Unless, of course, you function surreptitiously and you're the mistress of some famous public man, [Laughter] and pull the strings from behind the scenes. That has been known to happen, but it's not a very honest way of functioning.

Vidyasri: I think it's quite complex, because I think there are different messages, because it's fairly new that there's been this emphasis on a very masculine approach, and for women to join that too. So I think as women we've various - there's that expected of one in the public world, to be masculine; but, certainly in my generation, there's still somewhere a kind of more traditional conditioning behind that, which is that you will get married, and that you will be supported, and that actually you won't have to develop your masculine qualities. And I think that certainly for a certain generation there are the two messages coming at once, which is quite

S: I was thinking, say, of the business and professional field, where a woman who enters that field has to enter as it were at present on masculine terms, and develop masculine qualities, just in order to succeed, if she wants, say, to be a -

Vidyasri: But that's only been in the last twenty years that she's really entered that field, twenty or thirty years.

S: It's within the lifetime of some of you. But on the other hand, for men there is no corresponding field to enter which they have to develop feminine qualities, it would seem.

Vidyasri: Except for in a way with the feminist slant, when they are encouraged to look after the kids while the woman is at work; but that's not quite so universal

S: That doesn't draw much general approval.

Rachel: I think also that men who get involved with the feminist world do it through guilt sometimes.

S: Yes. Yes, either personal or collective. All right, then, let's pass on.

When you die, Bhante, -

a little reminder, mustn't forget that -

do you think the Order will be strong enough to continue to grow and remain on the Middle Way?

I don't really know, I just hope so, I just hope so. The Order, of course, will be as strong as its individual members; there's no such thing as the Order as an entity. If individuals are strong and they continue to grow, then presumably the Order will likewise. So

How do you stop a spiritual movement becoming an organisation with rules and regulations?

This is quite a cunning question, actually!

What is the relationship between rules and criteria?

So why do I say it's a rather cunning question? - well, not intentionally so, I'm sure [Laughter], but - I seem to recognise the handwriting - but never mind about that. So 'How do you stop a spiritual movement becoming an organisation with rules and regulations?' So what the question really, one could say, means is 'What rules and regulations have to be laid down to stop a spiritual movement becoming an organisation with rules and regulations?' [Laughter] It really amounts to that, doesn't it? Because, again, a spiritual movement consists of individuals, and if those individuals want rules and regulations or bind themselves with rules and regulations, the Movement will do likewise, because the Movement is just them writ large. So again, the only way of stopping a spiritual movement becoming an organisation with rules and regulations is for each individual member of that movement to take responsibility for themselves in such a way that they don't need rules and regulations.

So 'What is the relationship between rules and criteria?' More often, I say 'rules and principles', but it comes to the same thing - that the principle represents the broad general criterion, one could say, and it becomes a rule, so to speak, when it's applied to a specific situation or context. But you have to keep the principle or criterion in mind all the time. For instance, I've explained this, I think, in the *Ten Pillars*, non-violence, abstention from harming living beings, is a principle, but you can reduce that to specific situations. You're a vegetarian - not that there's a rule, 'Thou shalt be a vegetarian', but because vegetarianism represents the application of the principle of non-violence to the sphere of eating, to the sphere of food. So things become just rules when you forget the underlying principle and you start following the rule for its own sake; and sometimes in such a way that the principle is actually negated. For instance, to give a common example from Eastern Buddhism, there is a rule in the Vinaya that bhikkhus do not eat after 12 o'clock. So what is the principle underlying that rule? Is it clear? What is the principle?

Vidyasri: Not overeating.

S: Not overeating.

_____ : -

S: Well, exactly. But some bhikkhus will get up extra early in the morning before dawn, have a meal as soon as dawn breaks, and have another one about nine o'clock, and another one at half-past eleven. So they are keeping the rule, but they've forgotten the principle. And if we're not careful we can do that in all sorts of ways.

For instance, you might be observing silence, but there might be a lot of note-passing and lots of little giggles and signs and all that sort of thing, so actually you are communicating, in a way, employing a sort of language, so that the observance of the silence just becomes a sort of formality, it's just a rule that you should not actually speak during that period. So that is the nature of the relationship, one might say, between rules and criteria or principles. So one must always ask oneself, if one is following or observing a particular rule, what is the underlying principle, and am I, through the observance of the rule, remaining faithful to that principle?

