

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

Sangharakshita in Seminar

**Questions and Answers on
"A Survey of Buddhism" Chapter One: Sections Eight to Eighteen**

Held at: Sukhavati, East London, in April 1982

[Second 'Transcriptions' Edition - April 2000]

Those Present: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Dharmacharis: Tejamati, Kuladeva, Kulamitra, Jinapriya, Dhammarati, Siddhiratna, Dharmananda, Atula, Mahamati, Sagaramati, Vairocana, Virananda, Vajradipa

[Numbers in square brackets refer to the page numbers of the **first** edition. These original page numbers are still used in the 'Unedited Seminar Index', available separately from 'Transcriptions']

Sangharakshita: I don't know whether Kulamitra explained to you how we came to our decision about this particular group. He put it to me that it would be a good idea if I got together with study group leaders. He wasn't altogether clear why it was a good idea for me to get together with study group leaders but he seemed to think it **was** definitely a good idea. So then the question arose what I might do with them? I thought after we'd talked about it for a little while that it would be a good idea to go over some quite basic material, because one thing that we've been noticing recently when Subhuti's been taking retreats for the intensive pre-ordination course people has been the extent of what he calls their 'horrendous ignorance' of the Dharma; and it does seem that people aren't getting nearly a sufficiently good grounding in quite basic things, and I couldn't help wondering whether it was perhaps because people who were taking study themselves weren't always very well grounded in basic things, or whether perhaps questions didn't sometimes arise that they - the study group leaders - hadn't been able to deal with properly. Consequently there'd be still some vagueness in certain areas or uncertainty in certain areas amongst people attending those classes. I've also gathered from odd comments, mainly by Mitras that sometimes there's quite a lot of general discussion in study groups and that the study groups often get quite a long way away from the Dharma, even when the text is ostensibly a dharma text, and that perhaps suggests that some study group leaders at least don't feel altogether at home with purely dharma material, perhaps not quite confident of themselves in that area, and therefore tend to allow, if not to encourage, discussion to just become very general, because that is much less demanding. So I thought for these various reasons that it might not be a bad idea to go back to some of the more basic chapters of the *Survey*, because most people sooner or later do get around to reading the *Survey*, and especially in the case of study group leaders one might as well have a proper understanding of it. It may well be that one is asked questions by people attending study groups based on their reading of the *Survey*. So I suggested to Kulamitra that we used this time - I think it's going to be four Sunday mornings - just to go into the material contained in some of the more basic or even the more crucial chapters of the *Survey*. [2] So I suggested to him certain sections for study and I asked him to convey to all of you that you should study - at least read through - the appropriate chapters or the appropriate sections before this study group meets and make a note of any points that you are not yourselves very clear about or which you welcome the opportunity of discussing at some length, or raising questions that you have been asked based on those particular sections by people in your study groups but which you felt you hadn't been able to deal with adequately; maybe because you didn't understand the material properly yourself. So we're going to make a start along those lines this morning. I take it you've all got a note of those sections. I think it's three sections that we're going to try and deal with this morning, isn't it? So where do we start?

Siddhiratna: Page 56.

Sagaramati: Page 50 in the new edition.

S: Yes, I've got the old edition. So we're not going to read through or anything like that. It may be that there's quite a lot that you do understand, but let's take up any point or any particular aspect that people don't feel quite sure about or clear about or which they feel needs bit of further discussion. We adopted this method, by the way, on the course in Tuscany and it worked very well. People dug out all sorts of questions.

Dhammarati: The first thing that I came to is the wee stanza on page 57 of the old edition from the *Sutta Nipata*, just the last couple of lines

"When all conditions are removed, All ways of telling are removed".

I've been reading the 'Three Jewels' recently and you give an example in there of the difference between anitya and anatta. You use the example of a leaf, the red leaf becoming a green leaf, and there's no substance apart from their properties. In a way that seems quite clear and it's a fairly easy idea to understand, but I almost feel disappointed at what's apparently so simple, because it seems that here was something sort of..

S: Something?

Dhammarati: It's a quite sort of mysterious verse almost that the idea can be apparently so simple. Is it just a linguistic thing, to actually say the language cannot handle the experience or is it going further than that?

S: It is going, I would say, even further than that. Not that language cannot simply handle the experience but even thought, in the sense of concepts, cannot handle the experience. Language is based on and derived from one's experience in the sense world, one's rational reflections upon [3] that, so when that sort of language encounters an experience or a state that goes beyond the sense world, goes beyond the kamaloka, goes even beyond the *rupaloka* and *arupaloka*, well there are no categories that apply, there are no words that apply. One can perhaps communicate something but not in a sort of scientific way, if you see what I mean. Not by means of abstract concepts; one can't communicate in a straightforward information-giving sort of way. One can perhaps communicate just a glimpse or a taste by sort of semi-poetic means. One can suggest, one can indicate, but one can't really describe. I think this is something I've touched upon once or twice in lectures. I think it's very important to understand with regard to Buddhism, with regard to the Dharma, with regard to the Buddha, with regard to the Buddha's experience, that there is a lot, in fact the greater part, that we don't understand. I mean it's very easy to say, well the Buddha gained Enlightenment and Enlightenment is such and such, and we take it that we've understood, but I think we have to question whether we **really** have understood - or how **much** we have understood - otherwise we're sort of cherishing the notion that we know all about it when in fact we don't. If we have the impression that we know all about it, well we won't be making much of an effort **really** to know all about it because we'll be thinking we know already, we know all about Enlightenment, we know all about nirvana, because we can reel off the appropriate traditional expressions.

This can come up in other ways. I remember reading some months ago something by Ruskin. He was talking about Apollo. This may seem a bit of a diversion but actually it isn't. He was talking about Apollo, I think it was Apollo anyway. He was saying that Apollo, if it was Apollo, or rather he was saying that we think that we know what Apollo looks like because we are familiar with the traditional Greco-Roman

iconography, so we can at once think of a human form of a certain type, bearing certain emblems, weapons and so on with a certain expression, a certain pose, and we think well that that is Apollo. But Ruskin says actually that isn't Apollo, we don't know anything about Apollo, and as far as I remember he goes on to make the point that it's a sort of spirit of imagination, prophecy etc., that we should feel and be in contact with if we're to know Apollo. Do you see what I mean? It is not just a question of familiarity with the traditional iconography, so to speak. So it's much the same with Buddhism, it's much the same with Buddhist iconography say when it comes to the Bodhisattvas. You can say well you're familiar with the idea of Manjushri, you know what Manjushri looks like - he's sixteen years old and he carries a flaming sword, lotus, book and all the rest of it, but no you're only familiar with the iconography of Manjushri or Manjugosha. I mean you've got to have a real feeling for **Wisdom**, a real sensitivity to that, some awareness of it, some experience of it, before you can be really said to know Manjushri or Manjugosha. So it's much the same with the visual icons, as it is, so to speak with the 'verbal' icons. Do you see what I mean? We think that just because we're [4] familiar with the verbal icons, familiar with the visual icons, we have real knowledge of what those icons represent. But actually we don't. So if we sort of are manipulating these verbal and visual icons too - what shall I say? - too nimbly or too slickly, too skilfully well then we may lose sight of the fact we don't have any real knowledge or experience of the things that they represent. In other words we'll be under the delusion that we have experienced when we don't have it and that's a terrible sort of situation to be in.

I was thinking therefore it might be a sort of useful exercise - again this is a bit of a diversion but maybe not - that if supposing one does the Manjushri visualization one could say to oneself, by way of sort of exercise, well I'll do a sort of, let's say, meditation on Manjushri but I'll do it, I'll try to get some feeling of Manjushri without thinking of him in any particular form. I'll forget all about the sixteen year old youth and the flaming sword and the blue lotuses. All right put all that aside, what am I left with? What sort of feeling, what sort of experience? Because you can sort of conjure up the visual icon but if you're not careful that may hide from you the fact you've no experience of what it represents. And it's the same with these verbal icons; in other words with these descriptions in words. I mean because you can explain quite nicely, quite neatly, what Enlightenment is, it's a state of Perfect Wisdom and Perfect Positive Emotion and Perfect Energy. You can sort of kid yourself that you know all about it, but you don't. So the verse here says, 'when all conditions are removed all ways of telling are removed.' You're very familiar with the ways of telling and you don't really understand that, for what you're supposed to be talking about, there are in fact no conditions. You've imposed certain conditions on that, and you're familiar with the words which reflect those conditions and you think you know all about that which is, so to speak, behind the conditions, whereas perhaps you know nothing at all about it. So therefore the verse says, 'There is no measuring of man, Won to the Goal'. Well it's very important to remember that. One might make use of expressions like Perfect Wisdom and Supreme Compassion sort of provisionally. You understand what they mean, you understand quite well perhaps but what you don't understand is in what sense they are true of the Buddha. So if you're too confident that you sort of know all about it because you can manipulate the verbal and the visual symbols it will remove all sort of sense of mystery from the Dharma; it'll remove all sense of unfathomed depth, as it were. It'll become glib, superficial. There won't be very much in it. So you have to be careful in a way that you don't explain too much, you don't explain so well and clearly and confidently that you give - I mean when you're talking especially about anything to do [5] with the Buddha, nirvana, sunyata - you don't explain it so well or so closely that you give people the impression that they now have a very good, adequate idea of what that is all about.

You should also, if you want to communicate anything at all, be able to communicate something of the mystery, something of the unfathomed depth, which words cannot reach, which **thoughts** cannot reach, but which perhaps through the imagination, through symbols, you can get some glimpse of. But even the

symbols mustn't be sort of brought into play mechanically. They become. they are just what I call mere visual icons.

Sagaramati: If somebody asks you a question, which beginners often do like 'what is Nirvana?' or 'what is the goal of Buddhism?' I mean in one sense you're left with your own emptiness that you don't understand and the other side is like well look if you just present this nothing to them they'll think well it's strange being a Buddhist when you don't know what your goal is.

S: Well yes I mean you may get that sort of question from Christians. They'll come round, they'll bounce in and say 'I'm saved, Jesus has saved me. Are **you** saved? Have you reached Nirvana?' So you say 'well, er, no not quite'. Then they say, 'well your religion's not doing much for you - I'm saved!' [*Laughter*]. So the semantic confusion is endless. It's not to be cleared up in a few minutes by anybody; hardly a Buddha couldn't really clear it up probably, not in a few minutes. But I think what is important is - well let's deal first of all with a sort of assumption - despite what some Buddhist texts say or appear to say I think one should avoid dealing with nirvana as a sort of state, fixed, something definite, out there. Do you see what I mean? When people ask you what is nirvana, the assumption underlying the question is that, well it is a definite sort of identifiable even locatable thing that can be described in quite straightforward, as it were, scientific terms. Well I think one should not go along with that assumption. So that when people ask about Nirvana you should retreat a few steps as it were and make the distinction clear between the skilful and the unskilful, the reactive and the creative, and then try to communicate a feeling for the creative process, and then you should suggest that that is something that can go on and on to further and further heights, becoming more and more intense, more and more creative, and that the whole spiritual life, the whole process of the Higher Evolution is a movement of that sort in that kind of direction, and **then** bring in Nirvana, and say that one can so to speak imagine this movement of creativity, this spiral of creativity, going on and on indefinitely and that Nirvana represents the furthest conceivable point beyond which you can't really imagine anything. I mean thought and imagination even just fail. So that sort of area which in a way you believe that the [6] that the process in some way continues but the process has already reached such a high pitch of development that you can't imagine what it might sort of expand to or spiral up into after that. And that sort of unknown area where you have to sort of admit defeat, even as far as your imagination is concerned, well, that you just **indicate** with the word Nirvana. Do you see what I mean? I think this is really the only valid sort of approach if new people especially come to you with the question, of 'what is nirvana?' or 'tell us something about nirvana' and the advantage also of this is that you **can** say something from your own experience. You can say well as a Buddhist, as one who has gone for Refuge, I do have the experience of a greater degree of positivity and creativity than I had before. There does seem to be a sort of movement, a sort of stream setting in that direction; I'm trying to cultivate that and strengthen that and I have the faith, if one likes to call it that, that I can go on doing this indefinitely and that this will culminate in greater and greater bursts of creativity. And the ultimate burst, the ultimate so far as my conception goes is the one that we call Buddhahood or Nirvana.

Atula: On that line Bhante, I think you've explained it before but the difference between *rupajhana* and *arupajhana* - is it that in the *rupajhanas* there is still quite a substantial feeling of self, and in the *arupajhanas* that is dissolved much much more. Is that what happens?

S: It does to some extent come back to this word '*rupa*' which is 'form' - that's the literal translation - even shape, configuration and this suggests something out there, an object, something that you see, if you take the word '*rupa*' literally. So obviously where there is *rupa* out there which you see and when there is you as the seer, well clearly there is a division, there's a dichotomy, a subject/object discrimination, and there's a sort of dualistic set up, dualistic framework. So supposing there is no *rupa*, well this suggests that there is

no subject perceiving the *rupa* so therefore that suggests that the subject/object relationship is in abeyance; now not quite broken down. But there is of course in Buddhism a distinction between the *arupajhana* state, or the *arupaloka*, which are virtually interchangeable, and Nirvana. Now speaking as it were metaphysically, which is taking a different approach from the one I've just been taking, one says, according to tradition, that nirvana, that there is no subject/object duality - there it's completely transcended. So if there is to be a distinction between the *arupaloka* state and the state of the purely transcendental, the state of nirvana, then one cannot say that in the

[7] *arupaloka* state or *arupajhana* state, one cannot say that subject/object distinction has been completely and permanently eradicated. So one can only say, therefore, that it has become extremely subtle, so that there is no very obvious or crude, as it were perception of something objective, something out there. The subject/object relation is sort of toned down, it is not so strongly polarised. Do you see what I mean? I think one can say that one finds that even in, let's say, ordinary meditation, meditation that doesn't get very far up in the *rupaloka* even; even there the *rupa* is different, it is subtler. It's more vivid perhaps but it is subtler and more refined. So perhaps one can think of the *arupaloka* as a level where that process is continued even further. There's a very subtle sort of diaphanous, subject/object distinction which vanishes completely only when one reaches Nirvana.

Sagaramati: Would that subtlety continue when say you came out of meditation: you open your eyes and you see a so called concrete world? Would your relationship with that concrete world feel subtler? Would the brick walls still feel like solid brick walls or would they be more vivid to look at?

S: Well the brick wall would still be experienced as a brick wall. But at the same time, in the light of Wisdom so to speak, you'd see that brick wall quite differently. The fact that you saw it differently with your awoken insight, or prajna, wouldn't mean that your senses didn't experience it in a manner appropriate to senses. The five senses would be operating in the same way as before, the manovijnana would be operating in the same way as before. According to the Yogachara way of looking at things the only thing that wouldn't be there and operating would be the klisto-manovijnana. So it would be as though, yes, you would be having still the continued experience of the void, and within that void there would be floating, as it were, these colourful forms, which you saw, so to speak, out there, but which you did not appropriate as solid objects, and which you did not, in fact even discriminate even from the void. You see? It would be a different sort of experience, a different sort of state, something that we can only envisage as just a lighter and **freer** way of experiencing the ordinary world. The world is there but at the same time it's miraculously different because your attitude towards it has so **totally changed**. In a way it's the same old world, it hasn't changed a bit, but in another way it is completely different. The Zen people, the Zen masters, they emphasised this aspect of things quite strongly and I think people know even from their ordinary mundane experience that an alteration in your mental state will cause an alteration in the way that you actually perceive the objective world. Some people say - I can't remember - some people say that [8] when you fall in love you see the world in a quite different way. This may be true, but certainly if you get up in the morning after a really good meditation you look out, so to speak, at the world and even dull old Bethnal Green would look different, perhaps. It looks actually physically, visually different. *[pause]* So this suggests a very close sort of inter-relationship between subject and object - as the subject so the object. Perhaps we shouldn't introduce the red herring of what the object is really like as distinct from what it appears to be like. I think that would cause us to go round and round in circles.

Dhammarati: Just a connected thing, again from the 'Three Jewels' rather than from here. You've got a definite sort of relationship between 'consciousness' and 'matter' there. This actually came up at a beginners class on Wednesday. A guy was asking what the sort of relationship between consciousness and matter was,

so are they actually different, are they two different phenomena or are consciousness and matter more deeply connected?

S: I think the first thing that one must get clear is that there's really no such thing as matter. Matter is a concept. One can speak of something experienced as, so to speak, objective and external, but the idea of matter is something quite different. One can speak of, well, experience. Experience seems to polarise itself into something 'out there' and something 'in here'. What is 'in here' is more under your control say than what is 'out there'. When you try to control what is 'out there' in accordance with feelings which are 'in here', well you encounter a certain amount of resistance. That resistance is really, in the long run, what you mean by *rupa*. You come up **against** something which is not amenable to your control. This forces upon you the idea of an objective reality. But matter is something quite different. I think no serious thinker nowadays - least of all a scientist - would employ the term matter. One can only speak of the objective world appearing or being experienced in different ways.

Dhammarati: On a sort of physical level you can see how there's a sort of crossover between the material world and (unclear) but the element that actually experiences these two poles, the internal pole and the external pole, is that experience... almost what's the relationship between that and the objects of experience?

S: One could say that the term 'matter' is a sort of a symbol of the extreme of objectivity, for the objective pole of one's experience carried to extremes. And 'mind' equally is the symbol for the opposite extreme, that of the subject. But I think one needs to make it

[9] clear that though these are symbols which we use for these opposite extremes it's sometimes very difficult to tell where one ends and the other begins. They sort of shade off, there's a sort of continuum of experience within which you distinguish a certain polarisation into a sort of object which we symbolise by matter and a subject which we symbolise as mind. And that from a Buddhist point of view, especially Mahayana Buddhist point of view, that polarisation is unnecessary. It's that polarisation which is the source of all our troubles, all our suffering - that we don't have to interpret, so to speak neutral experience in terms of subject/object relationships. And that when we do that less, or when the polarity becomes less, and when the subject/object distinction becomes attenuated just a little bit as in meditation, well we have a different sort of experience. We feel things differently, see things differently. Everything just becomes lighter, more diaphanous, more transparent and so on.

Atula: So is it the actual words or conceptual formulations that actually form qualities that you put onto something, and that causes your separation from it?

S: Though of course I think one has to be very careful making a sort of real, hard and fast distinction between, say, a substance and its attributes. It's not that there is literally this sort of neutral stuff, sunyata, existing as an object upon which you superimpose the subject/object distinction. That's just a way of presenting it because in order to present it you have to falsify it. Sunyata is not an object, but you've had to make it an object, speak of it as an object, in order to say anything **at all** even. So again it's a question not of a sort of scientific description but somehow to communicate some sense, some glimpse of what it is really all about.

Sagaramati: But isn't there actually something out there? I see a microphone and he sees a microphone. Everybody sees a microphone.

S: These are all conundrums that I've said that if you didn't avoid you'd just go round and round in circles [Laughter]. One can discuss endlessly about these things. The general Buddhist view, one might say, the

general Mahayana view, is that one has a common perception to the extent that one has a common karma, to the extent that one has a common mental outlook. The objects coincide because the subjects more or less coincide. There are small differences. You don't quite see the same object. For instance you can't look at it from exactly the same angle. Even if you're standing side by side with someone you're not seeing that object in quite the same way. Therefore in a sense you're not seeing the same object. But it's sufficiently close [10] - there is a sort of complex series of correlations between your perceptions and his perceptions, which enable you to speak, or to behave, as though there actually was a common object, though strictly speaking that object is only approximately common. I mean there may be something in between us - supposing it's an orange. I look at it from this side and you look at it from that side and I say to you, 'pick up that orange', and you come forward and pick up that orange. But that isn't really such a simple business as it might seem, because the fact that you have gone forward and picked up what you saw in front of you upon my asking you to go forward and pick up what was in front of you or what I see in front of me, doesn't strictly speaking mean that there is actually an orange there in the objective scientific sense. It means that when I see, when I have that experience, I'm enabled to say something to you as a result of which you can take a certain action and have a certain experience, and that we have a sort of common framework of reference for all those particular happenings and goings on. And the shorthand for that is that there is an object between us, which both of us perceive and which is the object, so to speak, of both our actions. Do you see what I mean? But it's only a shorthand, and we shouldn't deduce that there's a real, concrete orange existing there, with a definite nature independently of both our perceptions.

Sagaramati: If your attitudes, say your samskaras were different, you might not see anything? Or you might see something very different?

S: Yes, but then you'd be in a different world, at least to some extent.

Dharmananda : Could you say that consensus reality is crude enough for most people to be able to agree on its general shape?

S: Well the point about consensus reality is that it's only a reality for practical purposes, not that there is a common **thing** there. But we can agree to speak in terms of a common world of objects, because that will enable us to relate in a certain way, and do certain things, and get certain things done.

Sagaramati: So that would be relative truth.

S: One could label it that, yes, though it's a very ambiguous expression. Relative truth, strictly speaking, is a contradiction in terms. I think in the case of beginners' groups one has to be very careful not to get involved in discussions of this sort. One can just flounder if one is not careful, and discussion can just become very [11] aimless and pointless. I think, gently but firmly you have to steer people away from these sort of discussions. Maybe it's all right upon an Order occasion with a few Order members around, you can have a bit of fun going into these things more or less seriously, but I think you should keep away from them in your general centre study groups.

Virananda: Would you say that it's worth order members looking into this kind of question. Looking at what Western philosophers say or have said about epistemology?

S: It might be, if you could be sure you weren't going to get just further confused. I think what is most important is to recognise, or to be able to recognise the **assumptions** that underlie a lot of questions. One really has to question those assumptions, because very often the questions are not as straightforward as they

seem. They are riddled with assumptions, often of a most questionable nature. People do not really realise, they don't know, what question in fact they are asking. So perhaps rather than discussing such questions on their terms and thereby tacitly accepting their assumptions and thereby getting more and more confused. One can just make a start by gently questioning some of those assumptions, and making people realise there isn't a question really quite in the sense that they supposed, or really that they weren't understanding, didn't know what the question actually was that they were asking. There may be verbally a question - it's very easy to ask a verbal question, whether there's really a question there that is another matter. What they say is formally a question, it's grammatically a question but whether there's a real philosophical question there is quite another matter. For instance someone may say 'well what makes birds fly?' Here is the bird and it's flying so what **makes** it fly, as though there was some force or element or factor outside the bird which is responsible for its flight. Well you can't really answer the question - you can't say in a straightforward way 'oh it's x, y or z, which makes the bird fly'. Do you see what I mean? In order to explain the phenomenon of avian flight you'd have to explain things like the structure of the wing and the relationship between the weight of the bird and the weight of the air and all that sort of thing, to show how flight was possible, but you couldn't give a straightforward answer to the child's question 'what makes birds fly?'.

Atula: This brings up the question that when people ask those sort of questions they usually try to get at a creator. God's somewhere behind a question like that. That quite often happens.

S: Well very often people want a simplistic answer. They say well what makes so and so happen. Well they just want you to identify one [12] particular simple element which is responsible as God is in the wider universe. But one of the big points in Buddhism is that things occur, things happen, as the result of a quite complex - well structure's not quite the right word - a sort of dynamic structure of events, and you can't really understand an individual phenomenon and why it happens without understanding that quite complex structure of events which brings it about. There's not a simple one to one, cause-effect relationship. It's not that at all.

End of Side One Side Two

S: But you do find this in study groups with, say, new people, that questions tend to be simplistic in this sort of way. People expect a simple answer to a simple question. 'A straightforward answer to a straightforward question, that's what I want' they sometimes say. Well Christianity especially in its more popular forms gives those sort of simple straightforward unambiguous answers which people can then seize hold of and feel a certain amount of security. Buddhism doesn't really operate like that, or if it does it's at a very crude popular level which really is a travesty of Buddhism.

Tejamati: You can notice this in their advertising can't you. Outside churches they have these billboards with definite phrases on them, whereas you wouldn't see that outside a Buddhist Centre. *[Laughter]*

Atula: Some of them are very catchy aren't they?

S: Yes, you'd have to say something like 'Meditation might help you' *[Laughter]* Where outside the church it's 'Jesus Saves'; they're very very confident, or just a straightforward text, 'sins being washed away in the blood of Jesus'. Well it's very unambiguous, it's very concrete, it's very reassuring. We can't compete with that or we don't want to. *[pause]* You could say well Buddhism isn't really for the person who is looking for simple answers to simple questions. Well there **are** no such things really as simple questions in that sense. So sometimes it isn't easy to handle some beginners' questions for these sort of reasons - because you can't **share** their assumptions. You can't answer the question on their terms. Maybe you've got just a little bit

more intellectual sophistication than they have, but maybe not quite enough to be able to really handle that sort of question successfully. Well what is the trend in questions in classes nowadays? Is there any trend? Have things changed over the years?