Do you have any large plans that you have had to put aside because there is not going to be enough time for you to fulfil them?

I don't really know how much time I've got left, do I? 'Large plans' - well, there's all sorts of things I'd like to do, but they are more extensions of things I'm already doing. I'd like to spend more time writing; I'd like to spend more time with people; I'd like to spend more time going on lecture tours. So all these things represent, as I said, extensions of existing activities - not that I've got some completely different plan, large or small, that I wish I had time to put into effect. I don't think so, anyway. I'd like to write quite a few more books. I'd like to ordain quite a few hundred more people - thousands more! I'd like to give lots more lectures; I'd like to see a lot more people. I'd like to do a lot more reading. I'd like to spend lots of time quietly at Guhyaloka, not doing anything in particular. I'd like to have time to write poems - oh dear, yes; I haven't written any poems for a long time.

Dayamegha: Are there any major countries that you would like to see?

S: Well - so many! China, Russia, America. South America, yes, I'm especially interested in South America. But even that represents an extension of existing activities into new fields. No, I'm afraid many of these things I'll have to do vicariously, that is to say through other people, through Order members, not personally. I think I'll have to be careful not to try to do too much, and not try to spread myself too much and concentrate more on essentials - mainly, I think, on literary work. That's my present thinking, anyway.

*When you Go for Refuge within the Western Buddhist Order, the Insight practice you receive takes the form of a visualisation of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. Given that there are many other **vipassana** meditations, is there a reason for this emphasis on visualising an Enlightened being? Why not the contemplation of the twelve **nidanas**, for example?*

Well, yes, one can certainly do these other vipassana-type practices, but there is a reason why the visualisation of a Buddha or Bodhisattva - perhaps especially a Bodhisattva - is connected with the ordination, and that is that the Buddha or Bodhisattva is not just a being outside yourself; well, that's what it seems like at present, but in reality that Buddha or Bodhisattva represents what you yourself can become. In fact, on a deeper level, one might say, a very much deeper level (and I

usually use this sort of language only with caution) is in fact yourself, so to speak, outside time, outside space.

So if one thinks in terms of a Buddha or Bodhisattva, one is thinking in terms of a person, not an abstract principle or idea; you are not thinking in terms of impermanence or Reality or the Absolute, it's an Enlightened being, because that's what you aspire to become, or what you basically are: an Enlightened being. And all the different insights and *vipassanas* are aspects of the wisdom and understanding of that being, who is essentially you.

Dayamegha: Why did you say 'more particularly a Bodhisattva' rather than a Buddha?

S: I think it's easier for us to identify with the Bodhisattva. It's as though the Buddha is the central sun, and the Bodhisattvas are the rays of that sun; and those rays as it were connect up with us. And it's easier for us to go, I think, to the Bodhisattva figure rather than to the Buddha directly. But just as if we follow the ray we go back to the sun, in the same way if we follow the Bodhisattva we arrive at the Buddha. Also, of course, from another point of view - this occurs to me just now - there are male and female Bodhisattvas, but we don't have male and female Buddhas in the historical sense. So if one does find it difficult to identify with a being of the opposite gender, well, in the case of the Bodhisattvas there are female Bodhisattvas. I don't know whether that is actually a problem, but if it is for anybody, if it is easier for, say, a woman to think of herself as Tara than it is for her, say, to think herself as Avalokitesvara, there is Tara, there is that option.

Vidyasri: I have heard some women say that - or even that they've had a reluctance to connect with Tara, and realised it was because of almost a reluctance of really connecting that they as a woman could gain Enlightenment.

S: Well, they've got the Buddha's word for it. But there's also the evidence of the Theris. Perhaps their stories should be more widely known, because they are historical characters. That does, perhaps, at least for some people, make a difference. They are not, as it were, mythic beings. It's also interesting, of course, that quite a number of men Order members do the Tara practice, the Green Tara or the White Tara. They seem not to have any difficulty in making that connection; in fact, in some cases are very strongly drawn to that particular figure.

Dayamegha: Are you very often surprised by people's choice of Bodhisattva or Buddha form?

S: No, I can't say that I am, no.

Dayamegha: Is it reasonably predictable, then?

S: I won't say it's predictable; sometimes rather unpredictable. I do notice, though, that very often people seem to think in quite psychological terms. For instance, if they feel that they are lacking in energy, they tend to go for Padmasambhava - which is understandable, because one needs to make the connection. But it isn't that Padmasambhava represents energy in a one-sided psychological sense. But the important thing is to make the connection. If you make the connection in that way, fair enough. ... your practice, doing the Padmasambhava practice, and you'll gradually get more and more deeply into it, and transcend your original, more psychological standpoint.

All right, another set of questions.

What do you see as the possible pitfalls of using counselling techniques within a kalyana mitra relationship, if at all?

I don't see any real pitfalls, if the *kalyana mitra* relationship is a strong and positive one, and if you remember that it's a question of using the counselling techniques, not regarding them just as ends in themselves, it's really as simple as that. And of course the techniques themselves, I think at least to some extent, represent procedures that any sensitive and insightful person might adopt quite spontaneously in the course of their communication with other people who needed help, so to speak. Though not techniques in the sense of little tricks. For instance, that you should listen. Well, you'd think it was a commonsense thing, but lots of people just don't listen. If you want to counsel - I don't know if they do tell you this, but I imagine it's one of the things that you are told: at least listen to what the other person has to say before you start counselling them. Lend ear to what they have to say. One would have thought it was common sense, but probably not everybody does that. They are so ready with their advice, they don't even give the other person a chance to say what they want the advice about.

_____ : Is that the end of that?

S: No - did anyone have any specific point in mind, any particular counselling technique that they felt might constitute a pitfall? Or was it just a general question? I don't recognise this handwriting. Oh - oh. (Laughter.)

Malini: No, I didn't actually have -

S: I wondered about the spelling there! Anyway, that's neither here nor there.

Malini: No, I mean we're going to have a retreat for Order members who are involved in counselling techniques, and I was just curious to see what you

S: Well, from what I've heard as regards Order members who are doing counselling, it all seems to go quite well and to be very useful.

Malini: I also like - in the past, I haven't found it very much recently in the Friends - in the past there was quite a downer on anything psychological.

S: I imagine counselling techniques are not necessarily in themselves psychological. People can use them on the psychological level, but if they are used within the context of a *kalyana mitra* relationship presumably they, by virtue of that fact, transcend the purely psychological level anyway, at least in the long run. I must say I don't have any particular worry personally in this particular field - that of counselling. As -

Malini: I think there is confusion. Some people think anything to do with counselling is automatically psychological.

S: Well, perhaps it's a question of definition. Perhaps counselling, as counselling is understood and practised outside the FWBO, it may well be just psychological, just because the horizon of the counsellor is bounded by psychology. But in the case of the FWBO, if an Order member, for instance, made use of counselling techniques, for want of a better term, the mere fact that they were an Order member, and perhaps counselling either another Order member or a Mitra or a Friend, would mean that they couldn't be functioning in a purely psychological manner, one would hope at least; not in the long run, though they might address themselves to a particular psychological problem in a particular session. But their horizon would not be bounded by that, really. Because

they would be, presumably, helping people with their psychological problems, if they thought in those terms, in order to free them up for something that went further than the psychological problems or psychological level. But if there is still any confusion at the end of the retreat, maybe someone should write to me and raise whatever questions could not be resolved.

But this is not something that has bothered me personally, I must say - that is to say, as operated by or employed by Order members, especially in relation to other people within the Movement. Because again, as I said a little while ago, some of these techniques are procedures one adopts quite spontaneously if one is quite sensitive to others, whether one is communicating on a psychological level or on a spiritual level; presumably some of them were used by the Buddha himself, but they were not separately labelled and identified, or taught in that systematic way.

Vidyasri: There's something I've thought about, just wondered about, in relation to that. It's a slightly different angle, because it's not, say, within a *kalyana mitra* relationship; but as counselling, say, becomes more used in the FWBO, something I've wondered - it could either be even an Order member doing counselling, or it could be somebody from outside the Friends - is whether there would be any tendency for that to replace *kalyana mitrata*; and where this comes from a little bit, which may no longer be the case, is when I stayed at another Centre a few women were doing counselling, and I noticed that when something came up in their minds that was difficult they suggested to each other 'Go and see your counsellor', rather than talk to each other about the difficulty. And it just sort of - well, like Samata setting up at the LBC, and I know people are very interested, they want to go to her for counselling; and I'm just interested where people almost find that easier because it's a role and they pay and they can open up in the specific situation, whereas actually they don't know how to develop a friendship, and yet they can unburden themselves in that situation. And I've been thinking about that area.