Siddhiratna: I think there are different questions in different classes [13] because in Mitra study classes you don't really get simple questions, in fact it's not even questions at all, it's more like enquiries.

S: I'm thinking more of beginners and completely new people.

Dhammarati: It depends a bit on the material you're (unclear)... You don't get many question out of the blue but if you're giving a talk on awareness it tends to be practical. Some tapes spark off questions, some talks spark off questions, that are a lot more abstruse, like for instance as I said, one question on awareness, say, was a beginner. We had been talking about awareness and how you would have to extend your awareness through the four levels of your body, others things and reality, and he was saying, well look if a Buddha has extended his awareness does that mean sometimes he's concentrated or does it mean that all the time he's always aware of every phenomena? I mean I think it's different. It's just that it depends a bit on the material.

S: [chuckles to himself] [pause]

Sagaramati: That is common, the difference between what we call mindfulness and concentration. A lot of people think well there's a contradiction in what you're trying to do. They're doing the mindfulness of breathing and then they're becoming more concentrated. At the same time how are they going to be more mindful? They think that mindfulness and concentration are exclusive to one another. That's quite a difficult one too.

S: Well mindfulness is more like a faculty, like a beam of light that you can direct towards anything that you wish to direct it to. It isn't something which is absolutely all enveloping.

Sagaramati: I must admit that's the way I usually see mindfulness. It's like being under water and the water's like your mindfulness. You're just aware of it. It's like there's something in the air, a feeling in the air and you're just aware of things. You don't bump into things, you don't trip over things.

S: That's more like sensitivity isn't it?

Sagaramati: But isn't that an aspect of mindfulness?

S: Yes, I think one can't say that, or one can't suggest that, mindfulness is just sort of cool and clinical. It does have that aspect of sensitivity.

Siddhiratna: Is mindfulness a kind of generalised term, then, for a number of states of consciousness?

S: Well we use the term mindfulness. The word in Pali and Sanskrit [14] is really more faithfully represented by 'recollection'. It's more like remembering or even remembering to remember. You're sort of collected. You maintain your purpose. You're not distracted. It's continuity of attention.

Siddhiratna: It doesn't mean omniscience in the sense of.. (unclear)

S: No, it's not a sort of panoramic awareness.

Dharmananda: Singlemindedness?

S: It's single-mindedness, yes. That's an aspect of it. It's not doing one thing and thinking of something else. It's purposiveness also.

Sagaramati: I was just thinking that on my solitary I thought I'd found out what mindfulness was, but it was definitely a feeling. It's like I didn't have to make too much effort to be mindful, just for about ten or fifteen minutes, and I felt that this was what mindfulness was, but I would identify it much more with a feeling of what's around me, what's in my vision, my body. It was very different from the usual, well, just like a bare attention, a bare awareness.

S: Yes, it isn't just a sort of mirror-like faculty. It doesn't reflect things, as it were, impartially. It's the capacity to concentrate on what you 'want' to concentrate on, 'want', inverted commas, and to keep your concentration there, to maintain your attention, not to let that particular object on which you're concentrating slip away. You remain recollected. You collect yourself from moment to moment. You keep your attention **on** whatever is the matter in hand.

Sagaramati: I think what I was trying to get at is like there was an aesthetic element which, because it was pleasing, counteracted distraction. It's like you didn't want to **be** distracted, because there was something in the mindfulness itself that occupied your - like what I'd say was an emotional side of yourself. Distraction didn't matter.

S: Well when you are recollected, when you're mindful, you are to that extent integrated, and that itself is a pleasurable sensation or experience. You feel more together and that is pleasurable.

Tejamati: Wouldn't that involve some sort of dhyanic experience?

S: Well if it was continued beyond a certain point, yes it would. There is sort of continuity between the two, though in dhyanic experience usually one has, so to speak, chosen to 'concentrate', inverted commas, on a special kind of object. It may be your own mental state.

Dhammarati: Going back to these four levels of awareness things, self, [15] people and reality - you're not actually trying to cultivate a simultaneous awareness of these levels?

S: No you're not. To begin with you go from level **to** level, but eventually they sort of interpenetrate. You can have a sort of simultaneous - perhaps awareness isn't the word - feeling, experience of yourself as you are bodily, as you are in terms of emotion, in terms of movement, the whole, as it were, imbued with a sort of recollection of higher spiritual principles. Not that you're like a juggler keeping four different sets of balls going. You might feel a bit like that at first if you try to keep up all together, but they've become sort of integrated, sort of blended, because **you've** become integrated and blended. You don't need to distinguish between your bodily experience... well you distinguish but you don't divide, that is to say, your bodily experience from your emotional experience from your motor experience, from your overall sort of spiritual attitude.

Dhammarati: If you're actually recommending to people, or if you're actually trying to practise extending awareness on these levels, what does that mean practically? How would you go about it?

S: Well, they'd have to do one at a time. For instance when you're doing the Mindfulness of Breathing, well there of course you are just concentrating on the motion of the breath itself. When one is walking about, just be more conscious of one's bodily movements. Usually one needs just to concentrate on that by itself, from time to time, for a while. And then one can pay more attention to one's emotional state; one can concentrate on that for a while, maybe over a period of weeks or months. When you're walking about you always make a note of how you're actually feeling, whether you're cheerful or whether you're depressed, whether you're angry or pleased, or light hearted or joyful and so on, and then you can maybe make a note on some other occasion for another period of what you're thinking about, in the sense of objective things. Are you thinking about your work? Are you thinking about money? Are you thinking about advertisements which you saw? Are you thinking about holidays? Just be aware of the way in which your mind flits from object to object. And then again you can practise separately thinking about the Dharma. You can either maybe turn over a phrase or a saying and try to bear it in mind. Or you can repeat a mantra; that's a way of bearing in mind spiritual principles all the time. So one can practise with regard to these different levels of awareness in these ways at different times. But over a period of, no doubt, years, they will tend to come together and you'll have a sort of unified awareness of body, of feelings, thoughts, movements and higher[16A] spiritual principles. It will not be that you keep up the four different kinds of awareness with regard to four different objects at the same time. It'll be more like what I call a kind of unified awareness. It'll be a unified awareness on the part of a unified being.

Atula: You could see I suppose meditation as the only time that you actually get some experience of that because when you do become concentrated it's as though your awareness does expand.

S: Yes because for instance when you're sitting and meditating you are aware of your bodily posture. You are aware of that feeling of comfort. You're especially aware of your breath when you do the mindfulness of breathing. So you are aware of your overall feeling tone let us say. So there is a degree of unification there. But one can work on these different levels separately from time to time during the day.

Anyway we started off with a query about Nirvana from that particular chapter. Has anyone got any other queries from other sections?

Atula: It seems to me over the years that you keep coming back to the division again against philosophy or any construction of ideas. That seems to me more and more to come across as just so fundamentally important that we so often without any experience ourselves, we just get in the habit of acting on a certain sort of construction of ideas or a way of being, and that really quite quickly obstructs the really important things of vision. We do keep coming back to that point.

S: Can you be more specific, more concrete? Maybe give examples.

Atula: I suppose the most obvious example is that we come.. well it's best to speak about myself, it's as though your mind wants to latch onto certain ideas to make itself feel secure. We do take on a sort of way of living and begin to identify quite quickly with a sort of the ideal which has got ... well the actual vision has got nothing to do with it.

S: Can you give an example to make it really concrete. I'm not **quite** sure what you're actually talking about. I can see in a general way but not very specifically.

Atula: I suppose the pattern of lifestyle is the most obvious thing that we would be getting to. That we identify spiritual life with a certain kind of lifestyle.

S: But do you think that does happen?

Atula: I think it happens a lot. [16]

S: Even though we have said time and time again that lifestyle is secondary.

Atula: But most people do forget that quite quickly.

S: But people do, as you say, forget that quite quickly.

Atula: And I think it seems to need to keep being dragged up time and time again, that we are trying to actually get where the vision of the Buddha's whole thing was founded on a vision of existence and not an idea of what we are.

Sagaramati: Somebody I met recently said that unless they worked in a co-operative they weren't really living the spiritual life.

S: Ah but it might be true for them, but did they mean it as a generalisation that nobody was leading the spiritual life unless they worked in a co-op?

Sagaramati: I think it was just a thoughtless generalisation. There was a certain dogmatic attitude about the guy.

S: Of course then one could ask, even confining the discussion to the FWBO what did people do before there were co-ops - because they're a comparatively recent phenomenon, aren't they, no doubt highly desirable, highly valuable. Again perhaps it's a question of confusing the principle with a specific application of the principle. You cannot lead a spiritual life **fully** - and I think one must qualify if with fully - unless you're practising right livelihood, and one of the reasons why we have the co-ops is to enable people to practise right livelihood. That is not to suggest that working in a co-op is the **only** way of practising right livelihood. It can be practised in other ways. So perhaps this is a confusion between the principle involved and a specific **application** of that principle, in this particular case.

Atula: What also happens is that we get a sort of fad or a phase of a new idea and that I think sometimes becomes really... I don't know quite what happens.

Kuladeva: It's almost as if a group, as if there's a group attitude towards certain things, that something becomes, a certain something that pops up in some aspect of the FWBO becomes fashionable.

Atula: And everything else gets lost sight of.

S: Well perhaps the conclusion is that when something becomes fashionable, well treat it with a certain amount of reserve or a certain amount of caution. I'm not quite sure what is fashionable at the moment in and around the LBC but whatever it is treat it with caution! *[Laughter]* [17]

S: Though perhaps it wouldn't be as regards co-ops, it wouldn't be quite fair to say that co-ops are a fashion. I think most of the people working in them are much more serious than that. But nonetheless I think one should be careful not to think in terms of sort of shunting every individual person who comes along, along a certain smooth well-worn track. Do you see what I mean?

Atula: It seems to be the thing, I know when I was working in it, it seems to be that what you're doing at the time must be the only, like it's a sort of pattern of your mind that what you're doing is the most important thing and so therefore everyone else should be doing it and you get resentful of anyone that's not doing that thing.... (unclear)

S: Well as I said you need to distinguish between the principle and the particular application, or means and end. One needs to do that all the time. You must ask yourselves, well 'why am I doing this and is it really fulfilling its function? Is working in a co-op helping me to practise right livelihood? Am I really practising right livelihood? Is the practise of right livelihood helping me to develop as an individual etc., etc.' You must ask yourself these questions from time to time, to make sure that you haven't lost sight of the vision.
[pause to change tapes recording the seminar]

So when people come along to the FWBO for the first time, asking questions about it, you do have to give a definite lead - the structure, say, is such and such, and if you want to get more deeply involved, well very likely you could do such and such or get involved in such and such. You have to be reasonably definite. At the same time you have to explain the underlying philosophy, and why getting involved in that way would help you, would help the person to develop as an individual, and at the same time you have to make it clear somehow that it's not a rigid system. Sometimes people are looking for a rigid system. You have to follow a middle path, make it clear, yes, that there is a system, there is a structure, but it is at the same time a reasonably flexible one. It is intended to serve the needs of the individual, not that the individual has to be sacrificed to it. It doesn't exist in its own right so to speak.

But if one comes back to this question of lifestyles, maybe a salutary experience for some people is to go to India and see the lifestyles of most Order members there, that is to say the Indian Order members especially. It's very different from that of people here but at the same time they manage to put a lot of energy into the Movement. Some of them work for it really in a way that is second to nobody here, I would say. But the lifestyle is very different [18] It's a life style for one thing completely without trimmings. In the case say of the married Order members, yes, they deal with their wife and their children and their requirements but once that is done they've got no further thought than to work for the Movement, to work for the Dharma. *[pause]*

But what I **have** noticed - this may be getting a little bit off the present track - but never mind. What I have noticed or what I have suspected from some of the things I've heard is that when new people come along, the tendency is to try to shunt them quickly as possible into a community and into a co-op without understanding sufficiently, or giving oneself sufficient time to understand, whether that is really and truly the best thing for that person. Well very likely it is, perhaps in nine cases out of ten it is, if they can bring themselves to take that step, but one mustn't assume that it is or just have such faith in the pattern that all you have to do is just to induct any person who comes along into that pattern. That is not the case. I think there may be or perhaps there has been - perhaps not now- a tendency of that sort.

Mahamati: I would have thought that if, well the person Sagaramati mentions who, although he didn't work in a co-op then you weren't really practising the spiritual life, well then I wouldn't have thought that one could say that... I would say that for them the lifestyle had become primary. I wouldn't say you could say it was just they didn't realise it wasn't right for the other person, but really it wasn't right for them either because they're identifying with the lifestyle.

S: Yes. Perhaps people **need** to do that for a while - perhaps they do. But they certainly don't need to impose that sort of 'vision', inverted commas, on other people.

Mahamati: I feel that, from my own experience, that it is quite dangerous from the point of view of the individual. To develop oneself as an individual sooner or later one has to realise that one has got it wrong, basically. And I think that if you come into the FWBO with that sort of attitude, I don't see how it (unclear)....

S: I think if you're young, if you're very young, with lots of energy and enthusiasm and maybe a certain underlying insecurity, I think there will be almost necessarily at the beginning a tendency to identify yourself with whatever you're involved in, and I think you have to grow out of that. I think it's very difficult actually to **stop** people identifying in that way. One can only take steps to help them grow out of that and to make sure that they don't impose that attitude on other people. And it must be made clear always well that is not the official policy, so to speak, of the FWBO, that you can't [19] develop spiritually unless you're working in a co-op. I mean however valuable working in a co-op may be or undoubtedly is.

I have a point again in connection with lifestyle and lifestyle being secondary. I did spot and I hope scotch a little sort of misinterpretation some time ago, when I myself said that lifestyle is secondary. What did I say was primary? I've forgotten.

Sagaramati: Principle.

S: Yes the principle is primary and the lifestyle is secondary, as representing an application of the principle within a certain area. What I did **not** mean and what the statement does not mean is that lifestyle doesn't matter. Some people did take that statement to mean that. Not that life style was not of primary importance and that it was only of secondary importance, but that it didn't matter - it didn't matter what your lifestyle was; it didn't matter how you lived, provided you got your principles right. Well that was **not** what I meant. I did not mean that you could be careless about your lifestyle, but only that there was a possibility of a variety of more or less equally positive and appropriate lifestyles - not that just any old life style would do from the spiritual point of view, but some people seem to have taken it in that way.

All right any more questions from the actual text?

Virananda: I'd like to ask a question on page 53 of the new edition. It's the dialogue between Subhuti and the Buddha - can you give some indication of what is meant by 'isolated'?

S: Isolated. Unrelated. You can't relate to it. You can't relate to it because there's no subject/object distinction. It's isolated. You can't get hold of it. It's self-contained. It eludes you. A scientific definition is not really possible here. It's completely and utterly elusive. It's inaccessible. Some of the Mahayana Perfection of Wisdom Sutras, or rather all the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras probably in different places, have quite a lot to say about the **elusiveness** of Perfect Wisdom. It's ungraspable. You can't catch hold of it. You can't pin it down in a definition. It's isolated. I won't say it means the same thing but it's concerned from a different sort of angle with much the same sort of quality. It's completely isolated from, it's aloof, it's indifferent, to all your efforts to comprehend it, contain it. It's aloof, it's isolated.

Dhammarati: Same dialogue - "Nothing is fully known by the Enlightened"

S: Mmm. (chuckles) Yes, you shouldn't think that the Enlightened person knows everything. Because it suggests this dualistic subject/object [20] framework of reference which is of course, by very definition, so to speak, completely absent here. You can speak of knowledge in the case of a Buddha but you can speak of

knowledge only analogically. There's not a real knowledge in the sense of a real subject knowing a real object.

Siddhiratna: Is that what that means Bhante, because the Enlightened One has no subject/object you can't actually talk of him knowing, in the sense that there's a 'him' that knows and a 'thing' to be known.

S: Yes right. You could if you wanted to simplify it, maybe over simplify it and say well the Buddha doesn't 'know' Enlightenment because he is one with that. The Buddha is the Enlightened **One**. He has become completely at **one** with that particular object so there's no question of him knowing it as something out there; he is that. That is putting it rather simplistically but you could probably get away with it.

Siddhiratna: That's accurate is it?

S: It is not inaccurate. *[Laughter]* If you were to put things in that sort of way at a beginners' class in response to a question, you wouldn't be misleading them.

Kuladeva: It almost gives the impression though that the Buddha's Enlightenment isn't.. that there's something missing from it because I'm not saying that that is what's being said there, but it does almost give that impression because it says that nothing is fully known by the Tathagata.

S: Well I think to clarify that, it would be probably better to say because it would be more paradoxical and therefore make the person think, that the Buddha doesn't know anything. Not that there's something he doesn't understand, that he doesn't understand **anything**, that's the difference. Well then of course that makes someone think and then of course you have to say well it is because there isn't anything to be known in that sense, in that dualistic sense. The Buddha does not grasp any object of cognition.

Sagaramati: This seems to be (unclear) by what you were saying about.. like when you ask a question you have this underlying assumption that there is something to be known.

S: But I think, expressing that in much more general terms, I think, expressing it, in a way, in more commonplace terms, it's more a question of putting it over to people, putting it across to people the fact that the richness of existence and the richness of experience is such it cannot be exhausted by words. Do you see what I mean? [21] Otherwise you're in the position of, say, the botanist who thinks he's communicated to you what a rose is or is like because he's just given you the botanical definition which tells you what sort of petals and what sort of leaves and what sort of general structure the rose has, but that doesn't tell you what a rose is really like, it doesn't exhaust the richness of the rose. You've got to experience that for yourself. You have to see the rose and smell the rose. So therefore we must always beware, especially in the field of Buddhism, or spiritual life, of thinking that the worn out categories that we use really do exhaust, really do do justice to, the richness and variety of existence and of experience. I mean when we say the Buddha is endowed with Supreme Knowledge and Compassion and so on, what has one **really** said about the Buddha? Have you really communicated very much to other people, just trotting out these well worn old categories to which they attach, no doubt, their own subjective meanings? Surely the Buddha's nature and experience infinitely transcends all that. So once again as I said earlier on, one must beware of thinking that one knows, and beware of communicating an impression that one knows, or beware of making other people think that **they** now know as a result of what you've explained. You've given them the merest glimpse or hint, nothing more than that. So therefore in a way it's quite good that (.unclear..) it is said that the Buddha 'doesn't comprehend everything'. You could even say that, taking a slightly different angle of approach, that even

the Buddha doesn't understand everything. Reality transcends even the Buddha. You could say that, though in a way it isn't very Buddhistic - even the Buddha doesn't know everything.

Siddhiratna: Are you taking this approach actually to avoid people kind of fixing the idea that they've actually understood it because they've intellectually sorted it out and stuff like that. (S: Yes) And that the positive counterpart of that is to use the analogy of something like the rose and that you can't just define it in terms of its scientific nature or one thing and another, that there's magic about it as it were or something about it? It's in the 'Three Jewels' isn't it where you are talking about the poet and his view of the flower?

S: Yes, that's right. The way the poet sees the flower or the rose is analogous to the way in which the Buddha sees it, as it were. But seeing the rose in its reality doesn't mean superimposing upon your experience of the rose or even your non-experience of the rose, of certain formal intellectual categories, even Abhidharma categories. That's the sort of impression you get reading some Theravada works. [22]
[pause]

Sagaramati: There is one question on the first paragraph of 'Ineffable Nirvana'. When you're saying 'What is the nature of Nirvana. Granting that the Buddha did attain such a state (an admission which does not necessarily depend upon an acceptance of the traditional views regarding the place of his attainment in history.)' So you're saying that the Buddhist tradition doesn't depend on an actual historical figure called Sakyamuni who attained Enlightenment. Is that correct?

S: No, I'm not saying that. I did get questions about this on the course actually. 'Granting that the Buddha did attain such a state (an admission which does not necessarily depend upon an acceptance of the traditional views regarding the place of his attainment in history)', well what is that traditional view? That is to say that the Buddha was the first person within the present historical world period to gain Nirvana. Do you see what I mean? So one doesn't necessarily have to accept that view about the Buddha's role in history, as I've called it, to be able to answer the question of what was that state of Nirvana that the Buddha attained. I mean the status of that attainment is not altered in any way by the fact that it is or that it was or was not the first attainment, or the first time that it had been attained, in the present world period.

Sagaramati: The present world period. Would that include our history?

S: It would include our history yes.

Sagaramati: But would it go back to other worlds?

S: Yes it would go back many millions of years. So one can ask the question of 'what was that Nirvana that the Buddha attained?' without subscribing to the traditional Buddhist view or without necessarily subscribing to the traditional Buddhist view, that the Buddha was the first person in history, our history, our world period, to realize that state. That's all that I'm saying. It's a little aside as it were.

Dhammarati: On page 70 of the old edition you say that Nyantiloka Thera made a mistake in regarding Nirvana as 'the ultimate and absolute deliverance from all future rebirth', and I wondered how that tied in with the idea of the Stream Entrant, the Once Returner, the Non-Returner and so on. It seems quite explicit there, that there's going to be no more rebirth after.

S: Ah, not quite, no. There is a qualification - 'no rebirth as a result of karma'. So you have to make that point, otherwise you preclude the possibility of the Bodhisattva's descent in or into or rebirth into the

samsaric order or apparent rebirth into it, as a result not of karma but of compassion. One may not agree that such a thing is possible but that is the Mahayana point of view. So one mustn't exclude that. [23]

Dhammarati: I'm sorry. Did you say that that's the Mahayana position? That to some extent in fact is a contradiction of the Theravada point of view?

S: Yes, certainly it contradicts the, as it were, later, more rigidly formulated Theravada view. Though of course one can find anticipations if that is the word, of quite a number of Mahayana points of view in the Pali Canon of the Theravada itself - anticipations which have been more or less ignored by the Theravadins. They usually take quite a narrow view of the content of their own Canon. They've worked up, so to speak, just a sort of (few?) texts from it. As with the series of the positive nidanas - they've never been utilised, but they're there in the Pali Canon.

Sagaramati: Could you give a hint or (..indistinct..) - well sometimes I have a conflict between trying to be intellectually as clear as you can be and at the same time not falling into just manipulating words and expecting that sort or form of answer. You talk about truth is more poetic. At the same time that doesn't stop you trying to be as intellectually clear as you can.

S: I think it is very difficult because sometimes people force you to take the rational approach, the intellectual approach, even though one feels oneself that it is completely inappropriate, and you have to sort of deal with the situation as best you can. Because rational discourse is at least something that you have in common, so at least it is a means of communication, however unsatisfactory. And I think that as far as we are concerned in the West at present, the approach to Buddhism cannot but be in these terms, at least initially, so far as most people are concerned. Even if they come along to a meditation class well there will have to be some sort of explanation, so you are thereby introducing the element of rational discourse. That may give rise to questions, that may give rise to discussion and further questions. It's not like the situation say in a traditional Buddhist culture, say at its best, where you have things like institutions and, say, processions and images and festivals, where that other element of mystery - perhaps on a rather low level - is introduced, where people can make contact in another kind of way. I mean, for instance, there was that interview of mine on TV - well however well it might have gone, there's a certain definite limited format - asking questions which cannot but be sort of rational, and getting answers which cannot but be sort of rational. At least up to a point - that is a definite limitation. So I think one has to recognise that is almost unavoidably the situation, and do one's best to counteract it or to balance it.

End of Tape One Tape Two

[24]**S:** (continued) as quickly as possible. I think the centre itself helps a lot in that way. [pause for tape to be changed!] The fact that we've got the shrine room with those big golden images. They speak in their own way. It's good to have these sort of purely visual signposts around. [pause] And of course a lot comes across or has to come across from you personally when you're taking a class. You have to be able to say, so to speak, more than what you are saying. Your answers shouldn't be confined to or identified with, or identifiable with, what you actually say in words. There must be something a bit more than that, and if you can communicate also in **that** way, perhaps without maybe even the people in the class fully realising, then of course you can communicate the Dharma much more successfully. Some people do quite well with a minimum of intellectual equipment, and others don't do so well even though they've got much **more** intellectual equipment - that too can sometimes happen.

Atula: A question arising out of that is, if the Buddha's not reborn through karma, then, there's the time in the Parinirvana Sutra where I think Ananda, there is some question, that sometime in fact Ananda actually asked the question of the Buddha if he could prolong his life. What is the condition which would have, what brings about the Bodhisattva's continuing his life, if it's not ..?

S: That episode in the Pali Canon, in the Mahaparinibbanna Sutta in fact, is quite a curious one, quite an odd one in a way. It has been the subject of quite a lot of discussion. Let's take it that it is a genuine episode, that it did actually occur. Let's approach it say on that basis. The phrase is 'until the end of the kalpa' or kappa - the Buddha if requested could have continued to live until the end of the kappa, the kalpa, the age or the aeon. There are two schools of thought here as regards the meaning of that word; according to one school of thought it means until the end of the present world period, which could be thousands - even millions - of years ; according to the other school of thought kappa here means, in this context, only the full period of human life i.e. according to the then current Indian tradition, one hundred years. But whether it's a million years or a thousand years the principle is the same that the Buddha, if asked, would extend his lifespan, that he had the power to do that. But of course then the question arises, even assuming [25] that he has the power to do that, why does he have to be asked? That is quite a point. This perhaps connects - I don't know if it has been connected with, but in my mind it connects with - the episode of Brahma's request, that the Buddha is asked, well in this case he is asked by Brahma, a highly spiritual being belonging to a particular world, spiritual world, to preach. Well if one takes this fairly literally, it's as though the Buddha has to be reminded, he has to be induced to take note of what is going on in the world. But in the case of this request of Ananda's, which Ananda didn't make, that the Buddha should continue to live until the end of the aeon, it is perhaps intended to underline the fact that the Buddha has no personal will to live, that he could continue to live out of compassion but there has to be a **need** for him to do so. If no one shows the need, so to speak, for him to go on living, well then he doesn't, so to speak, exert himself **to** go on living. If people don't need him well he just lets things take their ordinary course.

Atula: Doesn't this contradict the whole emphasis on compassion ...?

S: In a way it does. I think if one can only sort of solve the problem completely by saying that well the Buddha did have compassion, yes, he sort of looked around to see whether he was needed any longer and he saw that he wasn't, but that he still had the capacity to live on longer if he wanted, but he did in fact see that it wasn't necessary, because there is another passage where he says that he would not pass away until the Bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, the upasakas and upasikas, are firmly established in the Truth etc. It does say that. But even so it remains a quite mysterious passage. But again perhaps we have to use our imaginations a bit. Perhaps we have to say or have to see, that the current of a Buddha's whole being is so sort of powerfully set in the direction of the Transcendental that even despite all his undoubted compassion he needs to have his attention called to the world sometimes if he's to do anything. Do you see what I mean? It's as difficult for the Buddha to think about the world as it is for people in the world to think about the transcendental. Just as people in the world, even religious-minded people, spiritually-minded people in principle yes; in theory they're quite happy to think about the [26] transcendental, but in practice they just have to be reminded. It's almost as though in the case of a Buddha it's the other way round; that he's, yes in principle he's happy enough to do whatever he can for the world, but you know he's so immersed in the transcendental that you just have to remind him of your existence in the world. When he's reminded of that, yes, he'll do what's necessary, he's quite willing to. Maybe it's something like that. This is a little speculative, but perhaps you could look at it in this way.

Siddhiratna: Do you think there's another aspect to it, Bhante. I'm not altogether sure but, it's a bit like.. It's not as if you ask us to go for Refuge, we have to ask you. It's not exactly a point of principle, but it almost needs to be that way round. (words unclear) ...

S: Yes, it needs to be made explicit. A certain ceremoniousness is appropriate. The Buddha has to be **invited** to stay. If there is no one to invite him he doesn't stay.

Atula: So I'm just trying to (words unclear) something that can't be answered but, the Bodhisattva takes on a vow to go through life to do what he can for beings, is it something to do with, there is a karma set up of people to actually draw the Bodhisattva into that situation, or what is it. I don't know. Perhaps you can't....

S: Well it's not only a question of Buddhism, I think in several spiritual traditions if you want a sort of teacher or spiritual figure or let's say Bodhisattva strongly enough he'll come, he'll have to come. Your need ensures that he **will** come if that need is really expressed, as when you do the visualisation of a Bodhisattva - it is not merely that you are thinking **about** the Bodhisattva, or you start thinking about the Bodhisattva usually by way of visualizing his form in accordance with the iconography that you've learned. In the Vajrayana tradition this is called the - the Bodhisattva you visualise is the samayasattva, but as a result of that the Bodhisattva comes and that is what is called the jnanasattva, that is to say that aspect of reality or Buddhahood which so to speak thinks of as say Manjushri, descends into the vehicle prepared in the form of the samayasattva and is then actually present under that form. In that way you are actually in touch with the Bodhisattva himself. [27] This is in the context of meditation, not of course actual rebirth into the world but even that is said to be possible. As a result of that kind of - well let's not be afraid of the word - 'prayer' in inverted commas in this connection.

Dharmananda: So is that's what's indicated when say for instance in the Tibetan tradition you very often here that such-and-such a person has been an incarnation of Manjushri or Avalokiteshvara, (word unclear) Tsong-kha-pa, Manjushri would actually ...

S: Yes, I think sometimes one has to make the distinction between sort of let us say, what shall we call it, horizontal incarnation or reincarnation and vertical incarnation or reincarnation, do you see what I mean? It is a sort of adoptionism - to use the Christian theological term - there was a school of Christian theologians let's say who held that Christ became the Son of God at the moment of his baptism by John the Baptist - he was adopted as the Son of God, he wasn't born the Son of God. It wasn't that the Son of God as such descended into that particular human body, so that from the moment of conception there was a Son of God Incarnate. Jesus became the Son of God Incarnate only when he was adopted as the Son of God at the time of his baptism. This is called adoptionism. So you could say that say Tsong-kha-pa was not you know the incarnation or reincarnation of Manjushri in the sense that Manjushri descended into the womb of Tsong-kha-pa's mother so that from the moment of conception there was a reincarnation of Manjushri. One could say that as a result of his meditations and studies and spiritual practices generally Tsong-kha-pa became, as it were, a vehicle for that particular aspect of Enlightenment or the Buddha-nature, that Wisdom aspect, which we, so to speak, personify as Manjushri. He became the living embodiment of Manjushri. He became the Manjushri incarnate. Perhaps one can think of it more in those sort of terms. In other words adoptionism except that it's not a question of you being passive and you being adopted by God or in this case by the Buddha as Manjushri, no, but you attain up to that point where you yourself become the samayasattva, it's not even that you just visualize the samayasattva in your meditation; in your whole **life** you are the samayasattva, therefore you attract the jnanasattva, you create an appropriate vehicle through which the jnanasattva can manifest. [28]

Siddhiratna: Isn't it, otherwise you'll end up with making Bodhisattvas or Buddhas into gods or kettle-genies, and it's a bit like the Apollo thing you'll end up mistaking the iconography for the spirit of the thing, and that they are actually personifications in the sense of somebody's perception of reality.

S: Right, yes, yes, not only that but if you've got the idea say of Manjushri descending into the womb of a particular woman, so that from the moment of conception someone is the reincarnation of Manjushri, then of course you are obliged to represent him or believe him to be such, regardless of his behaviour, as under the Tibetan system. Sometimes you've almost got to kid yourself that this really is the reincarnation of Manjushri, regardless of how he is actually behaving, do you see what I mean? I remember that when I was in Kalimpong and incarnate lamas were pouring into India from Tibet as refugees, there were reincarnations of Nagarjuna, and Tilopa and all sorts of personalities from Buddhist history. And it was pretty clear that some of them just weren't what they were supposed to be. I knew one or two, well several of them, a number of them personally, including the reincarnation of Rechung, in fact maybe coming to England to stay with me, but he didn't seem at all like the Rechung of the biography of Milarepa. In fact he denied to me privately that he was *[Laughter obscuring a few words]* therefore he was supposedly that from the moment of conception - I believe it's conception - so therefore he's treated as such, people regard him as such, respect him as such, but if he **isn't** like that he's in a very false position. The system, the tradition, the institution to which he belongs, is in a very false position indeed. But if you have this more adoptionist way of looking at things, well, if for instance that same person as a result of his spiritual endeavours does not only come to a high point of spiritual development but manifests the same sort of spiritual quality that Rechung manifested then you could perhaps speak of him as a manifestation of Rechung, even in a quite literal as distinct from a metaphorical sense, do you see what I mean? Otherwise you're saddled with playboy reincarnations of various saints and Bodhisattvas of the past, and the system is trying to keep up this pretence that this is what they really are, well they're just testing your faith something of that sort, or you mustn't question their mysterious [29] tantric methods, they know what they are doing. So in this way your faith becomes blinder and blinder - even blinder than it was when you were a Christian perhaps. You have to allow yourself to be bluffed. You have to bluff yourself perhaps.

Siddhiratna: This is a literalistic lineage tradition, as it were.

S: I'm not denying that it is possible perhaps for a Bodhisattva actually to descend into the womb of a woman, or for someone actually to be the reincarnation of a Bodhisattva right from the beginning, but it must be born out in actual deeds and life. I think the other possibility is much more common, so to speak: that someone by his own efforts does raise himself to a certain spiritual level, a level on which he can, as it were, reflect some particular aspect of reality especially, either the one identified with Wisdom or Compassion, so that he can be **said** to be the embodiment of the Bodhisattva that archetypally speaking embodies that particular aspect. It is as though, well perhaps even literally, that Bodhisattva works through him. For instance if he displays conspicuous wisdom - as Tsong-kha-pa did - or conspicuous compassion, or conspicuous energy.

Mahamati: Could there also be a distinction between reincarnations of the archetypal figures and the historical figures?

S: Yes, yes, I think one might even go a step further than I've gone so far and speak of the possibility of a rebirth, a sort of linear horizontal rebirth of historical figures, but of a vertical rebirth, so to speak, of these archetypal figures.

Mahamati: I was wondering if it wouldn't be from a certain point of view even quite likely that certain historical figures would be reborn again and again and again in line with the Bodhisattvas.

S: But what one would have to insist that if they were, as it were, these linear rebirths, at every point along the line they would have to manifest whoever it was they were supposed to be reincarnations of. They couldn't deviate from that.

Mahamati: Even in certain temperament...

S: Hmm?

Mahamati: They would have to show a certain similarity with [30] the original.

S: Yes, not with the original historical figure, assuming the historical figure to have been the embodiment of say, or to have reflected an archetypal form, but to continue to reflect that archetypal form. For instance, to give you an example, all right let's say that Nagarjuna was an enlightened sage, well if someone is to be believed to be the reincarnation of Nagarjuna then he needs to exhibit wisdom. Do you see what I mean? If he doesn't exhibit wisdom you are justified in doubting whether he in fact is the reincarnation of Nagarjuna. Let's take it a step further; let's suppose - this is not traditional, but let's suppose - that Nagarjuna, in his life as Nagarjuna was regarded as the incarnation of Manjushri, do you see what I mean? All right, he may have been, let's say, in that life adopted as Manjushri, he became Manjushri so that Manjushri manifested **through** him. But if he is really the reincarnation of Nagarjuna that same spiritual level will be maintained, and therefore he will continue to reflect and embody the archetypal Manjushri. It's not so much that the archetypal Manjushri Himself has descended into the rebirth process, do you see what I mean?

Mahamati: I just wondered whether...

S: It's not that Manjushri has been incarnated, it is more that Nagarjuna has been reincarnated and continues to reflect or embody Manjushri. In other words, archetypal Bodhisattvas as such do not become reborn, one could say. This is a little speculative, but one could look at it like this.

Mahamati: I suppose maybe the Buddha could have been reborn?

S: Well this is of course, this is in a sense the Mahayana view, or one of the Mahayana views.

Mahamati: What, that he would have come back?

S: Well you see the Theravada view is a bit different, that there is an actual sort of being who is reborn as Sakyamuni before he was a Bodhisattva, and now he's in his last life, and that same being, in a manner of speaking of course, is reborn and becomes Enlightened. The Mahayana view is not really that. The Mahayana view is that the Bodhisattva in the tenth bhumi - which is a very high exalted sort of status indeed - in that state he sort of [31] emanates a figure whatever you like to please, who appears to undergo conception and birth and growing up and becoming a Buddha, and who teaches and leads beings to Enlightenment, and who is then, so to speak, withdrawn into his source. That is more the traditional almost docetic Mahayana outlook.

Mahamati: (unclear) reappear as he wishes.

S: Yes, and of course then you get into sort of theological or Buddhological deep water, whether there is one such Buddha emanating his Bodhisattvas or whether there are different Buddhas emanating different Bodhisattvas etc., etc. Again the danger of literalism, of thinking that there is literally a Buddha who is an Enlightened Buddha, sambhogakaya who is distinct from others, and so on. I don't know whether you get these sort of questions in beginners classes, probably not, but there is no harm if you have more background material for your own satisfaction.

Atula: I'm just wondering, it's perhaps going a bit too far, I'm just wondering if the conception of Avalokitesvara, that sort of imagery, head-splitting, if it come out of such a..

S: One can take it just sort of metaphorically as Compassion looking in all directions, but one can perhaps take it, so to speak, 'mudalogically' or even 'ontologically', inverted commas too, as having a certain metaphysical truth - to use the word metaphysical which isn't really appropriate. I think what this all adds up to is that it's very difficult to understand or to talk about what we might term spiritual realities, it's very difficult to speak of them or talk about them in terms of concepts which are derived really, ultimately from sense-experience. Perhaps it's quite important to get into view, broadly speaking this traditional Buddhist conception - again to use that term - of a sort of stratified universe, a sort of hierarchy of levels, and with different organs of perception corresponding to these levels. For instance, you've got the Five Eyes of the Buddha. I was thinking some time ago that I ought to give a lecture on this one day; you've got the eye of flesh, the Divine Eye, you've got the Eye of the Dharma, the Eye of wisdom, and then the Buddha Eye or Universal Eye. These represent different organs of perception on [32] different levels. So our ordinary thought and speech are derived exclusively almost from our experience through our organ of flesh within the limits of the kamaloka, or a particular segment of the kamaloka, so how can thought and speech, fashioned that way really suffice to describe higher experiences on these other levels. In order to really **understand** those levels and experiences you've got to develop those **higher** faculties, those higher organs, the Divine Eye, and the Eye of the Dharma, the Eye of Wisdom, the Buddha Eye. I think maybe a lot of what we've been talking about this morning boils down to this: we don't always realize what a narrow band, in the total spectrum of possibilities as regards consciousness and existence, what a narrow band we do in fact occupy or cover. This is one of the things that drugs in the far distant sixties opened some people's eyes to, that there's a whole range of experience to which they were usually quite oblivious. I'm not saying that the range of experience revealed by psychedelic drugs is the same as the range revealed by these higher Eyes in Buddhism, but certainly there is an analogy between the two, do you see what I mean? So perhaps this is one of the things we need to put across quite a lot, that our experience covers a very narrow segment of the band of total experience, the experience which **is** open to human beings, that our sense-based perception and reason isn't really adequate to do justice to all these other levels. It is that perhaps, and we get glimpses of them or intimations of them, some of them through poetry, through the arts religious symbols, but even they give us just a glimmering, just a hint. *[pause]*

Shall we have a drink of some sort before we carry on? I am getting a bit dry [Tea Break]

Jinapriya: In the old edition on p.71 you make a reference to the heresy of Arittha, could you elucidate that a little further.

Tejamati: It's on page 64 of the new edition.

S: I'd better get that sutra and look it up. Hopefully it is in the community library. Majjhima-Nikaya 1. 135.
[pause to find the text]

Are you asking about the nature of the 'heresy' - to use that term?

Jinapriya: Yes, well, as it were, you mentioned it in passing and I wondered if you could elucidate further what it is. You use it as an illustration but the danger is to misunderstand (word unclear). [33]

S: Yes, Arittha is represented in this sutra as saying: 'insofar as I understand the Dhamma taught by the Lord, it is that in following those things called stumbling blocks by the Lord there's no stumbling block at all.' So Arittha understood the Buddha as saying that hindrances were in fact not hindrances, and he grasped the Dhamma wrongly, and it's a very dangerous thing to grasp the Dhamma wrongly, because the Dhamma is the **antidote** for wrong grasping, so if you grasp the Dhamma Itself wrongly, well what hope is there for you? So it's very dangerous to misinterpret the Dhamma. It's not so dangerous, you may say, to have an ordinary worldly misunderstanding, because the Dhamma, if you can come into contact with it, is able to correct that. But suppose you misunderstand the Dhamma Itself, suppose you misinterpret the Dhamma Itself then there is no remedy for you. Therefore we have to be very careful that we don't misinterpret the Dhamma. And the illustration which is given is of the poisonous water snake; if you grasp it rightly, well it does you no harm, if you grasp it wrongly it will turn round and bite you - so the Dhamma is like that, it's as though it is very powerful, you grasp it wrongly it can do you actual harm. That is to say, not that the Dhamma Itself is doing you harm but your misunderstanding of the Dhamma is doing you harm inasmuch as, having made the Dhamma Itself a stumbling block you've nothing now to help you. Is that what you were asking about, that sort of thing?

Jinapriya: Well I was just, I was wondering specifically Arittha's misconception, what it was, as it were?

S: Well the term here is 'stumbling-block'. I don't know if it is especially mentioned, specifically mentioned, but you could say, for instance, he maintained the hindrances were not hindrances, that craving was not a hindrance, that hatred was not a hindrance, that mental restlessness was not a hindrance etc., etc. This links up very much with something I was talking about with one group of people the other evening, that is to say the misuse of the terminology and the philosophy also so to speak, of the 'Friends' by some people. For instance, you've got the idea of individual development, that is, one might say, part of the bedrock of the whole Movement, the ideal of individual development, spiritual development, so that is lodged firmly in people's minds, but I have noticed that sometimes people speak just the language of personal development, or pay lip-service to personal development without [34] really being concerned with that. They know that they have to speak in terms of personal development or individual development, to present something in terms of individual development, to justify it in terms of individual development for it to be acceptable. For instance perhaps they feel like being lazy. Well their attitude is not well laziness is a hindrance, I've got to get rid of that and bestir myself, they say 'no, I think being lazy for a bit would be good for my individual development' - do you see what I mean? The idea of development - because it has ceased to be an ideal - negates the very possibility of development itself. The ideal of development has been used to justify unwillingness to develop. I see signs of this sort of thing here and there in the Movement in different ways, and we have to be very careful because if the ideal of development is misused in this way, if you grasp that particular water-snake wrongly how are you going to develop? What standards have you? What principles have you got, criteria? So this is a very dangerous trend, to try to justify things, things that are really weaknesses, and backslidings in terms of those things being good for your individual development.

Dhammarati: What are your criteria then for what's good. Because presumably that person feels much more inclined to a certain mode of action?

S: Yes. Well I think it's bound up also with another sort of current trend which is much much wider than the FWBO, that if something is good for you it must be easy and pleasant. Maybe it's a reaction from the older attitude of well if it's unpleasant it must do you good. It is as though we've gone to the other extreme - that nothing can really do you good, or contribute to your growth and development unless it's sort of easy and comfortable. So that you too easily assume that what you feel like doing and what you want to do is necessarily good for you to do. I think that is a very widespread tendency. In other words, people are very unwilling, nowadays, and again this goes far beyond the 'Friends', to think in terms of giving up something, or thinking as of duty, or thinking in terms of bearing a difficulty - it's got to be pleasant, it's got to be easy, and this affects even the spiritual life within the 'Friends'. If you don't want to do something, if you don't want to give up a certain habit you'll rationalize your way out of the situation. Something like smoking - 'oh, it steadies my nerves' etc. etc. People are unwilling to [35] give up this sort of habit. *[pause]*

This of course, yes, does bring us to the question how can you distinguish? I think you have to mistrust yourself here, if you're a beginner in this area. It's all very well to speak in terms of thinking for yourself - all right think for yourself, but then submit your conclusions to the judgement of your spiritual friends who know you and who can perhaps take a more objective view, who can arrive at a consensus, and who can perhaps see that you are rationalising that what you are presenting as helpful, or even necessary, to your spiritual development is in fact not so. Sometimes it's very obvious that something is not going to be good for somebody. Sometimes it's a bit doubtful, there are all sorts of intermediate positions. Sometimes you might say 'well try and let's see after a few weeks', you might like to say that, you may not always be very sure yourself, it may not be easy to tell, there might be arguments on both sides. But sometimes it's very clear that the person is rationalising, they are just taking the easy way, they are doing something which is not helpful, but they are pretending that it is all part of their spiritual development, they're deceiving themselves, not deliberately but rationalising in this sort of way. And how are **you** to know also that somebody else is developing? This is not easy. You can only have some inkling if you have observed the person, or seen the person, had contact with them over quite a period, if you know them pretty well. But I think the signs of overall development as an individual are pretty clear. There are such things as increased mindfulness, emotional positivity, energy, happiness, thoughtfulness where other people are concerned, reliability, responsibility, spontaneity, all these sort of characteristics - they're pretty easy to recognise. Sometimes maybe a deeper understanding of the Dharma. You can see someone has understood the Dharma more deeply perhaps, just theoretically, than they had understood it before. Perhaps you just feel they're more solid now, more reliable, more mature. If you've had the opportunity of associating with someone over a period of two or three years it isn't difficult to tell, roughly speaking, whether on the whole they have developed.

Mahamati: I believe the difficulty, one difficulty with applying that criterion is that people can't always develop regularly and therefore I feel everyone has to find their own way, and maybe they do have to even take a step back in order to take a couple of steps forward. You can't always say you shouldn't do that because it is unskilful. It doesn't seem.. [36]

S: I think even that philosophy one has to be very careful about, one has to examine what exactly it means. To give you an example, someone, one of the women wrote to me recently, and as many of the women are she is concerned about this question of abortion, and she had sort of come to the conclusion that if she did ever decide to have an abortion, she would definitely recognize it as an unskilful thing, so before she had the abortion she would confess that she was going to commit the abortion and repent. So, all right I haven't yet discussed the matter with her, but when I do, I shall point out that well from the Mahayana point of view confession and repentance follow the act, and an essential part of the confession or the repentance is you are not going to commit that act again, because you have seen its unskilfulness, so how can you possibly in that

way repent in advance. Do you see what I mean? It's a contradiction in terms, so here there seems to be a certain amount of confusion of thought. So it's much the same with that sort of *[tape noise obscures a few words]* if it really on the whole helps you well it's not a backward step, do you see what I mean. I think it's confusing to talk in terms of a backward step so that you can go forward. Well in a way we know what you mean - it's a metaphorical expression - just like the goat that is said to go back before he charges forward and butts you, but I don't think you can take it literally that it is justifiable to do something which is **actually** unskilful, which **actually** brings about a setback so that you deteriorate, so that you can go forward, I don't think it really happens like that, not literally.

Mahamati: Well it's just I think that people have to come to their own conclusions.

S: They have to come to their own conclusions, but **how** do they come to their own conclusions? They study the situation, they take all the information that they can, including the advice of their Kalyana Mitras, do you see what I mean, or other people who know them well, and if their Kalyana Mitras in the light of their knowledge of them, suggest a certain line of action well they would probably be unwise not to accept that advice. Of course the ultimate responsibility rests with them, with the individual, whether they accept the advice or not. But I think I'd be very careful not to suggest that someone just does what **they** think is best regardless, and without consulting Kalyana Mitras - [37] otherwise why do you **have** Kalyana Mitras?

Mahamati: I just - maybe I've got a slightly jaded view of this but you said that the first thing one should do is to trust one's own judgement, and at the moment I feel rather inclined to....

S: Yes, yes, trust your own judgement, but **after gathering all the relevant information** which includes what your Kalyana Mitras say. I mean you cannot but take, whether explicitly or implicitly, you either follow or you don't follow, that means the final responsibility is with you. *[pause to change - and find - the tape]*

Well what we mustn't do is sort of hastily jump to conclusions, and especially without consulting our Kalyana Mitras.

Mahamati: I suppose some people have been given wrong advice and quite strongly put advice by their Kalyana Mitras, or by other people in the name of spiritual friendship, and if you've been given wrong advice and you've acted on that, and you realize that you shouldn't have done.

S: Ah, but then the question arises, well how does one know that wrong advice is wrong advice? You may even be wrong, because things may not work out as you thought they would work out, that does not necessarily mean that you were given the wrong advice

For instance someone may advise you 'OK you go off to America or Australia.' When you get there it may not be what you expected, you may not have the good time that you expected. That does not mean that you were given wrong advice. Do you see what I mean? Advice is not quite right or wrong in that factual sort of way. But even so, you accepted that advice, you acted upon it or you did not act upon it. The responsibility was still yours. So even though, yes, the residual decision is yours but, no, you should certainly inform yourself as fully **[end of side, next side]** as you can about the situation, your suitability for it etc., etc, and you do that partly by thinking over things yourself, making your enquiries, partly by consulting your Kalyana Mitras.

Dhammarati: Having spoken to you, spoken to people who have spoken [38] to you, I get the impression that you're much less inclined in a way to hand out definite courses of advice than a lot of Order members are.