S: Yes, I think there are two things that can be said here. One is I don't think you can separate counselling and *kalyana mitrata* quite so sharply as your question suggests; because in the course of pursuing a relationship of *kalyana mitrata*, whether formalised as such or not, you can't help sometimes, as I've mentioned before, quite spontaneously bringing in counselling techniques. Even so, that counselling, one could say, is an integral part of a *kalyana mitra* relationship, and it may even be two-way: the counselling may be mutual - not that one person is always counselling the other, but, according to circumstances, sometimes you may be counselling the other person, sometimes they may be counselling you. Sometimes it may be so mutual that it's difficult to say who is counselling who. You're both benefiting from the exchange. But on the other hand, I think there is truth in what you say about people tending to try to deal with problems that arise in connection with their relationship with other people, not with those people but with somebody else quite outside the situation. That may sometimes be necessary, when the first two people have got themselves into a real *impasse* and can't get out of it. One of them may need the help of a third party who acts as a sort of facilitator, and sometimes a counsellor who is the third party can help break up the logjam. But whether or not that is the case, the original two people have to sort out any difficulties at first hand between themselves personally. So going to a third party in the person of a counsellor can only be a temporary measure, and perhaps in some cases the readiness to go to a counsellor is a means of avoiding the original situation. I think this is quite possible. Well, no doubt it does sometimes happen.

Vidyasri: When I thought about it, I thought there isn't a danger so long as people have real friendships. And then possibly you could use a counsellor for temporary periods of time, usefully; but if people don't have real friendships, then I could see going to counselling as being an avoidance of creating real friendships, actually.

S: I'd be rather surprised if two people who had a relationship of *kalyana mitrata*, whether formalised as such or not, felt the need, or either of them felt the need, to go to an outside counsellor. It would seem rather odd.

Dayamegha: What if there was some pattern in your background, or something, that the other person in the relationship just didn't seem to be able to help you articulate? Sometimes that can be useful in a counselling situation, but it's to no depreciation of the relationship.

S: In that case, the counsellor would need to refer the person back to the original *kalyana mitrata* relationship. Not that the person who went to the counsellor should leave the *kalyana mitra* relationship and transfer to the counsellor.

Dayamegha: Oh no!

S: Another point that occurred to me - I don't know whether this question has arisen - but in orthodox psychoanalysis there is a phenomenon called transference, and I think this may take place as between the client, let us say, and the counsellor; and the counsellor will need to know how to deal with that. Supposing someone is going to an analyst or a counsellor for help in sorting out problems, say problems of relationships; maybe a problem with your mother, let's say. A stage may come when the client starts experiencing the analyst or the counsellor as mother, and reacting to him or her as though he or she was mother, and feeling towards him or her personally those very emotions that were formerly felt towards mother. The analyst or the counsellor has got to be able to deal with that. There's also a phenomenon which is called counter-transference, in which the unskilled analyst does the same thing with regard to the client, and then they do get themselves into a mess.

Vidyasri: I think in a way it's also just that because I know as an Order member that one does at times come into friendships, that you do counsel in a sense; and so it seems strange some people being paid [*Laughter*] for this service; whereas you feel yes, you're supplying it most of the week, free!

S: I think sometimes it happens that people don't always appreciate or value what they get for free. It's unfortunate, but I think this is the case with at least some people.

(End of side one side two)

S: Perhaps there's something to be said for all Order members, as part of their training, to learn, semi-professionally at least, the rudiments of counselling, so that it's incorporated in the armoury, so to speak, of each individual Order member - so that it becomes a natural part of every Order member's communication with every other Order member and also with Mitras and Friends. So that there's no separate caste, as it were, of people who are functioning as counsellors. Otherwise, if you're not careful, they become sort of priests. You pay them to do for you what you should be doing for yourself, or yourselves.

Dayamegha: Do you think that's always the case, though? - that you should be doing those things for yourself?