S: Yes, I'm very reluctant to give definite advice. I **very** rarely give it. Only when I'm really pressed, yes. Though I clarify principles as much as I can and say, 'well these are the principles that you should be applying. But the way in which you apply them or whether you apply them or whether they are relevant, the extent to which they are relevant, that's something that only you can decide.' To come back to what we were talking about before about co-ops - well it's so easy to say to some up and coming young friend, 'well you should go straight into a co-op'. People unthinkingly give, well it's not advice, it's more like a directive. I think one should be very careful about doing that.

Atula: Yes, especially with some of the people that are 'wanting' advice, like those people that do actually come for advice, especially like some of the young people that I've had dealings with. They want you to make a decision for them and I'm very wary of doing that.

S: Well sometimes one may have to. If the person is very young, very immature, it may be they're not yet fully emerged from their childhood, and older more experienced people have to make decisions for them - usually it's their parents. And if the decisions are not taken by the parents the children don't feel able to take decisions themselves, if the children are just **left** without a decision That can be very bad for them. So someone, even someone who comes along - someone who's very young - to the centre, may be of that nature as it were. They may not be sufficiently mature. Then you have the responsibility even of directing them and that becomes a much bigger responsibility in a way than simply giving advice. You're almost in the parental position.

Atula: It's given that situation you have to be in the parental position.

S: Yes, I think you have to accept that. You're functioning within the group as it were, not within the spiritual community in that case. An immature person has come along who hasn't got a parent or the equivalent.

Atula: We do get a number of (those). I recognize that.

S: So I think one mustn't shrink from that responsibility but exercise it very very carefully. But certainly not try to give [39] directives to comparatively mature people. Encourage those people to take their own decisions after consulting others.

Dhammarati: Why are you so reluctant to give direct advice?

S: Well first of all because people.. well I can advise, I don't exert any pressure. I say I want usually people to clarify the position. Supposing someone says to me, 'well I think I want to go to Australia'. Well I don't sort of say 'well I don't think that's a good idea' or 'I do think that's a good idea'. I might say 'well what's behind it - what's your reason for wanting to go there?' etc., etc., but also I'm aware of well it doesn't really make much difference whether they go or not. *[Laughter]* They can develop if they stay here, well maybe they'll develop in a slightly different way - they can also develop if they go there, maybe in a slightly different way. There's not really much to choose between it as far as **I'm** concerned. So I don't feel especially motivated to either persuade or dissuade. Well if you're going off to Australia or wherever or doing something else, well fair enough. So there are a lot of things that people feel like doing that are not

sort of definitely skilful, not definitely unskilful, it doesn't really matter much either way. Going to Australia is in itself neither a skilful nor an unskilful action. Do you see what I mean? So I think there are very often occasions when advice is just not called for. Because it isn't a question of any choice between skilful and unskilful. When someone wants to shift to another centre, well in itself, yes, that's neither skilful or unskilful. But if for instance I see that that person has moved from one centre to another a number of times within a short period then I will say, 'well I think this is just a manifestation of restlessness, that you're not able to settle down anywhere, or as soon as you start settling down maybe various things come up which you don't want to face so you move on to another centre. So consider this'. Even then I don't say 'well it is restlessness'. I put it as a possibility because you can't sort of psychoanalyse someone on the spot in that sort of way, at least **I** can't. So I say 'well just consider that as a possibility, that perhaps it is just a manifestation of restlessness. Think about it because if it is, **if** it is, it probably would be better that you didn't go'. I don't usually put things more strongly than that. I encourage people to think about it in that sort of way and make their own decision in the end. I've said what I think, or what I think **might** be the case. So very rarely do I give a sort of very categorical advice or try to influence. I think I hardly ever try to influence people in a particular direction. I don't think this is desirable. But of course [40] sometimes this is a bit unsatisfactory if people want to be told what to do, and sometimes you mustn't go along with that. But if they are definitely immature and like children, well you do have to in a responsible way.

Mahamati: Do you think maybe, that is, what's at the back of my mind is people trying to influence you, and even spiritual friends trying to influence one in a certain direction.

S: *[interrupts]* Well I think that's fair enough. You see, I have to be extra careful because I'm quite aware that maybe, whether rightly or wrongly, a bit of extra weight attaches to what **I** may say - people may take it more seriously. Therefore I'm more, very very careful what I say. But amongst all of you who are more or less equals. I don't think it matters if someone tries to influence you. You should be robust enough to come back at him and not agree to be influenced.

Mahamati: You might experience it as a group. All these people trying to influence you in a certain direction, and one is not making up one's own mind.

S: But I think one has to be careful not to think that you necessarily make up your own mind just by **differing** with other people. If you just react - 'oh they're all telling me to do something, OK I'm not going to do it,' you're just as much influenced by them as if you'd gone along with it. I think there has to be a certain amount of robust give and take among people in this sort of way.

Mahamati: I suppose what I'm saying is that when I joined the Order I wasn't enough of an individual to be able to be a member of the Sangha in the full sense. It was as much a group as anything else. So then one is talking rather in idealistic terms to say you should listen to advice of the spiritual community when it's a group.

S: Well, no there are two things to distinguish here: whether the so-called spiritual community is actually functioning as a group or whether it is not functioning as a group, it is functioning as a spiritual community, but you're interpreting that, on account of your own weakness, as a group functioning. These are two quite distinct things and one has to deal with them distinctly. For instance if the spiritual community is lapsing, is not functioning as a spiritual community but is functioning as a group and is just bringing pressure to bear on one, well one is justified simply in resisting that. But supposing the spiritual community **is** functioning as a spiritual community but due to your own weakness or reactivity you can't see that, you take their advice as pressure, then you have to correct your own attitude and try to see that they're not bringing pressure, they

are in fact just giving advice. [41] Sometimes it may be very difficult to distinguish between the two. Different members of the spiritual community may be saying the same thing with a sort of different motivation. Some may be just saying it from a group point of view, others may be saying it genuinely as individuals. Sometimes the situation can be quite complex. People can even change. One evening if you discuss it with them they can perhaps speak genuinely as an individual. Some other evening it may seem very different. One has to try to strike a sort of balance, but you're not necessarily being an individual if you're just going against the group. That may be just as reactive. But I have noticed that some Order members give advice with a sort of confidence that I just personally wouldn't feel. [Laughter] because sometimes the situation is such that confidence is not called for. You're not required to be confident for instance whether going to Australia is going to be good for them or not. How can you know, how can you tell, what they're going to meet when they get there, what it's going to be like for them? The actual going, as I've said, is neutral. It's what they do when they get there which is either positive or negative, skilful or unskilful. The actual going is neither. Of course, you might point out, for instance, considerations like well you will be relatively isolated from the spiritual community and you may feel that that particular person needs more association with the spiritual community, so then you will say well please bear this in mind, please consider this before you go. Ask yourself whether you will get enough spiritual contact if you go to such and such place. If you think that you won't well maybe you'd better reconsider your decision - one can say that. But at present well if someone goes to Australia well they're almost certain to fall on their feet. The mere fact that they can even think of going all that way means they're pretty all right! You see what I mean? I'm not just speaking about Australia specifically, I'm taking it as an example. If someone can think of going to Australia and travelling all those thousands of miles well you don't have to worry about what's going to happen to them when they get there. The fact that they're thinking in those terms at all means they're pretty well able to look after themselves at least from a mundane point of view.

Because sometimes if say co-op managers are hard pressed and centre chairmen are hard pressed and need people there's a tendency to pressure people a bit. Yes certainly one can encourage people, even quite vigorously point out possibilities but one should be very careful about applying actual pressure. That is really something one should never do. I mean there's one particularly dreadful *micchaditthi* that if someone doesn't undertake the work that you think he ought to undertake you proceed to question his commitment - that is really dreadful, that's really sort of hitting below the belt I would say. That is really kicking someone in the spiritual you-know [42] what! [Laughter] That's really not fair at all. One should never say that, one should never even think that. That's to cut the ground between you on which alone communication can take place.

Anyway we got onto that from Arittha and his heresy. Any other query?

Virananda: I'd like to raise a query which is slightly on a tangent to what we've been talking about. It's just generally on the theme of individual development. Would you agree that as someone develops that not only their creative tendencies are heightened or strengthened but also their reactive tendencies? I ask this question because I was reading Goethe's autobiography not so long ago and he says something exactly to that effect, which he'd observed in himself - that as he progressed through his life he noticed that it wasn't just the positive or creative side of him which was being enhanced but also he had to deal with a stronger reactive side as well.

S: I take it he didn't use those actual terms.

Virananda: No he didn't, no.

S: I think if one is thinking in terms of ordinary human growth and development as distinct from spiritual development specifically, that is very true, that both your positive qualities and your negative qualities grow and develop together, but in the case of spiritual development specifically what happens is that the unskilful or the reactive is increasingly subordinated to the skilful and the creative and eventually eliminated altogether. It's energy infused into the skilful and the creative. But having said that one must also recognize that sometimes it happens that when you make an effort spiritually, when you do grow, when you do develop, become more creative, there's a sort of reaction from the other unintegrated side of yourself, perhaps a very powerful reaction, so it is as though we've become more creative and more reactive at the same time. Do you see what I mean? But this is a quite specific sort of phenomenon. That it's the reactivity that's sort of beginning to put up a fight for its life and it does fight very vigorously, and perhaps therefore reactivity does come into operation in full force in that desperate sort of way only after you really have started developing, and have become more creative but it is its sort of death throes as it were. It is on the way out. It hasn't **really** become more powerful.

Siddhiratna: There's an interesting thing that I've read on page 69 of the old edition, that Vacchagotta who after having talked to the Buddha about whether the Buddha's reborn or not gets the answer and then says - you say - 'at this point Vacchagotta breaks down and admits his mind has become completely confused and that the measure of faith

[43] which he had in the Buddha as the result of their former conversation has now completely disappeared.' I've gone through that a bit in the sense that sometimes even, it's related to say when I take study groups, you sometimes feel you don't really know what you're doing in there and I think it's a bit like what you just described, reactivity actually sort of struggling to keep its hold on you in some sense.

S: I think, yes, it may be that but I think also it can be due to another cause - that is to say your intellectual framework is expanding. You see for instance you thought that you understood something but then you begin to doubt your own understanding which sometimes means that your understanding is expanding. You're beginning to see the thing in a broader light, more comprehensibly. Your former sort of narrower understanding is breaking down but that may sort of have broken down before you've properly developed the broader framework. So you're left so to speak for the time being without much of a frame; you're dissatisfied with the old frame, with the **old** understanding but you haven't fully developed the new. I think this happens all the way along the line so to speak.

Siddhiratna: What's the solution?

S: Well there is no solution, in a way there's no problem. It's a natural process.

Siddhiratna: It's just by getting deeper into it.

S: Yes and formulating and re-formulating, creating a new more adequate framework. The difficulty arises when you're having to take study classes in that state of uncertainty, when you've got doubts about your old understanding but haven't properly developed your new understanding. You've doubts about the old framework of explanation but haven't developed a new framework of explanation.

Siddhiratna: It must be quite a broad reaching thing because it's not just merely that you've discarded some inadequate system of understanding and replaced it with a more broad one. A bit like realizing that the Earth's round instead of flat, but it's actually, there's an emotional sort of element there as well because you're actually existentially thrown as well as intellectually confused.

S: It's also correlated with a change of attitude perhaps on your part and you may sort of hover or wobble between the two for a while.

Sagaramati: I sometimes get this from the idea of evolution because often we go over this idea of evolution. Like in this chapter it's mentioned that the Buddha can remember his lives as far back as he wished [44] but as far as I know there is no mention of the Buddha being anything other than a human being. I know there are some Jatakas where he was a monkey but as far as I know they're unCanonical. They're like myths where the Buddha's sort of changed places with some of them.

S: They're not myths, they're more like folk stories, but it's true that references to previous lives on the part of the Buddha in the Nikayas, that is to say the Digha Nikaya, Majjhima, Anguttara, Samyutta - the four Nikayas, not the Kudaka because that contains the Jatakas - they invariably refer to the Buddha or the Buddha invariably refers to himself as having been either a righteous ruler or a sage. There are no other references, no references to any other kinds of previous birth at all. The rebirth as the monkey and the tiger and so on, they all come in the Jataka book, not in the actual verses but in the prose portion which is commentarial, not actual text. But I believe there's only quite a limited number of references to previous births of the Buddha's in the Pali texts, in the first four Nikayas but even though he refers only to rebirths as a righteous ruler and as a sage it doesn't mean that there were not before them other rebirths of another kind which he was able to remember but about which he has not said anything. In other words one cannot conclude from those limited references, even though they are all to rebirth as human beings, that the Buddha had no recollection of a rebirth other than as a human being. That is not proven. You can only say in the first four Nikayas he refers to rebirths as a human being only. What weight one attaches to that evidence is another matter. There is the odd reference to other people being reborn as animals, for instance as a jackal, but again how literally one is to take that that's another point. Or whether it is part of, for want of a better term, the original teaching, the Buddha's own teaching that's again another point not easy to determine.

Sagaramati: One last question I've got is to do with semantics. I get confused and that is that the unconditioned is contingent upon the conditioned because I know you've said that the unconditioned is not contingent upon the conditioned. In the formula you say that knowledge and vision of things as they are arises in dependence on samadhi which is conditioned, so you have the unconditioned arising in dependence upon the conditioned.

S: I think this sort of confusion is due to the use of two incompatible terminologies - a static terminology and a dynamic terminology. One can think of the unconditioned - let's use that term provisionally - either in static or in dynamic terms. If one thinks of the unconditioned in static terms it is something that is eternal, fixed, unchanging, and sometimes in the Pali texts it is referred to in that way. But one can [45] also think of the unconditioned in dynamic terms as that which is ever increasingly creative. So there's no question of a fixed unchanging abstract unconditioned. There is only the creative process, each stage of which is more creative than the last, so this can be called unconditioned. This is the spiral mode of conditionality. The spiral mode of conditionality is unconditioned in that sense. So I think it's a question of making up one's mind which particular kind of terminology one is using in any given context, and sticking to it. I become less and less satisfied with the static terminology.

Dhammarati: One last point. I think this might be one of the questions the Buddha thought wasn't worth answering.

S: Well we don't have to necessarily think it not worth answering.

Dhammarati: One of the guys asked - we'd been talking about the whole thing again of Enlightenment and perceiving things as they actually were, and he said well OK given all that how come that's not the way we see things, how come we're actually here and interpreting things and experiencing things in a limited way?

S: Well this sort of approach was exemplified in the story of the man wounded by the poisoned arrow. I think one can't take that parable too literally though. One can't stop people thinking and asking questions. One could also say that well sometimes you need to know the etiology of the disease before you can start treating it. For instance, all right supposing it is a poisoned arrow and you want to take it out, maybe it is helpful to know what kind of poison it is. Maybe that **is** relevant, supposing for instance you know that the arrow was shot by a person belonging to a particular tribe and supposing that particular tribe uses a certain kind of poison on its arrows, well if your treatment depends upon the kind of poison that has been used well it's useful to know who shot the arrow and which tribe he belonged to. Do you see what I mean? If one wants to speak in terms of the parable at all. One shouldn't take it too simplistically. Sometimes in order to get people out of a mess you need to know or they need to know how they got into it so that the process can be reversed. The Buddha himself does that. What is the **cause** of suffering, well craving. So in a way to some extent that goes against the parable of the man wounded by the poisoned arrow if you interpret that too literally. Otherwise you can say well don't worry about the cause of suffering just get rid of it. Well no, in order to get rid of it you have to find out what caused it. In terms of the man wounded by the poisoned arrow you have to know how the arrow got there in the first place, which in a way is what the parable taken at its face value seems to say that you mustn't want to know. What it

[46] really means I think is that you should not be concerned with any question which is not **directly** relevant to the taking out of the arrow, but that may include inquiring as to how the arrow got there in the first place. It can't preclude that. So you can't preclude sort of metaphysical questions altogether. It would be very convenient perhaps if you could. Sometimes Theravadins apply this parable quite mechanically - if anyone asks a question which is a bit difficult or a bit abstract they just repeat this parable to stifle any sort of discussion or any sort of inquiry. That isn't desirable. Though, yes there are unnecessary questions but again you could say, at least from a psychological point of view, well why do people even ask unnecessary questions. It must be necessary in some sense even if it's only psychological and you need to take note of that in order to deal with that person. Why is someone always babbling about the weather or about football? - well there must be a reason for that. So it's no use just saying to him well just stop talking about the weather or talking about football, let's just get down to the real nitty-gritty as it were - no - you have to inquire perhaps into what makes him talk in that compulsive manner on that particular subject. That is **relevant** to your helping him, to him developing. Again it seems that literalism is the real enemy.

Dhammarati: So how did the arrow get there in the first place?

S: Well you just study the chain of causation. It makes it very clear. *[Laughter]* It's a question of thinking clearly. Very often people don't think clearly. I got an example recently - it's in my mind because I mentioned it yesterday - again this well worn topic of abortion which is one that women are always considering it seems. Someone wrote to me, a woman wrote to me and sent a little article which she'd written on the subject which was not bad, but she'd also read something written by Kapleau on this subject, I think it was in "Zen, dawn in the West", and he, writing on the subject of abortion, makes the statement that according to Mahayana Buddhism the right to life is not absolute, which appears to open the door to the possibility of abortion. So all right he makes this statement, 'the right to life is not absolute, this is the Mahayana teaching'. So please comment as they say in the examination papers. What is your reaction to that? What do you notice about that statement?

Sagaramati: That there's a right. There's some assumption made.

Vairocana: Where does the right come from?

S: Yes, well there's a question that comes even before that. The term 'right' itself. Does it occur in Mahayana Buddhism? Does it **occur** [47] in Buddhism? Does it occur in **Indian** thought. What's the Sanskrit for it? What's the Pali for it? Also the question which Mahayana text? in which Sutras does the Buddha make this statement? Actually it's an impossible statement because the Buddha of the Mahayana Sutras would never have expressed himself in that way because the language of rights is not a traditional Buddhist language. It's come into existence even in the West only comparatively recently. So one cannot take that really as representing the Mahayana point of view. You know *a priori* that that's impossible, that couldn't be the Mahayana teaching on the subject. So on Kapleau's part there's been a confusion of thought I would say and if you can accept that statement of his about Mahayana Buddhism it shows confusion of thought on your part too. I'm not saying that the statement, the abstract statement, 'there is no absolute right to life' may not be correct, I'm not discussing that, I'm not discussing the merits of the statement considered in the abstract but as what purports to be a representation of **Mahayana** Buddhist teaching, I'm questioning it very much.

So again one sees that people don't think clearly. In Kapleau's case I'm rather surprised at this. It seems almost as though he's not thinking honestly because if you claim that Mahayana Buddhism teaches this that or the other and if the topic is quite important, what you should really do is to quote your sources, quote a sutra or quote a great Acharya to that effect.

Sagaramati: I imagine he was probably thinking of the Zen tradition when even a master can take somebody's life or take the life of a cat.

S: But even then do they put it in those terms, that the right to life is not absolute? You're introducing a certain way of looking at things there which is not perhaps appropriate or not historically justified. You're not presenting their point of view, you're interpreting their point of view. You're sort of translating it and that translation may be faithful or it may be unfaithful but 'right to life', the expression, in a Buddhist context, or alleged Buddhist context, is suspect immediately.

Virananda: I recollect - I don't know from where - of reading a phrase like one's birthright as a human being is Enlightenment. Is that something that's been added by a western....

S: Yes, I would say yes. In Sanskrit there is this (**Apattikali**) which means capacity for or eligibility for but it doesn't mean 'right'. It's just you have the capacity for.

Sagaramati: Putting that in a modern day slogan. I mean everybody who's born has certain rights to education and work etc. you could say[48] that as a human being you've got a capacity to become an educated person or to become... express your energy, and it's a pity if you're not allowed to do it. You can't really say that you've got a right.

S: I think this whole concept of rights is very very suspect, not just from the point of view of historical Buddhism but even taken on its own merits. It's almost a crazy point in the West. You sort of endow certain people with quite imaginary rights and you then proceed to fight for them and represent yourself as fighting for somebody's rights.

Sagaramati: Animals.

S: Animals' rights yes. Or you could apply this to anything, the rights of flowers for instance; and of course the right to something you think is desirable for them to have. Well, for instance under some regimes you would be told that you had the **right** to sacrifice yourself for the regime and the regime was determined to safeguard that right. Here again it's a bit like people using the language of personal development to justify something which is nothing to do with personal development.

Virananda: It seems that it's always the case that with this word 'rights' there is attached this word 'equality'. That your rights are somehow there to give you equality with the rest of your particular class. You can have various classes and they can be as wide as anything but there's always equality....

S: For instance soldiers die for their country. You too, even though you're a civilian, you have the right to die for your country. We don't want to **deprive** you of that right. We **insist** on your having that right. *[Laughter]* Do you see what I mean? That's because we want you to be equal.

Dhammarati: The idea of rights is useful insofar as it gets certain things done so if you're going to scrap the idea of rights you're going to have to stress the glory of compassion.

S: Yes, you're going to have to stress duties. Other people have a duty. The stronger have a duty towards the weaker, not that the weaker have rights for which they should fight or which other people should fight on their behalf. I think just stressing people's duties is much simpler.

Atula: It only politically you hear more of rights than anywhere now I think. It seems that that has become more and more prevalent as people....

S: It's as though if you endow people with rights then you justify your [49] fighting, I won't say for them you justify yourself in fighting. You justify yourself in committing violence.

Atula: It's really quite a new idea isn't it - rights.

S: Yes I think it arose in the 18th Century especially around the time of the French Revolution. The concept of 'natural rights'. It's a very very questionable concept indeed. Not that from a moral or spiritual point of view it is good that people should be treated in a certain way. One might agree that it's not good, but you don't need the concept of rights here. That is a very ambiguous, unsatisfactory concept which can be seriously misused.

Atula: It seems to have always been down to the fact that people weren't fulfilling their duties....

S: Because who says who has what rights? It's very arbitrary. Someone says that somebody else or they themselves, have a certain right and because they have this right they've got the right to fight for it.

Siddhiratna: The contradiction in terms though is that you can't have natural rights, you can only have rights which (unclear) to the social system as it were and therefore in some ways I would have thought some of those rights are worth protecting or standing up for but there's no way you can

S: Yes because you're keeping people to their contract, because by living in society you implicitly enter into a certain contract with people that you will treat them in a certain way if they will treat you in a certain way. If they do not live up to their side of the contract you're justified in pursuing the matter and even from the point of view of the group enforcing that contract.

Siddhiratna: Maybe in law you'd have the right to do that, to sue.

S: Yes there is such a thing as legal right, that undoubtedly exists but there's no such thing as moral right, I think, or natural right. Because legal right means that you are able through the courts to enforce something because there is a law to the effect that you shall enjoy something or not be subjected to something. The law for instance says that you shall not be assaulted. So if you are assaulted well the matter goes to court. In fact it isn't left to the individual in criminal matters to bring the matter to court. The matter is brought to court by the authorities in the person of the police.

Siddhiratna: What I find interesting is that natural right doesn't seem to be followed, although there's no such thing as natural right but there is a moral right I would have thought in the sense that - I'm not sure about [50] this - given that you have a situation in social society etc., that there are human beings, especially say children or something like that, it seems to me that most, if not all of those people without reservation have the right to express their individuality or be in a position where their individuality can be expressed.

S: I think the concept 'right' is essentially a legal one.

Siddhiratna: It's still a sort of social contract as it were.

S: I would say that the term 'right' is misleading in the moral context. You could say that from a spiritual point of view that it was desirable that people should be treated in a certain way and that you as say a spiritual individual would wish to treat people in a certain way but that is different from saying that they've got a right to be treated in a particular way. I think the concept of rights is essentially a legal concept - having force within the context of the group and is essentially something which is enforceable.

Siddhiratna: But you can't apply it to the moral philosophy.

S: No. I think this is a mistake which has been made in Britain recently, that you try to enforce certain moral values under the guise of rights by legal means. I think this is counter productive.

Siddhiratna: Do you know off hand of an example of that for instance?

S: Well for instance race relations. I think it's a mistake to make it a subject of legislation rather than say moral education.

Siddhiratna: There's going to be a resistance on the part of one part of that society...

S: Because people are all equally covered by the law. If the law is not equally applied well then there is sufficient grounds for action anyway. In terms of simple justice. As with say this question of blasphemy. This commission is working out proposals for alterations in the criminal law and suggested there should be a separate offence of blasphemy covering disruption of services in churches and saying rude things in churches and so on. But the point is that such eventualities are already covered by the laws referring to riot and all those sort of things. You don't really require something separate to deal simply with religion. So in the same way you don't really require separate laws dealing with race relations.

End of Side One Side Two

Otherwise you get what is sometimes called 'the race-relations industry'. I think there's some truth in that. There is a sort of industry. It's in someone's interests. You've got a cause and you can fight for the cause and you make actually the situation worse in the long run. This is what I think is happening in [51]Britain.

Mahamati: I don't know anything about it actually. I would have thought that in common law there was no law against discrimination on grounds of colour. That's why they introduced the race discriminations act. So that if you were a black person and you'd been discriminated against and you could prove it's because of your colour then you'd have grounds to complain.

S: Well there is this well known case in the Midlands somewhere where someone refused to sell his house to a coloured person, so that sort of eventuality is now covered by the law because it is said he was discriminating against a coloured person but then again, if one talks in terms of rights people have got the right to sell their house to anybody that they wish. If anyone thinks it's not good, they shouldn't discriminate well, that is a matter for moral education and persuasion, I think, not legislation. I think that will make the situation worse. It'll make the person who is say prosecuted under that law and compelled to sell his house say to a black person, very very upset and resentful.

Mahamati: The other aspect maybe is that if you change the law this does have an effect on... gradually people's attitudes change.

S: I think that is also quite dangerous because where is the limit? What are you going to change? Where do you stop? I mean supposing the regime or the government, whoever's in power, passes a law to modify your attitude in **any** respect, are you going to accept that just because it is the law? So I think you're on very shaky ground when you start trying to determine moral attitudes by purely legalistic means, or predominantly legalistic means.

Siddhiratna: It sounds like the police state.

S: For instance if someone doesn't sell his house to you for whatever grounds - maybe he doesn't like people with blue eyes or red hair, but it's not an injustice. It doesn't amount to an injustice, I would say, in the legal sense. Otherwise the only way you can resolve the situation is by not allowing people to sell their houses at all. You put it in the hands of the state. The state will sell their house for them, if the state in fact permits private property. Because all right, supposing leaving aside say the question of race, all right you can't help liking one person who applies to buy your house more than somebody else on whatsoever grounds. Supposing you are a Catholic and you sell your house to a Catholic, well are you going to have a law to oblige you to sell it to a Protestant and not to a Catholic as you would prefer? What is the criterion going to be? I mean haven't you got the choice, are you not free to sell it to a Protestant because you happen to be a Protestant or a Catholic if you happen to be a Catholic or white if you happen to be white? Or have [52] you not got the right to sell it to someone just because you like the look of him. Has the state got to intervene and adjudicate and ensure that the person who objectively needs the house most shall get it, because **you** can't decide that. So where does this process stop? Do you see what I mean?

Dhammarati: You've actually got an objective situation where a lot of people are having quite a hard time because they're so persistently discriminated against. There's a real problem there that has to be tackled. So if you don't legislate how do you do that?

S: Well supposing it's the question of housing. All right, supposing you say that certain people, say because of their colour are not getting housing, well then one might say the ultimate responsibility in a welfare state

rests with the government to provide it, not by forcing people who've got houses to sell them to coloured people but by actually building houses for them. *[pause]* But even then it's difficult. All right, supposing you build houses, supposing the government builds houses for black people, then supposing the black people sell those houses, where does it stop? Then again you've got to house these people and maybe they go and try to buy houses elsewhere and it starts all over again. Maybe they sell their houses to white people. Well you'd also have a law prohibiting black people from selling their houses to white people and making themselves homeless. *[Laughter]* All right supposing you oblige the white houseowner to sell his house to a black purchaser and the black purchaser buys it, all right, supposing after a while he wants to move is he allowed to sell it to a white person? or not?

Dhammarati: In a way it's a bit abstract because if the guy wanted to live someplace he's not going to sell the house, get a bank loan and then and go and buy bananas or something like that. It's the real needs that aren't being met.

S: Well I think if there are real needs that are not being met, presuming it's known what real needs actually are, I think the responsibility rests with the government to supply those needs, but not by forcing other citizens to do so by means of that sort of legislation. That I think only creates ill will. Therefore I think it exacerbates the situation. At the same time there should be much more intensive moral education along lines of general humanitarianism, insisting that all human beings are just human beings and the natural thing is to treat other human beings just as human beings. The differences of colour are relatively unimportant.

Kuladeva: I wonder how seriously that would be taken actually in certain [53] communities. Because I think there is a certain amount of that kind of attitude that's given over in schools but it doesn't really stop people who do live in communities that do have a tradition of prejudice against certain sections of society if one maintains those prejudices through their numbers.

S: I think you'll find it isn't really a question of colour at all, really. I think it's something deeper than that which gets as it were projected onto colour. It gives people a very deep satisfaction to be able to consider themselves superior to some other group of people and I think even if you manage to abolish any sort of feeling of superiority on grounds of colour - for instance the Portugese did this in their colonies. There was no discrimination on grounds of colour but then the feeling of superiority will be transferred to something else. It will go onto almost anything. If you live in a certain sort of house you'll consider yourself superior or if you've got a certain sort of car or your children go to a certain kind of school. I think people will find any means that they can of asserting their superiority over certain other people. I think this is probably an ineradicable characteristic of the group. So I think even if you solve the race question by whatsoever means I don't think you'll thereby solve this question. Some other group of people will be looked down upon for some other reason. There is this tendency. You find this in India so noticeably in the caste system. There's no caste so low that it doesn't look down upon some other caste which is supposed to be even lower and get satisfaction out of that. You can't find the lowest of all castes, that is to say a caste upon whom everybody else looks down and a caste that at the same time agrees that it is the lowest in all respects, no. It'll always consider that some other caste is lower still. It's almost sort of circular in away.

But I think trying to enforce by legislation people to treat certain other people in a different way I think is usually counterproductive. There's an interesting illustration of this in connection with alleged discrimination between the sexes. For instance in Russia a lot of women are doctors. The majority of doctors, at least 60 % are women. So one argument of the feminists is that there are certain kinds or work, higher grades of work that women are not permitted to do. As part of the move for liberating women those kinds of work should be thrown open to them. Do you see what I mean? That the women are excluded from

those positions because they are higher, or excluded from those professions because they are higher. Do you see the argument, and that women should have those professions thrown open to them too. But what they found for instance in Russia is that because so many women are doctors the status of doctors declines. Not that women have sort of [54] all gone up one step by becoming doctors but that the profession itself is no longer so highly regarded because it is staffed or manned mainly by women.

Siddhiratna: Who actually regards it as lower then?

S: The populous at large. Doctors aren't much respected. So things don't work out quite so logically as sometimes one might expect. So I think it's like the rheumatism, you drive it out of one part of the body and it goes into another. So I think you have to be very careful when it comes to social legislation.

Kuladeva: It's treating causes rather than symptoms.

S: Yes. Everybody agrees that discrimination in the sort of way that some white people discriminate against black people is morally wrong but I don't think it is to be dealt with by legislation. Any real harm that is done by anybody to anybody else is covered by existing general legislation. Otherwise if black people are protected by special legislation what about **other** groups of people? Should they not be protected by special legislation. Special legislation to protect children, to protect dogs etc.,etc. Well sometimes you need special legislation where their cases are not actually covered by general legislation but that is more of the nature of an extension. If the general legislation is sort of worded comprehensibly enough it will apply to all cases.

Atula: I suppose it happens the larger, the bigger a society gets. People have always got these sort of problems working within that sort of society because I think **we're** able to deal with things because we come up against each other and discuss and resolve the issue, and as long as things are being discussed perhaps there is some hope. It's when things don't get discussed and they're just festering all the time.

S: For instance in some of the areas where there have been race riots, sort of professional black leaders have moved in who seem in many cases just to make things worse. They are **representing** the people instead of say letting the people speak for themselves.

Atula: That's been the thing in the Labour Movement. Working people in a sense don't talk for themselves.

Kuladeva: That's just part of our democratic system actually. It's representative democracy rather than direct democracy. I heard a quite interesting comment on the radio a few days ago about the Falklands. Somebody had said that apparently people in the Falklands were beginning to warm to the idea of Argentinian sovereignty and then this other person, somebody else was disputing that fact and said, I've yet to hear a [55] Falklands council representative say such a thing. But it was as if it was what the actual Falklanders themselves - whether or not that was true - wasn't particularly important. It was what their elected representative said.

S: Well that depends on how much faith one has in democratic institutions. There's probably a greater likelihood that the representatives of the Falkland Islanders represented their views than say the members of Parliament in Britain represented the views of their constituents just because there's so few people in the Falklands. It's a much simpler sort of situation. It would very soon be known, it would be very easy to see if your representative didn't really represent your views, but in the constituencies here there are so many thousands, tens of thousands of people, so many complex issues it's very difficult to tell whether your representative is in fact representing you or not except on very simple straightforward issues, and very difficult to tell if he's representing the feeling of the constituency as a whole, because very often quite a

substantial minority of people didn't vote for him at all under our non-proportional system of representation. But it does seem that more weight needs to be attached to individual action than is often attached to it nowadays. In putting things right and doing things and improving relations among people.

Mahamati: I wonder whether that isn't too idealistic when speaking in terms of large groups. I'll think a lot more about what you said. For me it bears thinking about, but I'm not at all convinced that one shouldn't legislate on matters such as race relations. That example's come up.

S: Well there are two arguments. One is whether one should so to speak in the abstract legislate on say ethical matters at all because that is in fact what one is doing because injury to life and limb etc., etc., that is covered by the common law anyway, by the criminal law, but then there is the question - all right even supposing abstractly speaking, that one has the right so to speak to legislate in this way for these sort of moral matters well - is it effective?

Mahamati: Well at least it does provide say a black person with a house that he might not have got and otherwise he hasn't got a house and people haven't changed attitudes either. I think it may be that people's attitudes will change if there is a legal change with explanations why it's so and it's sort of thoroughly backed up

S: I think the notorious example of sort of morally motivated legislation that didn't succeed was prohibition in America. It was just unworkable.

Kuladeva: But how does that relate to so-called Buddhist countries that have attempted to incorporate the five precepts into their [56] constitution which is obviously bringing in a moral aspect.

S: Well there are two things to be said here and one is with regard to whether you can have a Buddhist state or Buddhist government as such at all. This is quite discussable. Sometimes these countries haven't discussed, and secondly, as regards the five precepts, the nature of these precepts, whether they are not moral principles which are essential to social life as such. Because they're not distinctively Buddhist. All right, you should not injure other living beings, well surely that is part so to speak of the social contract - that you should respect the lives of others, you should not do any injury to other people in the society. Do you see what I mean? So it is not that you're sort of passing specifically Buddhist moral legislation if you legislate that the five precepts should be observed, but that sort of moral observance is necessary for the existence of society itself. The same with theft. If theft was permitted there could be no society. If adultery was permitted given a certain conception of marriage society would not be possible. If people did not honour their contracts, that's the fourth precept, then again no society, no social life would be possible. So I think the five precepts fall in a different category. They're very basic things which all societies in effect are based on, even non-Buddhist ones. In a way you don't have to legislate I think really for those because it's taken for granted. Well perhaps you do just to punish the odd person who violates them. But if you were to legislate that everybody should go to the temple on full moon days, well that would be, I think, undesirable. The legislation would be undesirable, even though it was desirable that everybody should go to the temple on full moon days. So I think it's very doubtful whether there should be legislation compelling someone to sell his house, for instance, to some other kind of person when he doesn't want to, whatever that kind of person may be. Maybe it is quite difficult to decide because there's one kind of rights, to use that term or one kind of person having to be weighed against another kind of rights and another kind of person. If you accept the institution of private property at all presumably you have the right to dispose of your own private property to whomsoever you wish. Also presumably in a welfare state you have the right to be housed, you have the right to be able to acquire a house. If you aren't able to do so the state must come to your

assistance. But I think not by obliging someone who doesn't want to sell his house to you for whatsoever reasons to do that. I think the less legislation, the less force, which is what it means, is invoked, the better.

Siddhiratna: It's the principle of he who governs least governs best.

S: Yes well maybe this is - what do they call it? - libertarianism. [57] Maybe I do tend to think that. The less government the better. Or governmental interference only in matters of absolute necessity, but again one mustn't just leave it there. I also believe in very strong vigorous moral persuasion in different areas. I think that is also important. I think that is very much neglected. For instance there is the question of these Vietnamese people living not so very far away I suppose you know about that. I got onto Kulamitra about it, They were having some difficulties with their neighbours and all that and were quite isolated so I suggested that we made contact with them and tried to develop some friendships so he's pursuing that matter. Some of you know about it no doubt. But we could have taken another attitude. We could have had a demonstration demanding that they should be given certain rights and that the people who troubled them next door should be sent to prison. We could have adopted that attitude, I don't think that would have helped.

Siddhiratna: These people that were being forced into attending Christian prayers.

S: I didn't know about that.

Siddhiratna: There's another group actually that I saw on television about some Vietnamese - I think it's boat people - who had been housed in a centre especially set up for them and run by evangelical Christians and had been prevented from practising Buddhism.

S: Oh Dear, that's really bad isn't it.

Siddhiratna: Lewisham or somewhere.

S: It may be the same group even. Apparently they themselves have not made any complaint but it's been discovered what's going on, so I found out about it soon after my return from India so I asked Subhuti to get in touch with Kulamitra so we should be inviting them here. They wanted a temple to which they could go. It may be partly because they were being forced to go to church.

Anyway perhaps we should wind up there.

End of Session

Next Session

S: So we'll just deal as we did last week with any point either that isn't clear or that you'd welcome further discussion of, or further clarification of.

Kulamitra: When the Buddha's Enlightenment experience is described sometimes there's emphasis placed on his recalling of previous rebirths. Is that to be taken as actually as it were part of his insight experience or is it just as a basis of phenomenal data out of which he sort of perceives reality.

S: Many early accounts do mention that vision by the Buddha of so many previous existences but that is reckoned as a separate mundane [58] abhinna. It is not a transcendental insight. It is a mundane recollection

though an immensely magnified and more powerful one but it is still mundane. That point is quite clearly made by tradition, so it perhaps does provide the basis, the mundane positive or the positive mundane provides a basis for the emergence of, manifestation of the transcendental insight, but I was going to say in the Theravada tradition but actually this point of view is shared I think by Buddhist tradition generally, that kind of insight or recollection, if one can call it insight at all, is distinguished from transcendental insight or insight proper.

Kulamitra: Do you think it's just an incidental factor, or is it quite an important part of that experience?

S: It does seem to be generally held that a Buddha invariably does possess a very extensive recollection of previous lives, a recollection which is not necessarily possessed by Arahant disciples. Here we are within, so to speak, the limits of the Theravada but it does seem as though a Buddha is not only endowed with the transcendental insight proper that makes him a Buddha, but also with all sorts of other mundane virtues, if one can use that term, or qualifications, which distinguish him even on **that** level, from his most gifted disciples. It's almost as though - and here I'm interpreting, this is not actually said by tradition - it's almost as though the more powerful the mundane base, the stronger or firmer the mundane base, the greater the strength if you like of the transcendental insight that arises. This is my own comment, this is not what tradition actually says, but perhaps one **could** look at it in this way. Certainly as you know in the Mahayana generally in its what one might call more exoteric version of the Bodhisattva Ideal, the Bodhisattva does remain for so long in the samsara undergoing various births so that he can equip himself in the fullest possible way to be a Buddha, not only by way of full equipment of prajna or a full equipment of jnana but a full equipment of punya. So he is as fully equipped as possible for his mission. He needs as it were not only the transcendental experience but a certain amount of mundane equipment, You can see the basis of this sort of distinction even though one doesn't take that what I've called exoteric version of the Bodhisattva Ideal necessarily literally. For instance tradition says it's quite possible to conceive, theoretically let's say for the sake of argument, of an ugly Buddha. There are certainly ugly Arahants. There was one Arahant I think who was a dwarf and extremely unattractive in appearance but he was nonetheless an Arahant, but a Buddha is supposed to be able to attract and draw and fascinate and teach as many beings as possible. So in order to be able to do that, this is the traditional view, [59] a Buddha has to be as physically attractive and inspiring as possible with a very imposing presence and impressive physique and with manly beauty and a very pleasant voice and all the rest of it; so in order to equip himself with all those qualities he engages in all sorts of skilful actions which give him the requisite punya, because it is conceivable that had he not done that he could have attained Enlightenment proper by virtue of his jnana but the physical embodiment of that jnana after Enlightenment would have been lacking, so to speak, or would have been inadequate, at least aesthetically due to a deficiency of punya.

So this is why in the Bodhisattva Ideal the accumulation of punya is considered as important as the accumulation of jnana because it's the punya that provides you with a perfect setting for the jnana and it's the perfect setting that makes it all the more acceptable to other living beings. So if one was to take a perfectly literal traditional view, if the Buddha hadn't been able to recall his previous births he could not have taught as effectively as he did because from time to time he could illustrate his discourse say with say a Jataka story but that would mean he would have to be able to **remember** that particular incident from a previous life. If he had not been able to do that, well he would not have been able to relate those Jataka stories. He wouldn't have been able to instruct people in that particular way. So it would seem that the traditional view is that someone who is a Buddha as distinct we might say paradoxically from being merely Enlightened has the full equipment of **mundane** qualities and attainments as well as the transcendental insight itself. Now I'm not here **assessing** the traditional doctrine, I'm sort of merely stating, I'm merely making it clear. Assessment is another matter but this is the traditional teaching and one can see the general

principle that is involved. I think there are some texts which say relative to this that a Buddha can remember infinitely far back. He can remember as far back as he wishes. He can recall as many previous lives as he wishes. The power of recollection of an Aggasavaka- that is to say either Sariputra or Maudgalyana goes back so many aeons and other great disciples a lesser number of aeons and so on down the scale. This is sometimes stated. The faculty itself is called Pubbenivasanussati, that is to say recollection of previous abodes. I think actually this is all dealt with here under Abhinna. Let's have a look. (Pause) Yes the full list is of six Abhinna. They are all described here on pages 169 and 170. The sixth Abhinna is the destruction of the Asavas or knowledge of the destruction of the Asavas. This is the only one that is transcendental.

[pause] There's the production of the mind-made body, there's the development of the divine ear, that is to say clairaudience [60] Then recollection of previous births, then clairvoyance and then lastly the knowledge of the destruction of the Asavas. This is a very old list. That is to say it occurs in what as far as we know are quite early accounts of the Buddha's Enlightenment. So one gets a number of supernormal faculties which are as it were extensions, very much greater extensions of faculties that people already have. Then the purely transcendental Abhinna, the purely transcendental faculty which people have as yet to develop which is something quite distinct on a quite different level. It's partly because of this teaching about these six Abhinna that Buddhist tradition has always been able to distinguish, have always distinguished quite sharply, quite clearly between sort of supernormal powers and genuine transcendental attainments.

Otherwise Hindus are not nearly so well instructed in this respect usually. If say among Hindus a yogi can start reading people's thoughts a bit or maybe recollects his previous lives, people will at once say well he's enlightened - he's realized God, he's reached the ultimate goal. Buddhists will never make those sort of statements on that sort of basis. Even quite ordinary Buddhists, certainly in Theravada countries, are often quite well aware of that sort of distinction. Zen people are very well aware of the distinction. I think in the case of Tibetan Buddhists they do sometimes blur the distinction a little bit because the Enlightened Bodhisattva or Guru is supposed to be the master magician at the same time. So they tend to confuse master magicians or even novice magicians with Enlightened beings. But in principle they still of course do make that distinction.

Sagaramati: Are you aware of this distinction in any other religious teachings other than Buddhism?

S: Yes. This sort of distinction is sometimes made. The Sufis make a distinction between as it were mundane miracles and miracles which are worked directly by God and only the latter are genuine miracles. I think even the Catholics make this sort of distinction. For instance there is the phenomena of the stigmata and apparently Catholic theologians do distinguish between sort of psycho-physical stigmata in the ordinary sense and stigmata which are impressed directly by God, and only **that** is regarded as a sign of sanctity. So yes, within their own context and at their best I think other religious traditions are aware of that **kind** of distinction. Of course you have to be very careful here drawing these sort of parallels because a Buddhist might well take the view, Theravada Buddhists certainly take the view, that the God of say the Christians or the Muslims, certainly on the more exoteric level is essentially a mundane being, so even if a miracle so-called had been worked by him it would still be mundane from a [61] Buddhist point of view. So one has to be a little careful in making such comparisons. [pause]

Vajradipa: Leading on from remembering of past births what actually is remembered?

S: Well one can look at it like this. When you remember something that you did yesterday what is it that is remembered. In principle it's exactly the same question. So what is it that you remember when you remember something that happened yesterday? It's exactly the same question really. In one case say sleep has interposed and in the other case death has interposed. That's really the only difference. But when you remember it is as though what you identify is past is **present** to you in some form or other. You say that it's

present as a recollection. So whether it's a recollection of what you did yesterday or whether it's a recollection of what happened to you in a previous life there's no essential difference, because whether it's you several hundred births ago or you last week, it is still an agglomeration of skandhas presumably.

Tejamati: Could you tell me whether bodhi would always be expressible or the person who had attained bodhi would he always be able to express it in conceptual terms?

S: Well this raises the question of whether bodhi can be expressed in conceptual terms at all. In any case what does one mean by 'express'? I think Buddhist tradition would generally agree that bodhi or even spiritual experiences which fall short of bodhi can't really be expressed in conceptual terms, not adequately. With the help of conceptual terms you can give some hint or indication of where to look, in which direction to look, as it were, or in which direction to direct your practice, but one can't probably give a completely adequate account in conceptual terms. I mean there's lots of experiences that fall short of bodhi that one can't give an adequate account of in conceptual terms. Supposing someone asks you well could you give an account in conceptual terms of your friendship with so and so, well could you? You might say well yes I've got a friendship with that person.

End of Tape Next Tape

[62]**S:** (continued) You might say that you had a friendship with that person, and you might give a quite neat definition of friendship, but would you really be able to communicate in that way in purely conceptual terms any adequate - well what can one say? - notion, impression, of the sort of relationship that you enjoyed with that person.

Tejamati: But if you were Enlightened would that possibility, I mean would there be a choice? Would you have that choice?

S: Well there are Buddhist texts which say things like well from the moment of Enlightenment to the moment of his passing away, the Buddha has not uttered a single word. If we look at the Pali scriptures, for instance, we notice that usually the Buddha has got quite a lot to say about the **Path** to Nirvana, but very little to say about Nirvana Itself, and that is very often expressed in negative terms, that Nirvana is not this, or not that. I mean not that the Buddha's expressions are exclusively negative, but he doesn't have all that much to say about Nirvana. What he does have to say is usually no more than a hint or a suggestion, and clearly not to be taken, well if not literally, literalistically certainly.

Atula: Just to carry on from that, like, the Buddha does talk about Enlightenment in negative terms, why is it that the Mahayana had become much more definite about Nirvana? Is it because the language of Sanskrit is better able to deal with....

S: Well does the Mahayana become more definite? I mean has one established that as a fact? What does one mean by definite?

Atula: Well not definite, but they become, they've got much more to say about it.

S: Well yes, they've certainly got much more to say, but very often as in the case of the Perfection of Wisdom texts they've got even more negations than have the Theravadins - they've got great strings and lists of negations. I wouldn't like to say that the Mahayana is more definite than even the Theravada, especially when you bear in mind the Perfection of Wisdom teachings, and the Mahayana emphasis upon Sunyata. I

mean Sunyata is usually [63] regarded as a negative term, that things are said to be empty, and the Mahayana, as you know, makes much of that term. It's at least conceptually negative. So I think that there is an assumption there that can be questioned, that the Mahayana had a more definite conception of Enlightenment.

Atula: They seem to assert it much more, to elaborate in some way.....

S: Well they certainly elaborate more. I mean the Perfection of Wisdom texts elaborate more, but the elaboration, more often than not proceeds by way of negation. The negations are more elaborate still. *[pause]* One might even say that the Mahayana is **even more** aware than the Theravada of the impossibility of giving conceptual expression to the content of Enlightenment. One could certainly argue that.

Sagaramati: But isn't it the more Yogachara side of the Mahayana. They actually do seem to talk about something more positive.

S: Yes, that is true. They speak in terms of chitta. *[pause]*

Kulamitra: On a different tack altogether Bhante, uhm, Sariputra's first glimpse of the Buddha's teaching (word unclear), the English translation says 'The Tathagata has explained the origin of those things which proceed from a cause. Their cessation too He has explained. This is the doctrine of the great Sramana.' It has always seemed to me that that was an incredibly slim amount of words to have such a tremendous impact on Sariputra. I mean, is the Pali stronger? Do you think Sariputra was just incredibly receptive? Is it just, you know, because of the fact that it's an Arahant speaking to him? Why do **so** few words have such a tremendous impact on him?