S: I think, barring anything verging on the psychiatric, two Order members, or even an Order member and Mitra working together, should be able to sort everything out between themselves,

without calling on as it were expert assistance. Well, to put it another way, all Order members should be experts to some extent in this particular field, as part of their equipment as Order members. It's all part of an ability to communicate. It's not something that should be left to experts, but which the average Order member should be able to do. You can't, say, look after your own health completely; you do need doctors of various kinds, because not every individual person can study medicine to the extent that a doctor has to. But I think every Order member can learn enough of, say, counselling, and perhaps a few other simple things of that sort.

Rosy: Do you have anything in mind for the 'other few simple things'?

S: Well, for instance, dietetics. I think everyone who does a bit of cooking in a community should be aware of dietetics and should be able to prepare meals that are balanced, from the nutritional point of view. Though that doesn't mean that you spend four years at a catering college or anything of that sort, but at least you know the rudiments. Or, on a quite different level, grammar and spelling and typing and - I won't include word processing, I don't really approve of that - but some people might consider it essential equipment. If you're going to work in a Centre, some basic bookkeeping, elementary bookkeeping; at least the treasurer should know elementary bookkeeping! *[Laughter]* Should also be able to count, know the difference between debit and credit. *[Laughter]* Well, it's not always been the case, you know. It started from very humble beginnings.

Anyway, another question from the same paper:

Traditionally, on what side of the shrine should the leader sit? Some say it's the Buddha's right, others that it's our right side which should face the Buddha.

I was thinking about this - I remember that the Tibetan tradition certainly is that the leader, or person leading the puja, should sit on the Buddha's right as you face the Buddha, that is to say they keep the Buddha on their right. But the assistant, as it were, the supporter, as we might say, always sits opposite. So it isn't disrespectful to sit on the other side. We see in images the Buddha is flanked by Sariputra and Moggallana, or Ananda and Kasyapa. But as far as I remember, among Tibetans the rule was that if there's one leader, or the chief leader, let us say, where there are several, he sits with the Buddha on his right.

_____ : We do the opposite, generally, in the Friends, don't we?

S: There must have been a reason for that. I can't remember now what it was.

_____ : I think it was so people didn't fall in the coal hole at Sakura.

S: No, it wasn't! *[Laughter]* - because I sat in front of the coal hole, -

_____ : Precisely, so that other people -

S: Oh, other people! *[Laughter]* It could have been that! Yes - it could have been that reason. People might have done anything in those days. Perhaps I just didn't want to see a pair of legs disappearing down the coal hole. It could have been like that. Just shows you how tradition starts. Otherwise you might be down there still.

_____ : You don't see any reason for changing?

S: Not really, no. Unless any consideration was to arise that I hadn't been aware of before - no. Sometimes you find, in some Buddhist countries, the leader leads from the middle, sitting with his

back to the Buddha; though usually there's an enormous image, so his back is really against the lotus throne, not against the Buddha's own figure. It's the sort of point to which I'm not inclined to attach too much importance.

*In a recent **Shabda** Vessantara reported your comment that the term 'personal myth' seems to be used in an aberrant way by some people in the FWBO; that it had almost come to mean your own subjective myth which was personal to you, and that to talk of a 'myth' in this way is a contradiction in terms.*

Inasmuch as a myth is, almost essentially, it would seem, something collective. So your personal myth would be not just a myth that concerned only you, but your part, so to speak, in a larger myth, a story; myths are usually cast in the form of stories, anyway.

Vessantara also reported that you had said perhaps it would be better, rather than talking of personal myth, to simply say that a particular archetype appealed to you.

Yes, sometimes it seems to me that people are using the expression 'personal myth' when they really are referring to an archetype to which they were personally attracted. I thought that was probably leading to some confusion.

If I remember correctly, when you first introduced the term 'personal myth' several years ago, you talked in terms of it being the fulfilment of a gestalt. Could you please say more about this, and how this connects with one being attracted to a particular archetype?

I can't remember what I said on that occasion, or with what in mind I said it, but I would distinguish between a gestalt and an archetype. A gestalt usually represents the wholeness of a thing, as distinct from its parts, or even from a thing as the sum total of parts, whereas archetype suggests the original pattern of something, so there is obviously an overlap between *gestalt* and archetype, but they are not quite the same thing, none the less. An archetype is a visionary pattern, very often conceived as existing on some higher level of reality, and the phenomenon in question is modelled upon that, or partakes of that on its own lower level, or reflects that on its own lower level. But the *gestalt* seems to refer more to the aspect of wholeness of a thing, as distinct from its parts or even, as I said, as distinct from the sum total of all those parts. It isn't necessarily conceived of as existing, so to speak, on a higher level in the way that an archetype is.

Vidyasri: You do mention that in the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa* lectures.

S: Is it so?

Vidyasri: Can you remember - because one we were studying it last session - in one of them you mentioned about the personal myth and the *gestalt*?

S: Ah, I'll have to look that up, then. But anyway, that is how I would roughly distinguish between the archetype and the *gestalt*. Whereas a personal myth is as it were your own sort of personal transhistorical story, one could say. Perhaps I need to think more about that. I used the expression in passing; I don't think I've thought about it since. For instance, you think of the myths of Greece and Rome - well, they're stories about gods and goddesses and their exploits and adventures, so your personal myth would be a story about you, but not reflecting your historical biography but what was happening to you, your adventures and discoveries and explorations on

some other level. In a way.

Vidyasri: So does it have to relate to more people than just you?

S: It usually would involve, of course, more people than you, because you don't usually have your adventures and all that in isolation. I've just now thought of what may serve as a kind of example, from a story by D.H. Lawrence. The story is called *The Princess* - I think it's called *The Princess* - anyway, it relates to the stories about a father and his daughter, and the father really dotes on the daughter, in such a way that he treats her as a little princess, and she grows up with this idea of herself as a little princess, and treats everybody like that and relates to everybody in that way; whereas, of course, she's not a princess at all. You could say that was her personal myth, the myth that she was living out that she was in fact a little princess, and other people were her subjects and servants, and so on. Here obviously there's an element of unreality too, because she isn't a little princess; but in imaginative terms she is, because that's how she sees herself, that is how she experiences herself - until, of course, in the story she has a rude awakening. As in this case, her father has encouraged her to think of herself in those terms, because she was daddy's little princess; so she started thinking of herself, well, just as a little princess for everybody.

Rosy: Could that be more accurately described as a theme rather than a myth?

S: 'Theme' seems to be more general, doesn't it? You can speak of someone living out a myth, but you can hardly speak of them living out a theme.

Vidyasri: No, right, they might have a theme in their mind, but that's different, isn't it, living out the theme ?

S: Yes. A theme in a way is more abstract, isn't it?

Vidyasri: So in fact one's personal myth could be, for example, that one was a sort of tragic heroine

S: Right, yes.

Vidyasri: and that through your life you then create and relate to people in those terms.

S: Yes, or a martyr. Or a misunderstood genius. *[Laughter]* That would be quite a common one. The unrecognised hero.

Rachel: Do you think having a personal myth can stop you from taking responsibility for yourself?

S: It can in some cases put you out of touch with reality, as in the case of the little princess. It's difficult to say whether it necessarily relieves you of personal responsibility. I suppose it does, in a way.

Anoma: When you originally introduced the term, you seemed to be almost encouraging people on that seminar to think of their lives more in those terms.

S: Yes, thinking of their life in mythic terms, rather than developing a myth which was a substitute for, or an escape from, their lives. It's as though their life as they actually live it has a mythic dimension. For instance, you might have experienced difficulties and obstacles in getting here,

getting to the place of the retreat, so you could look at that in a sort of mythic way, thinking of yourself as a sort of heroine overcoming all sorts of dangers and difficulties and dragons and monsters. You might actually experience it like that, and even think that Mara was deliberately obstructing you. So that would be giving it all a mythic dimension, and you could develop this to the point where you were living out a sort of personal myth.

Anoma: I got the impression also that - this is where the *gestalt* thing came into it - you were saying that almost within each person there was this thing that was already kind of written, and it was a question of being receptive. (?)

S: Yes, you are all the time living on that mythic level did you but know it; something like that. I can't remember what I actually said then; I'll probably have to look it up.

Vidyasri: So how does that tally with what Vessantara said about Shabda?

Anoma: Well, it seemed that just some people were thinking of 'personal myth' -

S: Yes, some people seem to be using it in a way of just their personal whims and fancies, almost. That was the impression I got, listening to people.