S: I think the major factor must be the preparedness of the person concerned. I mean he had Gone Forth, gone forth with his friend Moggallana. You know they had a pact that whoever found an Enlightened teacher first should not just become a disciple but should go and tell the other; so that would suggest that they were really searching very very seriously and therefore were very receptive. That would seem to be the **main** factor, because time and again in the Buddhist scriptures examples of people being apparently very receptive to the Buddha's teaching and greatly [64] influenced by just a few words. And it does seem there is some historical basis for this. We find similar anecdotes in the case of many of the great Zen Masters, that they were deeply affected by just a few words. There's also, one might say, a more general consideration. One can find even in ordinary life sometimes, certain things, certain words, mean much more to you under certain circumstances, they seem much more meaningful. And they seem to have a certain resonance, a certain reverberation, and that would seem to be when for instance you aren't sort of understanding the words merely literally or merely, let's say intellectually. You respond to them emotionally or you even respond to them Imaginatively. You might even say you respond with your whole being, you **hear** with your whole being to begin with. And then it's as though so much has been said in those few words, you just sort of see a whole world of meaning unfolding from those few words. Maybe subsequently you can't sort of capture or recapture that, you sort of lose it, but at the moment, at that particular moment you've got it so to speak, so you just see a whole world of meaning in a few apparently simple words. It is because your whole being including your emotions is attuned to those words and what they may have to reveal.

Kulamitra: So in this case words like 'cause' and 'cessation' open up for Sariputra a real view of conditioned co-production.

S: Well even words that we think maybe were relatively insignificant or were not really part of the statement, 'this is the teaching of the great Sramana', I mean that would have been very very inspiring to Sariputra, the very idea of the 'great Sramana', you see. This could have had all sorts of reverberations within him, do you see what I mean? It's a bit like the story I have also quoted in the *Survey* of what happened when Anathapindika just heard that the Buddha had arrived, or a Buddha had arrived. He was startled even stunned by this very word 'Buddha', he kept repeating it, 'did you say "Buddha"?', 'yes, friend, I said "Buddha"', 'did you say "Buddha"'. The word, the mere word 'Buddha' seems to have aroused such reverberations in the depths of his being, so he wanted at once to go and see this person who was called 'Buddha' who had gained enlightenment, so he must have had to begin with some **feeling** for this state of enlightenment, he must have been thinking about it, do you see what I mean? It wasn't just a word which meant 'wise man' to him. It had a much, much richer connotation than that. When he heard that there was someone who **was** a Buddha well his whole being responded to that, just that [65] one word. There are many instances like that in the lives of Zen Masters.

Kulamitra: Is that why just beyond that bit you say 'these great mantras' Is that why you call, you know call a saying like that in a way a mantra.

S: One could say that. I think one finds in all spiritual traditions that there are certain key words and phrases that people sort of ponder and think about, and reflect upon, sort of century after century without being able to exhaust them. *[pause]*

Kuladeva: You do say actually just before that. Before that quotation there is another quotation, the English being 'This being that becomes, from the arising of this that arises; this not becoming, that does not become; from the ceasing of this, that ceases.' And just before you quoted that you said that you were writing, you were putting it in Pali, so that the reader could benefit by 'acquiring the merit' by 'reading and reciting it in the original language'. What is.....

S: Ah, ah, I am speaking of merit not in a sort of mechanical sense, but the punya represents the emotional associations. Because one thinks, well you know, these were the very words which the Buddha had spoken, which Assaji had learnt from the Buddha, which he repeated to Sariputta. So if one reflects or thinks or feels in that sort of way, well there is an emotional association hopefully. So you don't just have a cold intellectual understanding of those words. This is what I was getting at.

Tejamati: What do you mean when you say that 'Sariputra immediately attained to the First Stage of Sanctification'? What is that stage?

S: Ah, Stream Entry, yes Stream Entry. In more technical terms the eye of the dhamma, the dhamma-cakkhu, or dharma-chaksu arose for Sariputra, or he developed the eye of the dhamma, he entered the stream, his sort of spiritual vision was opened, and he saw the truth essentially of impermanence.

Tejamati: So what would be the second stage?

[66]

S: Well that is the stage or the state of the once-returner, then the non-returner, then the Arahant. I don't any longer use this expression 'Stage of Sanctification', that is one which is used by many translators from Pali texts. *[pause]*

Sagaramati: One thing, that what's called the mantra there this (*word unclear*), in dependence on A arises B. The thing is it seems to be applicable anywhere or to any phenomenon, it seems to be universal. Is that just because it's a conceptual thing, and that wherever we go we can always relate to concepts, or is there something more? Is there something unique about the actual formulation?

S: Well it's something which is really quite simple. If one takes it by easy stages; first of all you just see that everything changes. You could say, if one wanted to reduce it to its simplest terms, that this is the basic, the fundamental insight of Buddhism itself, or the Buddha himself, that everything changes, that nothing lasts, that nothing remains the same for two consecutive instants. This is the basic insight, it is really as simple as that. I mean this is why teachers like Milarepa are constantly harping on the theme of **impermanence**. So you could even go so far as to say that Buddhism itself, Buddhist teaching, Buddhist philosophy, is nothing but a systematic working out of the implications of this theme of impermanence. Usually it is said that there are three great characteristics of mundane existence, that it is impermanent, painful, and devoid of permanent unchanging self. But you can deduce these other two characteristics from this first one, because, if everything is constantly changing, then it means you cannot retain your hold on anything, because things change at the very moment that you're holding on to them. You can't retain anything for good, but if you try to do that, what happens if you try to do that, you are going against the very current of existence. So if you will insist on holding on to something which by its very nature, by virtually the very nature of existence itself, you cannot possibly hold on to. If there is that sort of tension, if you are pulling in one direction, the whole of the rest of existence is pulling in the other, what's going to be the result? - suffering. You are pitting your sort of puny will against the will so to speak of the whole universe, so it's obvious who's going to get the worst of the encounter. *[Laughter]* [67] So that is suffering. Your refusal not only to recognize but to act upon the truth of suffering, and the truth of impermanence, that is how suffering arises, because if you were to recognize the truth of suffering and act upon it all the time you would never experience suffering, certainly not mental suffering. You might experience physical suffering, that would be inseparable from embodied existence itself, but you would never experience mental suffering, that would be impossible, in fact you would be enlightened. So I mean just by realising the truth of and acting upon that simple teaching of impermanence. And then what about anatta? Well, what if you turn it round the other way, what does one mean by a 'self'? The concept of 'self' presupposes that something remains the same, that is to say something doesn't change. It's the same in the subsequent second, or subsequent instant as it was in the preceding, but your very principle of change says that that is impossible, everything is changing, it is changing all the time. It's not even by way of a series of increments, the change is continuous, not that things, not like the second hand of a watch, they're just jumping, it's still for a second then it jumps, no not like that, but there's an absolutely continuous movement. So since there's an absolutely continuous movement, since there's a continuum, well there is change without anything that changes, so there is no 'self', the self being defined as that which persists through or under change.

So from the principle of impermanence there follows the principle of 'no self' in that sense. So everything, so to speak, hangs on this principle of impermanence. If you understand that thoroughly and deeply, you understand everything, but if you want to go a little further, well again you can say well, observing change, that change seems to operate in two different ways, there's what we call the cyclical change, then there's what we call the spiral change. These two sort of flows within the one big flow of simple change, and then you come to see that if you refuse to recognize the truth of impermanence, if you insist on hanging on to existence of your experience, and resisting the fact that it changes, and if you start thinking in terms of unchanging entities and selves and yourself among them you just sort of get involved in a sort of whirlygig of change; you just go round and round in the same old circle. But if you don't do that, well, yes change [68] persists, but it is a different kind of change, you sort of sit loose to things, you don't sort of hold on to things. Your mental state therefore becomes progressively more calm and positive, you go up the spiral,

which is still change, but it's a different kind of change, not change which returns after a while to the same point, but change which sort of infinitely expands in a positive way. So one could say that everything really flows from this principle of change. You don't need to go really, certainly not in principle, very much beyond this. So perhaps Sariputta saw all this in a kind of flash, when Assaji proclaimed that particular verse to him. That was the key so to speak, and he was ready, he was prepared, so he could see the vast implications of those few words. *[pause]* I've sometimes thought that if there was a thorough grasp, or thorough understanding of the principle of impermanence people wouldn't really need to bother about anything else. This is why, as I mentioned, you find yogis like Milarepa who are really very practical and down to earth - they're just constantly insisting on this again and again and again. But if you are hanging on to anything you haven't grasped or even begun to grasp the principle of impermanence. You are going against the flow, you are going against existence itself. You are pitting yourself against existence, and you can't win.

Sagaramati: But is it as easy as that? I mean there are many psychological...

S: It isn't easy, but at least you know what you've got to do. You've got to apply your general insight to each specific situation, like when you want to keep a relationship going when it's coming to an end, or you want to continue to stay in a place that you've got to leave, or when you lose a sum of money that you did not want to lose - you have to apply it there. *[pause]*

Kulamitra: This brings me to a question which I had by implication. What can we actually do to cultivate this kind of view, I mean both in terms of meditation..

S: Well in a sense one can say that it's just a case of opening one's eyes and looking, but it's not as though this fact of change is something obscure and esoteric that you have to really look into things in order to find. It is absolutely obvious, but it's as though we deliberately refuse to see it we close our eyes or, we look the other way. It is not that we don't know or we can't see. So we refuse to see, we refuse to acknowledge what we see.

Siddhiratna: How does this relate to things like the arising of the Bodhichitta, consciousness and its luminosity? There's that aspect about the nature of Enlightenment where something is, I think I understand it as being experiential. But then what we seem to be saying just now is that you apply your rational [69] mind to any situation and try and understand it, but the two seem unrelated, or I can't see the relation between the two, because one's very emotional and feeling-tone and the other's very intellectual and rationally based.

S: It may take its starting point in a rational sort of way, but if it is of the nature of insight it can't just be rational, there must be a feeling element there as well. In the case of that original statement by Assaji to Sariputta, we surely can't understand it just as a rational statement, because to begin with Assaji himself had an actual realisation of that truth, and Sariputta himself was very very much prepared to receive and recognize that, because he did develop profound insight on the spot to the extent of gaining, according to tradition, Stream Entry. So there is a sort of emotional connotation of those words. So I don't think we can regard that sort of procedure as just rational. Do you see what I mean? Because there is a sort of movement, I won't say away from the conditioned literally, but there's a movement, a freedom from clinging. You see that that things are impermanent, so since you really see that you just don't cling onto them as much as before.

Siddhiratna: Will the eventual kind of insight into things, that things aren't permanent, either in sequential terms that there's actually a continuous flow, that's what's described as luminous consciousness, that's insight described. Would that be the case?

S: The question of this sort of luminous consciousness doesn't really arise until one starts moving up the spiral. You start actually experiencing the luminosity of one's - well, what shall I say, in minority terms, the luminosity of one's - own essential mind. This is not the language of... the Theravada uses it once or twice, that sort of expression is used. But as you realize more and more the impermanence of everything and you cease to cling, well yes, your mind becomes more positive, and to that extent it becomes more, so to speak, luminous and bright.

Sagaramati: You've got to have some sraddha. Well if you haven't got sraddha then you don't get more positive.

S: Well there is this original distinction between just a purely rational understanding which really has no effect upon (one), and actual insight. So we mustn't be misled by the apparently purely [70] conceptual form of what Assaji said, to think well it was just a sort of intellectual communication. Do you see what I mean? For Assaji himself that certainly wasn't the case. I mean he certainly just didn't have an intellectual understanding, or rational understanding to communicate, nor did Sariputta apparently understand it in that way. I mean certainly the language was the language of concepts as far as we can see, but there was a sort of emotional connotation to everything that Assaji said, which went far beyond the purely rational denotation of those words. It was a real spiritual communication.

Sagaramati: I would have thought between just the rational formulation and the insight, it's like between those two points there has got to be a beginning, there's got to be something between them, and that would be sraddha. Sariputta, he didn't have insight but he had more than an intellectual understanding, so he must have had some faith in...

S: Well you see this is why I mentioned at the beginning - that he had gone forth, he was definitely in quest of something. This presupposes faith, that he's really looking for some really spiritual teaching. He's not satisfied with anything that he's encountered so far. He was supposed to have been a disciple of Sanjaya the sceptic, as he's usually described. That clearly didn't satisfy him. He wanted something more. He was looking for that without perhaps knowing very precisely what it was, he just felt that something was lacking. So he was very open, very receptive to what Assaji had to say.

Dhammarati: Just on this faith thing, I don't quite see why it's necessary. Thinking about the William Blake verse about 'the winged joy', it seems to me what you've got there is the sort of transition between feeling and craving in the nidanas, and if you don't make the sort of jump into craving and try to sort of freeze things, what you're left with is just like sort of feeling and you've got a very rich experience of things that actually gives you a tremendous ...

Sagaramati: But that feeling could be disgruntlement.

Dhammarati: But is it not feeling in the terms of just experiencing very sort of richly the flow of life round about you and inside you without trying to freeze it, which in itself is a very invigorating experience.

S: What Dhammarati seems to be saying is that when clinging is removed [71] what is left is not just a purely rational understanding with no feeling, but your natural human sort of positivity including faith is just revealed, yeah.

Sagaramati: Even if you actually let go of the clinging.

S: But to come back to this question of the Bodhichitta; it's not easy in a way to bring this into the present discussion because it's as though you're concerned with two different frames of reference, one, so to speak, Hinayana, one Mahayana. But you could say what is the basic motivation, or one of the basic motivations, of the arising of the Bodhichitta is that you see people suffering and you feel that you would like to help them so that they didn't suffer, but then you also see **why** people suffer, and you see that they suffer because of craving which means that they are going against the flow of existence. So when you have that sort of understanding of impermanence, well if you just sort of look a little beyond your immediate experience you can see well **other** people are subject to the flow of experience, and that they are part of that flow, but you also see that they don't recognize that, they don't want to acknowledge that, they just go on clinging onto things and therefore they suffer, so it is as though at the same time that you understand the impermanence of things or as a direct consequence of that you see that people suffer and your natural, as it were human, feeling is that you would like to do something about that, and on that basis the Bodhichitta arises. It's not quite the same thing perhaps as entering the stream; it seems to be closely associated with it in as much as it isn't a very big step from understanding that everything is impermanent and that if you resist that flow you suffer, it is not a very big step to seeing well that is exactly what people do, and on account of which they suffer, and feeling that you would like to help **them** in as much as you would like to help yourself, because since you understand impermanence, to the extent that you understand it, you understand that there is no unchanging self, so there is no motivation, in a manner of speaking, for helping yourself rather than others. Once you've seen the principle of impermanence, or truth of impermanence, it's though you want to devote yourself to the eradication of craving and suffering generally, not just yours as distinct from that of other people; you want to devote yourself to helping to remove whatever suffering there may be in the universe, and it's in **that** connection that the Bodhichitta arises. So in a way everything centres around this realization of impermanence. One could devise many little exercises to test oneself or to apply this principle; if you're very upset about something or disturbed, all right 'why is that? Is it because I'm refusing to recognize and act upon the principle of impermanence? Am I just resisting?' Yes. Could be.

Vajradipa: There does seem to be a tension set up quite deliberately, doesn't there, within the teaching, particularly the Mahayana, like in the Heart Sutra particularly, where you are continually reminded to see the impermanence of all things, yet at the same time to see that everything actually is the primal void which is not born or destroyed.

S: Ah, but what is this primal void? I think one is in danger here of being very dangerously misled. I've come to the conclusion that it's a great mistake to think of sunyata as, or to try and interpret it in terms of, a sort of ontological principle, which is in fact what we do most of the time unconsciously, do you see what I mean?

Kulamitra: What does ...

S: Ontology means a sort of science or knowledge of abstract being, of being as being, or existence as existence. So when you say, for instance, or when a Mahayana sutra says that all things are sunyata, they do not mean to say that all things can be reduced to one common identifiable substratum. That is the extreme of eternalism. So....

Siddhiratna: Like the Absolute?

S: Yes, yes, the unchanging absolute. So sunyata is not a sort of absolute, not an entity. It has no ontological significance. So all right, what **is** sunyata? The Mahayana sutras themselves make this abundantly clear, but conventions of language almost force us to treat it as an entity, when in fact it's not an entity at all, it's the antithesis of an entity. So what is it? When it is said that all things are sunyata, all things are void, what is meant? If it is not meant that all things are at bottom transformations of one and the same sort of cosmic principle, one and the same entity, one and the same absolute, if it isn't that well what is it, what is its significance? [73]

Sagaramati: Well isn't it just really impermanence?

S: You could say it's just impermanence, yes. Yes, it's impermanence and it's something else. To say that things are sunyata has another significance. It means that well, they are not to be defined in terms of existence or non-existence. Why? - well they are constantly changing, there is pure continuous flow. Again you go back to impermanence. What the text does not intend to do is posit some kind of entity; sunyata is not an entity, it has no ontological significance.

Virananda: Another kind of misunderstanding of that, which I think I fall into, is that you have the idea that there's a void and out of that all comes. There's a primal void which was there in the beginning and then the material world and samsaric existence somehow emanates from ...

S: Well here it's a sort of cosmological principle. Yes, in a way one can't help thinking in those terms if one isn't very careful, because if you think of sunyata as the void, well that suggests sort of a vast empty space, and, yes, just as things go into a vast empty space things come out of a vast empty space. It's a sort of metaphysical black hole, except that in the black hole things go in but don't come out, but they have started thinking that things that go into black holes do come out, but somewhere else in the universe or in some other universe, certainly not in this one. You see what I mean? So one can think of the void in that sort of cosmological way. But really all the sort of speculations and (word unclear) come back to the fact that well, well speculations regarding sunyata seem to come back to the fact that everything is impermanent, and things being impermanent you can't sort of speak of them in terms of exclusive existence or non-existence. So we mustn't forget that the Indian mind seems to have been rather conceptually orientated. They seem to have liked this conceptual language. I mean Tibetans don't go in for that sort of thing, nor do certainly Chinese Ch'an people or Japanese Zen people, they've cut out all the Indian metaphysical verbiage, you could say. In a way they've come back, they've come a bit closer to the Buddha's own original position or what as far as we can tell was the Buddha's own original position. So people like Milarepa, they don't go in for discussions about sunyata ; Milarepa will simply say well have you given up such and such, are you clinging onto it? That's the direct practical application of that same principle. Otherwise you know, here you are, you're a [74] worldly person puffing on your cigar with all your worldly possessions around you, and here you just like to talk about sunyata, well what is the value of that? Of course if you're discussing the principle of impermanence it becomes blatantly obvious what you're actually doing; the inconsistency becomes only too painfully obvious, but if you're discussing sunyata it isn't so immediately obvious because sunyata does seem to be genuinely, as it were, philosophical. The sort of thing you can't really **do** anything about. So perhaps we need a much more emphatic, a much more unambiguous emphasis on the plain straightforward principle of impermanence. And perhaps one should try to see well what is it that one usually hangs on to. Maybe that would tell one a lot about oneself, about the particular form that your spiritual practice should take.

Some people may find it very difficult to give up company, they're very attached to company, to society, they don't like to be on their own, well that's just what they should work on. Other people find it very difficult to give up talking, they don't like silence, they are attached to talking. Say if a conversation naturally comes to an end they don't like to stop there, they want to go on talking perhaps, however late at night it may be, just for the sake of talking. Well sometimes you do find in certain situations you are quite conscious - in a way you're conscious - that something has come to an end, something has broken up, but you can see at the same time that even though you see it has come to an end you're not willing to really accept that. You can feel, you can experience the reluctance, the resistance within yourself to accepting the facts of the situation. The most extreme form is when someone dies to whom you are very attached. You find it very difficult to reconcile yourself to this. You can feel yourself refusing to actually accept the fact that that person has died, you sort of rebel. If you are a sort of theist you may be tempted to blame God - 'O God, why did you do this to me?' - sometimes people do. As a Buddhist you rebel against the natural law.

Sagaramati: Just thinking it seems like a full-blooded worldly life could lead to that more than a sort of sedate so-called spiritual life.

S: Explain! *[Laughter]* You haven't convinced me with those few simple words! *[Laughter]*

Sagaramati: Well I mean if you really are reflecting on impermanence and you were leading a life, you were say a very greedy person and all the rest of it, and you were a full-blooded person, if you did constantly [75] every time you got thwarted or you got let down or you lost a thing or something like that, if you really reflected on well it is impermanent, but you keep going, I imagine something's bound to strike you on a deeper level than say someone who is leading a sedate life.

S: What is this sedate life? I'm not quite sure. Can even the sedate life escape deprivations and losses and thereby suffering?

Sagaramati: I'm not saying it can, but it seems to be attenuated. But the other there's no attenuation. (**S:** Muted) It's a raw sort of....

S: I won't take that as thereby meaning that you ought to indulge in these cravings just so that you can experience the sufferings so that you can realize impermanence all the more quickly and easily. It doesn't seem in practice actually to happen like that. I mean sometimes, yes, these people who throw themselves into life **do** have a sort of awakening, but sometimes the sedately living people have an awakening too. It is very difficult to generalize.

Kulamitra: Surely the criterion is your ability to maintain awareness? Because people living a worldly life are usually having to lose their awareness.

S: Yes, yes. And you very often see people sort of suffering as the result of attachment but then they go on to repeat the same process. For instance I heard someone say once 'no, I'm not going to have another dog, I went through so much when that one died. It's just too awful losing it.' And then a few months later they've got a puppy in the house. The same old pattern is being repeated all over again. Or there's the other comparison which you get I think in the Buddhist scriptures. After childbirth the woman says 'no, I'm never going to go through that again. I just couldn't stand it. No, no more children for me'. But a few months later she's pregnant again, she's forgotten all her previous sufferings, or unmindfulness has overwhelmed her.

Siddhiratna: There's a funny stage you can go through, isn't there, where some of the things that you do you actually accept the consequences of and you just know the negative aspect - you take that into consideration when you embark onto the activity. I'm not saying that you make a thing about that other than it's something that has occurred to you. In certain situations, I mean, I'll do something; although I know all the consequences I'm happy to accept them.

Kuladeva: Presumably you consider it worthwhile doing that at the time.

Siddhiratna: Yes. It's less difficult than not to do it, as it were.

S: Well, there's several factors involved. One would perhaps be that the suffering isn't very great - especially not very great in comparison with the pleasure that you'll experience first. And of course also it's that in some cases the prospect of the pleasure is much more **real** than the prospect of the suffering. So there's also although you've got a certain rational understanding of the situation in fact there is an element of blindness because the suffering perhaps is not so vividly present to you as the prospect of enjoyment.

Siddhiratna: Can you give us an example?

S: Well, like when you drink a few bottles of wine and you know that you'll have a bit of a hangover in the morning; but you sort of accept that. It's because the hangover isn't all that bad, and in any case while you know you're going to experience the hangover you don't allow yourself to think about it too much because the prospect of getting a bit drunk [*Laughter*] is [77] really so pleasant.

Kuladeva: Also, the suffering is further away, it's not quite so real. The suffering in that is further away from the pleasure. You don't sort of, it's a bit more removed.

End of Side Onto Tape Four

S: But, on the other hand, if supposing you have a really bad hangover - **really** bad. Next time, I think you'd approach your usual indulgence a bit more carefully. Supposing, all right, you indulge nonetheless but again you have this terrible hangover. After two or three such experiences I think you'd probably start modifying your behaviour.

Siddhiratna: I think actually I was thinking of applying it, well not applying it, but thinking a bit in relation to - it's going a bit off the tack - but applying it to rebirth and things like that, or rebecoming. That there's this emphasis of suffering etc - that's why you want to cease existence. But if you sort of weigh up the balances as it were, the satisfactions of being a human being alive in the world against the painful aspects of that, I sometimes wonder whether you can accept the fact that being alive is painful - but it's also pleasurable.

S: Well, the alternative is not just to cease to exist. The alternative is a much more highly satisfactory mode of existence. It's not that it's a choice between, oh, either human life or you know, just annihilation. If that was the choice, well people might think that even human life was preferable. The choice really - though it doesn't seem a very real choice for most people - is between ordinary human life as we normally experience it and **Enlightened** life, whether in or out of a human body.

Siddhiratna: Yes, I suppose what happens is sometimes you question that that Enlightened state of life is actually quite difficult to achieve -

S: The spiritual life is seen largely in terms of what you will be expected to, or what you will have to give up, and the compensations, I mean great as they are, are not really very vividly present. They don't seem very real. So if it's a choice between [78] a very real pleasure now however unskilful, and this rather vague, hypothetical, Enlightened mind, *[Laughter]* Enlightenment doesn't stand much of a chance.

Siddhiratna: Yes. I've heard it said that somebody was saying that I'm quite happy to be a healthy, happy and human Mitra. I'm not sure I really want to be an Order member. The guy was sort of happy to be a Mitra.

S: With the assumption being that all over the world is the way to Enlightenment. *[Laughter]*. It seems from the point of view of a Mitra that it looks like that.

Kulamitra: Can I get back to method or whatever? Because it seems to me that with impermanence, I mean, usually we view impermanence with horror but in fact it's got a very positive aspect.