Anoma: But then you said that perhaps it's better just to think in terms of what archetype attracts you, it seems to me that that didn't involve - well, I found it quite fascinating when I first heard you talking in this

S: Yes, it wasn't that I was repudiating the original idea of living out a personal myth, but I thought that the most appropriate term for what people, I think on that particular occasion, were talking about was not personal myth - it didn't seem to be that at all - but preferring a particular archetype. It was not that I was repudiating the idea of a personal myth, but I was saying that that expression was not the appropriate one for what they on that retreat - or some people on that retreat - seemed to be talking about.

Anoma: Ah. I think people are quite interested whenever 'personal myth' is mentioned.

S: Yes, they seemed to be using the term very loosely, without much idea of what it meant at all. I think this does sometimes happen - a new phrase goes round, usually originating, I'm afraid, from me - and it becomes a sort of catchword, and people often use it without really stopping and asking themselves what it means. It's just a sort of 'in' term or 'in' expression.

Anoma: I think even the tape I heard when we were originally talking about it, most of the people didn't seem to understand what you were saying, even at the time.

S: Yes. Sometimes, say, in a lecture I use a phrase or coin a phrase which is clear within that context, but which is then taken out of that context and used in a very general and loose way, which doesn't always have much meaning.

All right then, let's go on.

In a Question and Answer session on the lecture on 'Psychological Types' from the 'Higher Evolution of the Individual' series, I heard that you had said that knowing what type of person you were was important so that you could work on yourself

quite specifically, not generally.

Yes, that's true. I referred to the psychological types as just representing helps to self-understanding; self-understanding being what I was particularly concerned with. But the various classifications of psychological types I felt were, at least for some people, keys to self-understanding. Then the question goes on:

I have found that what I have learned from my astrological birth chart has helped me in the process of knowing myself, providing a kind of mirror in which I could see myself more clearly - almost like a mandala of my various qualities and tendencies. This has helped me to work on myself. However, I have heard you do not have a positive view of astrology as an indirect means. Is this because you think its basic premises are in conflict with dharmic principle?

Well, there are different ways of looking at astrology. The aspect I'm not happy about is the allegedly predictive element, which suggests a sort of determinism: that your fate is written in your stars, kind of thing. I think some astrologers at least regard that as a debasement or misuse of astrology, though it's a very popular one.

But there is another aspect of astrology - I'm not quite sure what it's called; it probably has got a term - a sort of characterological aspect, where, as the question says, the birth chart is used as a key to character. There may be something in that; I'm not quite sure about it, because I find it difficult to see to what extent it is as it were scientifically true, and to what extent you take it as a sort of basis of contemplation, in much the same way that you do the I Ching, and bring out things apparently from it but which actually you are bringing out from your own mind - as though you just take that as a starting point. It may have validity in that way.

There's a little story that I'm going to relate in my forthcoming paper that I'll be reading on the Order anniversary. Years ago, a friend of mine was very keen on drawing up a birth chart for me, which he did, and I thought it, yes, quite interesting, and it seemed to throw a light on certain aspects of my own character in the particular arrangement of planets. So just while I happened to be writing this paper a little while ago, I happened to get out this birth chart, just to check certain points, and I happened to show it to Prasannasiddhi, who knows a bit about astrology. He at once saw that it was wrongly drawn! So I sent it back to the original astrologer, who apologised, and said that the lady who drew his charts had made a mistake; he didn't accept the mistake himself, which I thought bit significant. Anyway, this is someone outside the FWBO, but whom I knew; and he sent me back a revised version. But that wasn't nearly so illuminating as regards my character! *[Laughter]* But with the original wrong birth chart I'd made a definite connection, I'd seen that as throwing light on my character, as it were.

But I'm quite prepared to accept that astrology in that sense may be able to throw some light on personal character; may give you a sort of key, it may be helpful. But I'm not too sure about it, I must admit, because I haven't ever studied astrology, I don't, so I have to rely on my friends who are experts in these matters. But predictive astrology is obviously quite inconsistent with the principles of Buddhism, in fact is explicitly rejected in the Pali Canon by the Buddha. Anyway - ah, last batch of questions: all about Vajrapani. I think I shall answer those rather quickly, which will be easy to do because in some cases I don't know the answer!

Why do we usually visualise Vajrapani in peaceful form, although he is most familiar to us in the wrathful form?

There is a traditional reason: strictly speaking, all the wrathful deities come in the highest Yoga Tantra, as do the yab-yum deities, so one doesn't start with those, obviously; one starts with the non yab-yum and non-wrathful forms, i.e. with the single peaceful forms. That's just following tradition.

I have heard him referred to as 'Guardian of Serpents'. Does this refer to nagas, and is this why he wears the snake around his body? Why is he connected with serpents?

I must say I don't really know why he is connected, though one does find that the guardian kings are regarded as leading bands of different kinds of creatures, including nagas in one case. It may have some indirect connection there, but I'll have to look that up.

What is the significance of the green cloth that he wears around his shoulders?

Sorry, don't know that either. I'm not even sure whether there actually is an explanation - though probably there is, or there is an explanation that some Tibetan lama or other has given at some time. Could be almost anything.

Is the card of a Bodhisattva in the British Museum attributed to Vajrasattva actually Vajrapani? He holds a vajra in each hand. I have a copy of the card with me.

I think it's sometimes difficult to distinguish between Vajrasattva and the Bodhisattva Vajrapani and Indra, because they are all associated with thunderbolts. So sometimes it may not be iconographically clear who is intended, whether Vajrasattva or Vajrapani or even Indra. Maybe the original person who made or cast the image was clear in his own mind, but iconographically no definite identification may be possible, sometimes.

Dayamegha: Does Vajrapani always have two vajras ... ?

S: No, more usually it's one vajra, and a vajra and a bell. But one can't rule out - No, sorry Vajrapani wouldn't have a bell. (*Voices speaking at once.*) But there are all sorts of anomalous forms. It's very dangerous to generalise about especially Tibetan iconography, because they've got all sorts of rare forms that don't follow the rules - well, don't follow the general rules.

Dayamegha: in the Amitabha - he has a vajra and a bell.

S: Vajrapani?

Dayamegha: Yes.

Vidyasri: Do you know what his *mudra* is or what it ?

S: I don't offhand, no. But even in Tibetan Buddhism mistakes do sometimes occur. Tibetan artists do sometimes make mistakes in iconography, so again one has to distinguish between a rare form and an actual mistake by the artist. But there's no reason why Vajrapani shouldn't have *dorje* and bell like Vajrasattva; one is Wisdom, one is Compassion, and surely Vajrapani has both, just as Vajrasattva does. So there's no real problem, one might think.

Rosy: Do you know anything about Vajrapani's mythological origins?

S: I don't, I'm afraid. I've not been able to find out very much. He isn't mentioned very much; he occurs very rarely in the sutras, usually in a quite subordinate capacity, just asking questions. There seems to be no myth of him, in the way that there is for, say, Avalokitesvara or Tara. I've not come across - I've been looking, because several people are doing the practice.

Rosy: There's a little story I came across in a book, something or other to do with some elixir of life which got thrown into the ocean and he had to dive for it, but it sounds quite a strange story, it doesn't sound like other Buddhist legends that I've heard, so I'm not sure where it's come from, really. He had to swallow it and it made his throat blue -

S: Ah, well, that's Avalokitesvara. That's how he got his name of Nilakantha or Blue-throated. Yes, and the story is also told in Hindu mythology about the god Shiva, who is also called Nilakantha; because the story goes that there was the ocean of nectar, the primeval ocean, and the gods and the *asuras* churned it; for the churning stick they used Mount Meru, and for the rope to twirl it they used the cosmic serpent Sesha. And the devas were pulling at one end and the *asuras* at the other, and they churned the ocean of nectar, just as one might churn milk to get butter, because they wanted to bring out all the blessings. So up came all sorts of wonderful things; there was Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, and there was the wish-fulfilling cow and all sorts of other things. But then there came up an enormous goll of poison, which would have destroyed the whole universe, so according to the Buddhists Avalokitesvara, according to the Hindus Shiva, out of compassion swallowed it; but it lodged in the throat and turned the whole throat blue. Hence they are called Nilakantha or Blue-throated. [*Laughter*] So that's the story.

All right, end of story. End of questions.

*Transcribed by Joyce Mumford
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