S: Yes, because another aspect is transformation. I mean, this is a well know sort of vision that if you're in any situation which seems really bad you can at the least console yourself with the fact that it cannot last: you must come out of it sooner or later. But, above and beyond that, yes, it's the very principle of impermanence that makes it possible to effect that transition from, as we call them, the round to the spiral.

Kulamitra: It's also the principle just of ordinary growth isn't it. I mean, the things that we perceive as beautiful - plants and the growth of life around us. I mean, it just wouldn't exist without that principle. (Murmurs of assent)

S: If there was no change there would be no development.

Kulamitra: Yeah. But in terms of actual practices designed to cultivate an insight into impermanence, I mean you've got the six element practice and apparently you can do a sort of five skandha practice - is that right? - that you could meditate on the five skandhas using that kind of analysis.

S: Seeing yourself as, so to speak, broken up into these five heaps. [79]

Kulamitra: Yes. That's using the analytical aspect which, I mean, it must have its positive connotations but I think it's quite difficult to see that. It seems to me that if you use what you called later on the 'dynamic synthetical aspect' you could draw out more the positive side because it seems to me that, say, the Higher Evolution of Man is like a dynamic synthetical view: it's a view of the way things actually develop. Are there ways that we can cultivate that - you know, sort of meditative ways - so that we get more of a positive impression of impermanence? Do you see what I mean?

S: Yes. I think **one** way is by reading, say, the biographies of people like Milarepa. You can see that positive progressive change taking place so vividly. *[pause]* I don't know if you were thinking of something of that sort.

Kulamitra: I wasn't sure. I read Buck's 'Cosmic Consciousness' quite recently and I must say I felt that that had that kind of effect. It gave me a sort of view of things which seemed really positive and inspiring and

seemed to open up a lot of possibilities. I mean, it's basically the view of the Higher Evolution that **you** present but I think he does go into things more fully in more detail sometimes. And there are all those sort of experiences he runs through. You know, numerous people's experiences.

S: One might not agree as to exactly where, say, on the path he places those experiences but nonetheless in a general way they illustrate that sort of upward progressive movement of consciousness. One might not for instance agree that Walt Whitman was as enlightened as the Buddha [*Laughter*] but nonetheless it's a movement in the same general direction.

Kulamitra: I just wondered if you could make a meditation practice out of something like that. I mean, I don't mean out of that particular book but you know, in the same way that you could use in meditation you could develop an analysis, could you have a meditation practice which developed faith I suppose in positive development. [80]

S: Well, I think you **could** in a way. There is a sort of practice for instance, there is in the Pali Canon - it's mentioned in Buddhaghosa's Visuddhi Magga - the recollection of the gods; but this is usually explained in a quite limited way. You recollect that the gods have got where they are because of their sila and punya they've accumulated as human beings and so on and so forth. I think you could go actually further than that and I've been giving some thought to this sort of question this last year or so. We see in many of the Buddhist scriptures, especially in the Pali, you've got this quite inspiring description of the different realms of the gods, the different planes or levels of being; descriptions of the subdivisions of the *rupa* and *arupaloka*. So you could, as it were, reflect upon those. You could for instance call to mind the four great kings and then you could call to mind, say, the Indra devaloka. Then you could call to mind the higher *rupalokas* and then, going beyond the *rupaloka*, go to the *arupaloka*, the different Brahmas and the different degrees and kinds of radiance. In other words you're going step by step up level by level you could get a more vivid impression of the hierarchy of being. It's a bit like in some forms of ancient Christianity, a sort of recollecting, though this wasn't I think a specific practice; say, the nine orders of angels that are arranged in a hierarchy.

In this way you get the impression, get the feeling of a whole series of stages of development above and beyond your own. This, in a way is a very important point. This has very broad, say, cultural and spiritual significance in the West. I think I've talked before of a sort of decline - a spiritual decline - in the West as having set in from about maybe, well say, the 13th Century. One could say, that up to that point in **some** ways Christianity was quite positive and quite inspiring. Even persecution wasn't so prevalent as it became later on. There was of course no inquisition at that time and so on. But it seems as though the 13th century was a sort of turning point. Christianity became much more rational, much more dogmatic. The Church became more authoritarian. So some people have tried to identify the cause or causes of that and some have identified it in **this** way - I'll try to give just a brief, simple account. Well, to put it **very** briefly, angels became less important. The church had always taught that there [81] was this sort of hierarchy of angelic beings, but a lot of Christians sort of following one might even say non-Christian precedents, mainly say neo-Platonic, held or believed that you could **communicate** with these angels. You could put yourself into touch with the angelic hierarchies. You could even receive inspiration from them and spiritual guidance from them. So this presupposed the existence of a sort of spiritual faculty, a spiritual **organ** which would enable you to do this - because clearly it wasn't a rational faculty. So what happened apparently, according to some people, was that in the 13th Century the works of Aristotle, the non-Christian thinkers and theologians, became increasingly popular and in the thought of Aristotle there's no room, as there is in Plato's teaching, for this sort of higher visionary imaginative faculty. This came to be ruled out more and more, and not only that but the Church was becoming more and more centralized and more and more

authoritarian; it didn't suit the church that people should be able to have, or mystics should be able to have, their own sort of independent contact with sources of inspiration. They had to go through the proper channels: i.e. through the Church. So emphasis came to be placed more and more on the sacraments and doing things through the sacraments - though the priest who administered the sacraments, through the church to which the priest belonged and who ordains the priest. So in this way the importance of that visionary faculty - you could even say the imagination - was lost sight of; it was even suppressed, and you got therefore a more rationalistic type of Christianity which became codified and crystallized in dogma. You got a narrower version of Christianity. You got a harsher, stricter version. And also you got a more authoritarian version in every way. And that tendency went on increasing until there was the explosion of the Reformation. All the more sort of inspired sort of forms of Christianity became more peripheral, more heretical. And after the 13th Century quite a number of teachings and practices came to be regarded as heretical and were persecuted which were tolerated in former centuries. So you see the sort of development? So **some** students of Western social history look at the matter in this sort of way. It's as though Man lost any effective sense - or [82] Western Man lost any effective sense - of his place in the hierarchy of being. And this idea of hierarchy of being was very very prominent and important in neo-Platonism especially, and subsequently in some forms of the more mystical forms of Christianity. And it's as though from the 13th Century onwards the Church strongly discouraged that sort of attitude, or that sort of philosophy for reasons of its own. So Christian thought became increasingly more rational, more dogmatic and more authoritarian. I mean, this is just a very rough sketch of what some people think, but do you see what I'm getting at? So everything which represented, say, a contact with the imagination became peripheral and heretical, and even went underground; to re-emerge later on with the Renaissance or the Reformation.

So perhaps the Theravada was guilty of something of the same sort because it forgot about all these sort of higher realms - or official Theravada forgot about all these higher realms - and disregarded them and concentrated just upon the analysis of the individual into five skandhas, which was very one-sided and one might even say negative. So therefore, it might be good to sort of say contemplate the deva realms as representing higher and higher and more and more refined levels of being which are meant to shade off into the Transcendental. Do you see what I mean? And this is why you may remember - in an earlier chapter or earlier section of the *Survey* I referred to the fact that some translators of the so-called first sermon, cut out the mythological conclusions about the shout which is echoed, the great shout which is echoed after the Buddha has so successfully taught his first disciples from one sphere of the devas to another, higher and higher and higher. It seems to be that that is often cut out and regarded as inessential or mere mythological addition. But actually, as I've said, it's very very significant. It's part of the context of the teaching and you could even say that well, the context is part of the teaching itself.

Kulamitra: I think a similar thing can happen with the higher evolution itself. I was aware recently going back to that sort of triangle diagram. I mean, you can see it really rationalistically and dryly, but it can really come alive in a much more imaginative sense - I mean, I suppose actually what [83] it is saying is that hierarchy of being, a progressive hierarchy of being.

S: Yes. You want it to be very vividly present to you imaginatively. In the West the hierarchies of angels gave that. In neoplatonism the whole system of emanations which were somehow identified with the gods of classical mythology. And in Buddhism, yes, the brahmalokas and so on, they give that dimension. I think that is very important because it enables you to come to grips imaginatively with this higher stage of the path which are not just abstract stages but they're embodied in actual - for want of a better term - personalities.

Siddhiratna: This is an emphasis on saying that these are all reasons why I should actually practise the path anyway as it were; one should practise growth and development. I'm sorry, I'm going back to the source of this discussion.

S: Well, it's not an abstract reason but it makes, say, the higher levels of the path much more **real** to one, because it's as though, if one takes a more, say, rational scientific attitude - all right, you believe in the lower evolution; well, that's quite real to you because you can go to a zoo and you can see monkeys and all sorts of other animals and you can feel: well, yes, you belong to the animal world; well, if you accept evolutionary teaching you come up from the animals so to speak by one mysterious means or another. But all right, supposing you want to look up to beings on higher rungs of the evolutionary ladder in the same way that you can look **down** to beings on the lower evolutionary rungs and see them: well, where are you going to look? It's as though there's a sort of blank until you get to the figure of the Buddha, so you need to fill in, as it were, those intermediate stages with very vivid and very appealing figures.

Siddhiratna: All those angels and so on.

S: Even in a way the Bodhisattvas are not enough because the Bodhisattvas are too near to the Transcendental: they're all on that one higher level you see? [84]

Kulamitra: So you could start with the artist presumably?

S: Yes. Well, I've spoken in the past in terms of - I've got into a little bit of trouble for this [*Laughter*] but I've mentioned my own hierarchy of say, woman, man, artist, angel or god - those are the deva gods with a small 'g' in the sense of a deva brahma - after that the bodhisattvas and Buddhas.

Sagaramati: But aren't the devas, as far as I understand them from the Buddhist context, they're passive. I mean, it's like if you lead a skilful life as a human being you can enjoy this sort of passive state as a deva for so long but then after that you'll come back to being..

S: Well, in a way there's a sort of - not exactly confusion - but a mixture of mythologies. In some ways the angel is a more positive figure. Angels have perhaps been sort of worked over a bit more than devas. Within the purely Theravada context a deva is essentially mundane. But you do sometimes get the conception of, say, a deva who is a faithful follower of the Buddha; and, for instance, in the case of the Anagami you've got someone who is on the path to Enlightenment but in a deva form. Do you see what I mean?

Kulamitra: What is the Anagami?

S: The non-returner. Yeh? Who doesn't return to this world after death but he hasn't attained to full Enlightenment. He, according to tradition, occupies a special abode, the Suddharasa, the pure abodes, at the summit of the *rupaloka*. So in a sense he is a deva: he's born in a deva realm; but in another sense he's not a deva because his consciousness is - at least partially, if one can use that expression - an Enlightened consciousness. He's entered the stream and he's in fact gone way beyond that, but he's still not emancipated from mundane existence completely. So we'll have to work out some sort of scheme which did justice on the one hand to a higher level of existence which was still mundane, and a higher level of existence - or a higher point on the evolutionary scale - which was not just mundane, but which was Transcendental. But of course part of the spiral itself is also part of the realm, so because the devas represent, you could [85] say, beings who have accumulated a lot of punya, who've practised sila very well; so in a sense they are ahead of us even though they don't possess actual insight - well, they're ahead of us assuming that we **don't** possess

insight. To the extent that we possess insight, well we're more advanced, despite our inferior grosser bodily form, than devas who don't have any degree of insight. But, nonetheless, there is this sort of general principle of that hierarchy, and you need concrete figures to contemplate to make the hierarchy more alive and more vivid to you - and therefore the higher stages of the path more alive and vivid: therefore, the whole path itself. Mrs Rhys-Davids, in her writings on early Buddhism, really is sort of insisting on this in her own way, when she speaks of the path as being a path or journey or pilgrimage through worlds. It's not just a question of improving this sort of present human life - leading a good life and then in the end that's nirvana. *[Laughter]* This is the way Buddhism is sometimes represented.

Dhammarati: The material in the Greater Mandala Mitrata seems to me to have this sort of flavour, and I wonder if that has roots in traditional practices - or if that material could be extended to become...

S: Well, the mandala is essentially a static symbol. Where I have sometimes spoken in terms of the 'round' sort of down here and then the mandala up there and what is connecting them is the path or spiral. So the mandala seems to me a different kind of symbol. One can't, I think, use the mandala symbol in this sort of way. The mandala seems to be more of a symbol for the goal rather than the path. In so far as the mandala is concerned, one is thinking in static rather than dynamic terms. Everything is sort of set out in the mandala as so to speak co-existing. It's as though you're out of time there.

Dhammarati: The thing I think about the greater mandala that for me connects with it is there's something in it somehow that lets you look at phenomena round about you - rather than seeing them as frightening they're beautiful, and you're not actually - because they're so beautiful you're prepared to go with their movement.

S: Well they're beautiful from the standpoint of, so to speak, Enlightenment. You see, if you look say at a flower with an Enlightened mind, you look at it without attachment, without craving, [86] well it's as though you place that flower in the greater mandala, the mandala of Enlightenment you could say. But that is sort of more static way of looking at things. It's as though in the mandala, when we incorporate things in that way, you've got all the successive steps coexistent but what you probably want more or most people want more is a more vivid sense of the actual sort of movement of progression from one stage or one step to another - and the path and the hierarchy would seem to give that more. Maybe this sort of more static concept of the mandala is useful and helpful for those who are more, as it were, result orientated. If you're too result orientated it may be helpful sometimes to reflect, well, it's all here already so to speak, but you can't afford to take that sort of statement too literally.

Vajradipa: That's what seems to be happening just this morning. We were talking earlier about impermanence as being all we need to consider and now we're talking really about the hierarchy of things as if they actually exist quite concretely as well as the danger of actually falling into them.

Virananda: You actually make this point here - page 84 of the new edition - where you give a quotation from Webster which says, 'the phenomenal world was thus distinguished from the ontal world of permanent being and the ideal world of permanent truth' and you go on to say 'Against this sort of antithesis which vitiates practically the whole of western philosophy, ancient, and modern, from before the time of Plato and after that of Hegel', it sets Buddhagoshā's double negative definition of dharma as phenomenon. I was wondering about this when I read this passage. It just struck me how there is something, thought, in Platonism in that you say it's vitiated the whole of western philosophy and I wondered how could it be made compatible with Buddhism, because it's got this conception of a world of forms. I wondered whether the

world of form could somehow be made compatible with Buddhism, serve a useful purpose, rather than it just being seen as something which vitiated philosophy.

S: It's not the concept of a world of forms so much has vitiated western philosophy or some important forms of western philosophy. It's the - what shall I say? - the duality between that static world of forms, of ideas in Plato's sense and the mundane world. It's the lack of that sort of intermediate world of emanations which the neoplatonists developed - that was maybe **their** contribution or their principal contribution to the Platonic tradition. There are hints of this in Plato himself. For instance in the *Symposium* but that wasn't developed in a very systematic sort of way. The net result of Platonic philosophy sort of popularly or semi-popularly interpreted is a [87] a world of static forms which embody reality up there and unreality down here, and sort of nothing in between. And in a sense no means of transition, no bridge, and I mean apart from some teachings say in Plato's *Symposium* which were not systematically developed in Platonism itself. But the neo-Platonists with the help of Greek and even Egyptian mythology seem to have filled in that gap and made a sort of continuous series or hierarchy between the world of the forms and the ordinary world. And in Christian terms that was done with the help of this idea of the hierarchy of angels; and you find much the same sort of thing in Sufism. But it's said that when by the time the 13th Century came, the importance of angels was depreciated - angels were given less importance so to speak. They were not as much objects of worship as before. At one time they were very much objects of worship; churches were dedicated to archangels for instance collectively or even to individual archangels especially St. Michael and also for as it were organisational reasons the church didn't want people to so to speak have access to these sort of levels of inspiration where they could be sort of independently inspired, without going through the machinery of the church. At the same time there was the growing principle of rationalistic Aristotelean thought which didn't give any great place - in fact no place at all - to the imagination. So for all practical purposes the world of angelic hierarchies was sort of cut out of existence. And by the time you come to Protestantism well they get rid of the last vestiges almost it. In Protestantism the angels have no place at all. So in Protestantism you've got a remote god and you've got the secular world. And you've got the emphasis upon reason and private judgement. That leads straight into the modern secular world, devoid of imagination. The only people through that whole period in Western Europe who tried to do something for the imagination were the romantic poets and some of their hangers-on. So you see the sort of picture? But of course there was always a sort of underground movement of say Cabbalists and alchemists who were trying desperately in one way or another to keep in touch with this other side of things, and in alchemy it's well known that angels and angelic figures paid quite an important part. So it does mean that it probably is very important from the standpoint of a fuller and more positive understanding of impermanence, of evolutionary progress and the path, to sort of fill in the gaps that we've inherited. Do you see what I mean? And obviously with the help of the Buddhist tradition and yes in the Buddhist tradition, in the Buddha's own [88] teachings there are constant references to this sort of hierarchy of levels of consciousness, as described in the four lower and the four higher *jhanas* and even a sort of 'mythological' - inverted commas - hierarchy in terms of gods and brahmas - and above that well there's the bodhisattvas of the Mahayana. This gives us so to speak something to work with. This gives us a proper framework and context and perspective.

Siddhiratna: These things are actually meant to act as inspirations to, trying to attain Enlightenment?

S: Yes. So also one sort of thinks, one reflects that these figures if one thinks of them as figures, are not just outside you because I mean this is not quite adequate language, but they, as it were represent or embody stages of the path that one day you will realize. So you could also say that sooner or later you'll encounter these figures. Anyway these are the sort of terms within which you're thinking when say you meditate on or visualize a Bodhisattva - it's not just a concentration exercise. You're trying to draw nearer to a particular

higher stage of the path as embodied in that figure. Perhaps to reflect or to meditate on Bodhisattvas might even be considered as going a bit too fast. You see what I mean? Maybe you need well say an angelic figure, a deva-like figure that is just in between you and the Bodhisattva. Maybe a bodhisattva is too far advanced.

Kulamitra: I wondered once if one could say meditate on Athene, I mean at the time I felt quite attracted towards that figure.

S: I think one has to be careful here because I mean Athene say belongs to a mythology which is virtually dead. But I mean maybe for some people that figure is real. I mean I've recently been reading some of Prakasha's essays and it is quite clear that that figure is real for him- so no doubt he can use it. But for others it may not have that sort of reality and it would be a bit sort of artificial to try to revive it.

Kulamitra: But that's the trouble though isn't it? I find that more real than the equivalent in Indian mythology because that's a mythology that I don't have a cultural connection with. It's a bit difficult. We don't have a good connection with **any** mythology.

S: I don't think it's necessarily just a question of a conscious connection via the rational mind because sometimes you can respond very strongly to figures that have got nothing to do with your cultural heritage in the ordinary sense. But nonetheless I think probably we have suffered from not having that sort of cosmic or [89]symbolical background. Maybe in catholic countries they're a bit better off with saints. Or even angels though angels occupy a comparatively unimportant place now. But maybe worship of saints in Catholicism, in popular Catholicism, not looking at it in very strict theological terms, does fulfil a sort of need which is certainly not met in Protestantism.

Vairocana: Why is it that we've just got Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Why don't we seem to have the names of those various gods that we can actually relate to? They seem very sort of vague, the deva realm. Why is it that it's not put over all that strongly? We're just presented with bodhisattvas.

S: Well bodhisattvas are of course spiritually and doctrinally more as it were immediately one might say justifiable but you know it only begins to be possible within the FWBO to speak about devas. If I'd started giving lectures on devas 10 or 4 or 15 years ago well what would have happened? One has to prepare the ground so to speak.

Vairocana: But I mean the names even if you read through books on Buddhism you can find Manjushri, Avalokitesvara, all over the place, you don't find names of any angels or devas or

S: Well I think there's a reason for that. The reason is that details about the devas, the devaloka realms, are mainly given in the **Pali** texts, in the Digha Nikaya, Majhimma Nikaya. There's a number of many many references to all the different kinds of gods and so on, **but** modern exponents of the Theravada especially those who come to the West are almost ashamed of all that side of the teaching. They want to present Buddhism as just a purely rational teaching, usually. So if they're asked about gods they become a bit embarrassed and say, 'yes, yes those things are mentioned in the Pali scriptures - though the Buddha is just using the language of his time, he didn't really believe in them. Of course he was a very enlightened man, a rational man.' So in that way the devas are swept aside by the Theravadins, usually. Though in some Theravada countries, especially Burma, the devas known as (Nats) there, occupy quite an important place. But scholars would regard this as sort of getting away from pure Buddhism.

They would say popular Burmese Buddhism is very corrupt. This is how they would express it. 'Burmese Buddhists are over occupied worshipping the (Nats)' Well perhaps they are but in principle they're not wrong. So that sort of material, that aspect of the Theravada is not placed before us. Those particular passages, those whole suttas even, in the Pali Canon are just glossed over. Theravadins themselves, especially, as I said, those who come to teach Buddhism in the West, just ignore them. They're certainly not properly put across. And then of course in the [90] Mahayana, usually because they are more concerned with bodhisattvas, they tend not to mention the gods so much. So in that way we fall between two stools. But perhaps we have to give attention to these things.

Kuladeva: What about the bodhisattva samayasattva. Can that not fill the gap?

S: It's not quite the same thing. That's the sort of conventional form that you build up through your meditation. It doesn't represent so to speak, the bodhisattva himself but provides a sort of vehicle for his manifestation. This is also partly why I've been dropping hints from time to time about human beings, angels, gods, bodhisattvas and even artists.

Sagaramati: But it is quite hard to relate to the gods of - I mean even the European traditions, even the Greek traditions because they're so... I mean they flay people.

S: Well there's this whole, say ethical objection to the gods of classical mythology. I mean even Athene didn't always behave herself very well. This applies to the Hindu gods as well. You couldn't possibly interest our Indian Buddhist friends in Hindu gods- they just want nothing to do with them whatever. But I think angels is not a bad concept for us to take up, partly because it's a bit on the fringes of Christianity as we know it and because it's absent from many forms of Christianity because the churches for centuries have underplayed it for reasons which I've indicated.

Siddhiratna: Could that be the appreciation of the Buddha himself as a superior figure as opposed to angels and stuff like that which for me are a bit too mythological to give much credibility to but I mean...

End of Side One Side Two

Jinapriya: very sort of weak. I'm thinking of some of the dreadful Victorian prints which (unclear) had. [Laughter].

S: But this is the sort of thing that you'd get in the absence of a genuine tradition. You see these appear in the context of Protestantism and they're purely sort of sentimental creations on the part of people who have no real imaginative development and no actual contact with angels at all - and who probably don't believe that contact with angels is possible anyway. It's just a sentimental cliché.

Kuladeva: I must say I find angels association with Christianity, especially Roman Catholicism a bit off putting. [91]

Siddhiratna: You seem to have missed the question that do you think that the Buddha is a viable replacement as it were for the notion of getting into contact with angel consciousness, as it were?

S: It's difficult to say because it depends how real the Buddha is to you. I mean if the Buddha is very real to you, chances are it isn't the Buddha. Do you see what I mean?

Siddhiratna: Well the feeling is and my understanding. Because in a sense his achievement is that far removed from where you're probably at that to say that you're in contact would be mistaken; although still nonetheless the notion that somebody left home, rejected conventional morality and one thing and another and then set out to achieve something.....

S: Well that sounds all right. It seems as though that way of looking at things, though valid, doesn't sort of provide for the whole imaginative side of the spiritual life. It seems very sort of rational, whereas in the case of say angels, gods, bodhisattvas, they're very very sort of colourful. They appeal to one's imagination.

Siddhiratna: It leads on to ask the question what's the value of the imaginative if that's... because if we've just been talking about impermanence and... well I'm not quite sure but delusion or the imaginative is subjective, and if you're at the level that you're at, and you're into imagining all sorts of things.

S: That's using imagination loosely. It's not just a question of fantasizing.

Siddhiratna: What's the difference?

S: It's as though imagination one can say is the means of transition from the mundane to the transcendental and it's because imagination - the object of the imagination - is emotionally moving that you're able to sort of gear your energies towards the transcendental - but if you've got simply a conceptual, a rational, notion of the transcendental that doesn't happen.

Siddhiratna: It's not enough to motivate you.

S: It's not enough to motivate you.

Siddhiratna: Do the Zen and the Ch'an traditions have much to do with ...

S: No they don't. I personally consider this their greatest weakness. No they don't.

Siddhiratna: There's no sort of something that they've taken from their [92] popular mythology preceding Buddhism.

S: Well no, There are some forms of Ch'an that incorporate something of Shin as it's called in Japan. That is to say they worship Amitabha Buddha and recollecting the beauties of the Pure Land. So that gives them a sort of imaginative element. But I suspect that pure Ch'an unless a very definite spiritual level is kept up or a very definite level of practice, that is of meditation, is kept up, it can sort of become quite one sided and even dry. And this is why I read with great suspicion accounts say of modern Zen masters who have lengthy sesshins or conduct lengthy sesshins and then have a wild party afterwards with loads of drinking. It's as though that is to make up for the strain that they've undergone. The spring is allowed to uncoil. This suggests that the whole practice has been wilful and it's wilful because there's no imaginative element to sort of really lead you and inspire you. It's much much too willed - and then of course a reaction has set in and they've learned to sort of cope with that reaction it seems to me, just by having a drinking party afterwards.

Dhammarati: The thing that always strikes me about the Japanese and Chinese art as opposed to Indian art is that in the visual arts you've got landscapes and realistic

motifs rather than the theological motifs. And in the poetry again you've got very sort of realistic poetry rather than a very elaborate symbolic poetry. It still seems to me you've got a very sort of in a way penetrating view of phenomena. You don't think that that art that takes a realistic motif as its starting point is imaginative in the same sense as the... You don't think that gives you access to ...?

S: Well I think it can if it is genuine but I think the great danger is that that sort of insight can be confused with just rational understanding and this is what happens very much with certainly modern Theravada Buddhism. It's as though you need the support of imagination to really involve your emotional energies, and unless they are involved, radically involved, there's no real overall all round spiritual progress or development. Of course in Japanese Buddhism broadly speaking that element is represented by the Shingon school and yes they do have another kind of Japanese Buddhist art. They have beautiful depictions of Avalokitesvara, the various bodhisattvas and some of the wrathful ones.

Atula: I've a tendency at times when I keep hearing the word imagination and the use of it, and so my understanding of the subject, certainly where I get a feeling really for it is with William Blake, the way he responded in a sense between these figures. It's as though the imagination is a particular kind of response, a particular kind of orientation to life [93] and I think going back to what Sagaramati was saying earlier about it, it's as though he seems to be talking about living a full-blooded life rather than like just two orientations which we can either get pulled in engrossed in something or we can be repelled, shrink back from it. He's sort of all for sort of going into life...

S: Well you must be very careful by what one means by this full-blooded life. Because William Blake didn't go out and get drunk as far as I know.

Atula: No no no.

S: And he didn't bump anybody off. I mean in what does this fullbloodedness consist of?

Atula: I think it is certainly not a getting pulled into indulging something and it's certainly not a being repelled. It is an acceptance of impermanence. I certainly get that feeling from Blake - that it's a response to impermanence which seems to give rise to the imagination.

S: But there's still something quite vague about this full-blooded approach.

Sagaramati: What I was saying was that if you've got a good grasp of impermanence, one good practical way of realising it is to have a sort of very full- blooded life because ..

S: But what does he mean by this full- blooded life? *[Laughter]*

Sagaramati: Something that if your energy....

S: Does it mean a real man?

Atula: It's an orientation.

Sagaramati: It's something that engages your energies. I mean intellectually and emotionally etc., you're engaged. Sometimes like say to use an analogy, Dharmapala's life. I remember saying this a while ago. The

idea of somebody doing that doesn't touch me, it doesn't engage me. I can appreciate.... yes, Anagarika Dharmapala. (S: Ah **Anagarika** Dharmapala He was quite a full-blooded character) but it doesn't stretch my imagination in any way. And a full-blooded life would be something that, well, all your faculties are engaged in. I don't mean just it has to be worldly.

S: Mmmm. Then I think the term full-blooded is a misnomer because for instance as I pointed out in my own biography of Dharmapala, in his younger days he was very very fond of Shelley and the romantic poets generally but that side of things got squeezed out. I mean I'm sure that he retained that sort of love of poetry but he just had no time for it. So it's as though that whole side of him was never [94] developed. The seed of it was there in his early life but it got squeezed out. So from that point of view, if you mean by full-blooded the person who does develop all those other especially more emotional aspects of himself, well yes, he wasn't leading a very full-blooded life at the end, even though he was leading a very active and vigorous life. He did sort of narrow himself down quite a bit. I mean under other circumstances perhaps that wouldn't have happened. There'd be no need say restore Buddhaghosa or if indeed someone else had restored it, well Dharmapala might have concentrated much more on meditation or literature and might have even written poetry. Do you see what I mean? But he certainly wasn't a full blooded character in the sense of being an all-round person.

Sagaramati: I think what I was trying to say was that impermanence as a concept has to be applied to things. It's no good reflecting on something in the abstract being dharmic. It has to be something that is very very real to you. So if you're not leading a very full-blooded life then even in the objective world....

S: Well I think the misunderstanding that needs to be avoided is that full-blooded is not a euphemism for unskilful. *[Laughter]* Otherwise very often you've got a full-blooded life - Aha, plenty of wine, women and song - no, that is not a full-blooded life; that is just an unskilful life.

Sagaramati: What I meant really was a more balanced life. It's like a wheel. I mean your life. We are unskilful but there could also be emphasis on the skilful, whereas the secluded would be sort of avoiding the unskilful in a way in trying to develop the skilful.

S: Well no. I would say that would be more like trying to avoid unskilful action by avoiding action itself altogether. Well that clearly is no good.

Vairocana: Full blooded seems more related to just physical action. Actually just going out and performing certain physical actions.

Sagaramati: But what's behind the physical action?

Siddhiratna: The whole thing of full-blooded seems to me to suggest actually being in conflict with forces which are holding other people's situations back. It's out doing battle with the actions more.

S: Shall we pause for a drink?

Siddhiratna: Cheers Bhante! *[Laughter]*

[Tea Break]

Dhammarati: One last question about angels. *[Laughter]*

S: I'm quite happy with angels.

Dhammarati: English 19th Century art and Turner who's more or less ruthlessly a realist, and Pre-Raphaelites who brought in motifs like angels and things like that, And I must say that to my eye I kind of think Turner's work far more spiritual than the Pre-Raphaelites quite self-conscious use of images like that. Is there a sort of risk that our use of angels

S: Turner did one painting of an angel - didn't he - at least one - "The Angel in [95] the Sun".

Kulamitra: And those ones at the end of his life. They seemed to have moved on from a kind of expansion of what was realistic into (?).

S: Hmmm.

Kulamitra: Well no I mean the expansion of his view of the realistic seems there were some paintings - there's 'Moses', there's a few sort of vortexal paintings, one of which is subtitled 'Goethe's theory of colour' but it's actually Moses in there. And there's that one of the angel with a sword in the air and there's someone called I think (La Cigor) getting a ring from a sort of maiden in the water. And they're all towards the end of his life.

Dhammarati: I must say I don't know them very well but it's interesting that even they're rooted so thoroughly in realism but it's no sort of...

S: Well if one was say to discuss the matter with Blake, you might say that his art was extremely realistic because he was just painting or he was just drawing what he actually **saw**. So one has to be quite careful about how one understands the terms that one uses. I would say there was a difference in that sort of way between say Blake and the Pre-Raphaelites. Let's assume for the sake of argument that they both depict an angel; well the Pre-Raphaelites, as far as I know, had never seen an angel; it was a sort of semi-literary reconstruction but then they might have had some kind of feeling that clearly that symbol, that figure, **meant** something but perhaps it didn't mean something to them in quite the same way that it meant say something to Fra Angelico or even Botticelli. But in the case of Blake it was quite different. I mean he **saw** angels [*chuckles*] so he just represented angels just as easily as he might draw a picture of Mrs. Blake. It was as straightforward as that, for him. Where Turner comes here, I don't know. I think his imagination was imagination in a more, what shall I say - I was going to say more imaginative sense, but in the more poetic sense; though there's an element obviously of genuine imagination in the poet. Not that the poet necessarily sees that figure in the way that Blake, did but he had a definite strong feeling for it. It's meaningful for him. It's not just a sort of visual figure of speech as it was say for the sentimental Victorian artist who just depicted beings with wings.

Vajradipa: Then what is the difference between them? Just saying that Blake sees and then the Pre-Raphaelites imagined.

S: Well imagined is in a sense the wrong terminology because we've been using the imaginative in a different sense. That's why I said [96] 'sort of constructed'. yeh?

Kulamitra: Does the imagination progress - starting maybe with like an extension or a more truthful seeing of what is around you through to things which go on to become more and more visionary. I mean is there a

progression in that sense of that faculty that. ... it begins by actually I dunno, seeing more in what's actually around you and then, as you open up, progress until you actually maybe do see.

S: Well in a way from a certain point of view the two are not distinct, in the sense that maybe you see a flower. You can see a flower with your two physical eyes or you can see it with your imagination, so to speak, but the fact that you can see it with your imagination doesn't mean that you cease to see the flower with your two physical eyes. So it's as though you see the flower but it has at the same time this, well imaginative value for you. You're seeing the flower in greater depth you could say. So it is as though if you sort of want to go step by step you begin by **seeing** the flower - you really do look at it. And very likely you can't rise to the next step, that is to say seeing the flower in depth, without first having seen the flower in the ordinary sense. So I think a lot, or some at least, of imaginative art, let us say, consists not so much in the construction of a world of archetypal images above and beyond the material world - the so-called material world - but rather seeing those images in the images of the material world, by seeing those images in the material world just in greater depth. You see That I mean? That is not to say that if you rise to a higher level still you may not leave the material world completely behind and see a completely fresh range of images on another level.

Kulamitra: Yes, but in terms of the development of that faculty you might be better off, rather than sort of cutting yourself off in your room and trying to think of semi-literary constructions that you can work with, to actually go out into nature and just try and see more deeply into your surroundings.

S: Well of course it depends what you actually respond to. I mean for instance you might say open a book, an art book, and find yourself very strongly responding to certain figures which have got very little to do with the natural world. So it's only to be expected then that well you just want to dwell upon those - or even meditate upon those.

Sagaramati: Are you saying that just because Blake actually saw angels it doesn't mean to say he has more imagination?

S: Ah, now one must introduce another distinction. Some people do have this well visionary faculty in a sense, but it isn't invested with any symbolical meaning. Some people can just, well let's say produce - what are they called - eidetic images more easily than others. [97] They do not necessarily have any sort of symbolic significance. So it's as though in the case of Blake he couldn't only produce eidetic images, he not only saw things in terms of visual images but they were for him invested with spiritual meaning and therefore were symbols. So he had as it were this **double** faculty. Say just as you could invest something you see in the natural world with a symbolic meaning so you can invest the eidetic images also with a symbolic meaning; and because they're eidetic, well perhaps they do represent a level of greater refinement and perhaps they can even be more appropriate vehicles for the images produced by the imagination proper.

Virananda: So what is this faculty which invests these images with...

S: Well this is what we've been calling imagination with a capital 'I', or the imaginal faculty. So that would seem to be, in Buddhist terms, a faculty for the perception of a level of reality which is above what we've been calling the natural world, but below the Transcendental. That is to say it is a faculty which pertains to the *rupaloka* and *arupaloka*. And the lower ranges of the *rupaloka* as well as the higher ranges of the *kamaloka* realm seem to correspond to the artistic consciousness. The artist seems to have his sphere there. Well perhaps the very greatest artists go beyond that.

Kuladeva: Sorry, where are the artists?

S: The higher ranges of the kamaloka and the lower ranges of the *rupaloka* in Buddhist terms.

Sagaramati: There's a correspondence between the imagination and the symbolic representation?

S: Yes.

Kulamitra: Could you see it as like this. As your imaginative faculty develops you see progressively more and more symbolic meaning in your experience let's say.

S: Yes I think that as your imagination develops you see the whole of your experience as symbolic but a point may also come when your experience goes beyond the natural world so you're seeing as symbolic experiences beyond the natural world, i.e. the *rupaloka*, *arupaloka*.

Kulamitra: But at that point they are your experiences.

S: Yes but it's significant that we don't have a proper word for imagination - though the word imagination itself has been given back something of its original significance since the time of Coleridge. That is the great significance of Coleridge, broadly speaking. He realised the importance of what we've come to call the imagination.

Virananda: What, by distinguishing it from fantasy?

S: Yes. Well Blake likewise realised its importance, but Coleridge [98] was able to explain the whole matter from a more general philosophical standpoint. To place it within a broader context. Blake simply asserted the imagination and demonstrated the imagination but Coleridge as it were reasoned the matter out.

Kulamitra: So what we know as the *jhanas* could also be described as levels of imaginary experience? Progressive levels of imaginary experience?

S: Yes, yes. Except that perhaps one must make a further distinction between mundane imagination and transcendental imagination - and this is a distinction I'm making as it were off the cuff as regards the actual terminology but you see what I'm getting at?

Kulamitra: Not quite. Could you explain further?

S: Well it's like the distinction in the Vajrayana between samayasattva and jnanasattva. That is to say you can have an image or a form, say, of a deva, belonging to a higher realm, so you could say have a perception, an experience of that form, of that deva - that would be mundane imagination. But supposing that deva was transformed into a bodhisattva or that deva became a bodhisattva, or a bodhisattva took on that deva form and that you were able not only to perceive and experience the deva form but also the bodhisattva content as it were; that would be Transcendental Imagination which you were exercising. And in fact of course, I mean, you could say that devas are represented in traditional Buddhist art as young princes and bodhisattvas are represented as devas.

Kulamitra: But that's yet another faculty coming into play isn't it?

S: You could call it another faculty. Or you could call it an extension or development of the original faculty.

Kulamitra: But you could have that with, say you meet a guru, a teacher, I mean you could see that person - well they just seem to you a kind old man or you could perceive their transcendental quality. You'd see there's some kind of difference.

S: Yes. Right. Of course you could go even further than that and say well you can see something transcendental so to speak even in the flower. I mean you have to be careful not just to be poetical in the sense of pseudo-poetical but if you have developed an Enlightened consciousness, if you have developed the **Transcendental** Imagination well everything that you see becomes symbolical of reality itself - you see reality **in everything**. Which doesn't mean you see reality like a sort of entity standing behind that mundane object separate from it. You just see that object as sort of well significant of something beyond itself [99] which is at the same time itself in so to speak its higher aspect.

Dhammarati: Is it different from just simple awareness?

S: Well awareness as we commonly use the term seems to exclude the feeling element. I say 'seems to' because awareness in the true sense doesn't exclude. But where we use the term imagination the feeling element is quite obviously there. And also one might say imagination is a sort of faculty. It's something you exercise, it's something you **do**, it's creative, whereas awareness - rightly or wrongly - suggests a sort of just mirroring of what is actually there. It doesn't suggest anything active or creative.

Siddhiratna: It's a tricky distinction that isn't it, because it seems to me imagination is not constructed and that's where you get this kind of synthetic kind of angel.

S: I mean Coleridge would say that that was the work of fancy and not imagination.

Siddhiratna: And somehow imagination kind of reveals itself. And you just said something which I thought you weren't going to say which is that it's a faculty that can be developed. Is that the case? Because it seems to me imagination occurs to you sort of despite yourself as it were.

S: Hm. I think you can develop imagination, but clearly it's not to be developed just by taking thought, because you see objectively, rationally, the need to do that.

Siddhiratna: Because otherwise it becomes fantasy.

S: Yes. Otherwise it becomes fantasy. Because for instance you can take for instance half of a horse and half of a cow and put them together....

Siddhiratna: And stick wings on them. *[Laughter]*

S: Well yes. That is just fancy. I mean Coleridge gives this sort of example.

Siddhiratna: I mean you see it in these 14th Century manuscripts don't you? Where people are trying to construct an elephant or something.

Kulamitra: People with heads in their chests.

S: But if you actually see it or if you have a sort of **experience** of it, well you can have extraordinary multiwinged and eyed creatures but they can be imaginative creations. However extraordinary they may be. They're not just sort of artificial juxtapositions of bits and [100] pieces having different origins.

Siddhiratna: Somehow it seems to me that it arises in you rather than you make an effort to do it if you see what I mean. It's as much as you can do to put yourself in that situation where it may.....

S: Also perhaps you can remove the obstacles to the imagination manifesting itself.

Siddhiratna: By opening yourself to stimulation?

S: You may know for instance that you just have to be quiet and on your own.

Atula: In that case it arises out of all those...

Sagaramati: But surely it should arise... I mean if you're doing the metta bhavana and things like that I mean as a consequence of your spiritual life - it should manifest. There must be some method for...

S: No, I would say that the metta is just very weak, more often than not.

Sagaramati: I mean there must be some method for the imagination to come out.

Siddhiratna: You mean for the imagination to come out is dependent on there being metta.

Sagaramati: Yes, if there's no positive emotion

S: I think there's something in that, because we see sort of historically if we look back to - I think it's the - Mahagovinda Sutta in the Majjhima Nikaya - I think it's Mahagovinda who spent the whole of the rainy season retreat in seclusion and doing the metta bhavana and at the end Brahma Sanatkumara appeared to him. Do you see what I mean? It's as though if you put yourself in that state of metta which is a **Brahma** Vihara it is only natural that a **Brahma** should appear to you. And in what sort of form? A youthful, beautiful, attractive form, because that is the objective correlate of your mental state. I'm not saying that he brahma in modern parlance is merely subjective. No. The Brahma as objects is as real as you - the metta practising subject - is real as subject. So it does seem that when positive emotion - if one can reason from this Sutta - when positive emotion, especially metta, reaches a certain pitch, well you just start seeing the world differently. You start even seeing different images, different figures, that being the sort of objective correlate of your subjective state, your subjective experience.

Virananda: It seems to me that the tendency is to just place a single emphasis on seeing. It strikes me say that.... well you singled out the romantic poets but you could also single out romantic composers, particularly say Beethoven or just that faculty operating through music, getting in touch with higher levels of consciousness using that faculty but on the level of sound say. Something different. I also [101] remember that you spoke about smell once in a lecture.

S: Right yes. Well it does seem that sight and hearing are the most developed senses and it seems that they are the best mediums for any more advanced experience - you can express in terms of sight, you can express in terms of hearing. In hearing one includes of course speech.

Mahamati: So when you said that one might come to experience - as I understood it - everything as symbolic, does that correlate with one would be in a higher state of consciousness?

S: Yes, one could put it in that way. One would be seeing things in a different way because you were experiencing a different state of consciousness.

Mahamati: Can you say more about what that actually means; to experience things symbolically?

S: Well you see things as pointing beyond themselves. You don't see them as sort of closed things. You see them as open-ended. A flower is a flower but at the same time it's not just a flower. It means everything else - or at least it means a very great deal other than just flower. Well, you can express it in Avatamsaka terms that things reflect one another. In the flower you don't just see the flower - I mean ultimately you see the whole world reflected in the flower and you see everything as reflecting in that sort of way. You see everything as symbolical. I think the poets also get into this sort of state sometimes - I don't know about other artists. But poets certainly get into it. I think that is when they are sometimes, so to speak, inspired they tend to see the symbolical interconnections of things.

Kulamitra: Does this mean usually we think like 'ourselves, our world' and then there's Enlightenment, the Transcendental but if you can see so much in everything then Enlightenment is like a necessary part of the fabric of existence. Without that element I mean what we actually know couldn't be either. Is it something like that?

S: You could say that.

Kuladeva: It's like the transcendental penetrating the mundane.

S: Yes. Though of course one has to be quite careful how one conceives this and doesn't sort of interpret it ontologically. Not that the world has been created out of that so to speak. It's a different order of expression.

Dhammarati: To come back to Sagaramati's point a wee bit about sort of metta being the basis for the imagination. Take a really ordinary example of say you're looking at a flower. On the one hand you're [102] aware of it, that awareness you find quite invigorating, but connected with that is a sort of sympathy with a flower. Almost a sort of positive emotional response to it. Now on the basis of that positive emotional response you're more aware and you get, like, the one effects the other and they escalate. And I must say I've actually found a bit of difficulty in even teaching the mindfulness of breathing and the metta saying where one starts the other stops. They seem to be almost sometimes indistinguishable.

S: Well certainly metta is not without awareness because you're aware of the people that you're feeling metta for, and awareness includes awareness of one's feelings, awareness of one's emotional states. So there's a certain amount of overlap, and eventually I mean as one reaches *jhana* states, they do coalesce more and more. It becomes more and more difficult to distinguish between them. I mean just as in a healthy human being - well you can't **really** separate his emotions from his reason. They operate together. They're different aspects of each other. But usually we are or we feel divided. But going back to what you were saying about the flower; if you feel let's say metta towards the flower it means you have a greater sense of the flower being alive and you respond to the life in the flower. Your attitude towards it is an attitude of 'well this flower is alive, it's another living thing.' almost it's another person. So you start seeing almost the flower as a person, not just as a thing or as a plant in the ordinary sense. You're certainly not just seeing it botanically. You might say well you almost can have a conversation with the flower without being

sentimental in the 'fairies at the bottom of the garden' way [*Laughter*]. So you might say, well some people might say, you personify the flower. But I mean you're seeing more in the flower than is usual. You're seeing the flower in greater depth and feeling it, experiencing it in greater depth. Blake would actually see a fairy sitting on the flower but you might not go so far as that - you might not see any fairies sitting on the flower but you'd have the same sort of experience of just, so to speak, the flower itself. You'd feel in the same way - the way the Blake expressed just by saying for instance he saw a fairy sitting on it, well perhaps he actually did see a fairy. That would be his way of experiencing what you experience in another way. He sort of almost takes it to extremes. Well I hope it doesn't get out that grown men this morning were talking about fairies! [*Laughter*]

Kulamitra: It seems to me that has quite a strong effect on the way we live in the sense that...I mean we're in the shrine room trying to develop metta. Maybe when we're out of the shrine room we're quite [103] aware of trying to keep that up with people but we don't have any awareness of the things. I mean it has struck me sometimes but I still find it incredibly hard to do, occasionally I've actually had a sense of even - a flower at least is organic - but even inorganic things having a significance just because... I think craftsmen get that to some extent with their tools and the wood they are working with or something like that.

S: I think that's a bit different in the case of the tools because there's a bit of your life perhaps you feel has rubbed off onto the tools. I mean not the other way around. Not that you're perceiving the independent life of the tools, because the tools as tools are extensions of your hands.

Tejamati: Do you think metta has something to do with the origination of say nature gods? I mean I'm just reminded of ancient Greek mythology.

S: But then you wouldn't necessarily always feel metta towards nature. You might feel fear and terror and they could give rise to a different kind of God. The storm god or the cloud god. A menacing god, an evil god even. But what I was going to say was it's probably difficult to feel metta towards brick and stone and cement and corrugated iron. So I think probably therefore it's more difficult to feel metta towards nature when you're living in a city. I think if you want to do it at all or are able to do it at all, it's easier in the country when you're surrounded by, so to speak, living things. I mean not that even brick and cement and steel are strictly inanimate but one might say there are degrees of manifestation of life. It's much more easy to perceive the life in a plant, a flower, a tree, than it is in a steel girder or a plastered wall, but then of course an interesting thing arises, and it may be a little hobby horse of mine - perhaps an indication of the degree to which you are practising metta towards say other forms of organic existence - say towards plants - is the state of the house plants in the community. You see what I mean? I mean surely every thing has some significance. Because if you see a plant that needs water and you don't give it water, don't even notice that it needs water even though you see it every day what's happened to your metta? What's happened to your mindfulness? They aren't being practised even in a quite elementary sort of way. You haven't really succeeded in carrying them out of the shrine room perhaps - assuming that you had experienced them in the shrine room. So I think this is quite significant. Also of course collectively as regards the human race itself. It applies to our treatment of the environment, the natural [104] environment, which is of course shocking. Quite criminal. So perhaps it is a useful exercise to sort of just consciously care for the living things or the growing things in one's environment, not only other human beings but animals if you have them - say cats and dogs, and plants.

Virananda: Do you think it'd be a good thing to actually try to give things names? [*Laughter*]

S: Well we give things names. Do you mean individual names? I mean you sort of call your fern 'Freddy' or call your cactus 'Claude' *[Laughter]*

Virananda: Yes, yes that kind of thing.

S: Well I think I'd need to think about that. To me personally it smacks a little of sentiment. *[Laughter]* I don't feel any need personally to give plants individual names though I am quite fond of plants, but it never occurred to me to call my plant Jimmy or even 'Samantabhadra' or *[Laughter]*

End of Tape Four

Tape Five

No, I think it shouldn't be a question of labelling a plant in that way. If you're so aware of the plant and have such metta for it that quite spontaneously you just want to give it a proper name, fair enough, but I think that giving proper names in a general sort of way to plants to me is a bit sort of twee *[Laughter]* A bit like keeping pet stones.

Tejamati: Sorry, what's wrong with keeping pet stones? *[Laughter]* I don't actually advocate keeping pet stones!

S: Well I think it's not that people are really sort of aware of the stone as a stone, that they're sort of transferring other qualities to it, which is just the opposite process as people do with animals. They don't really see the dog as a dog or the cat as a cat - they sort of anthropomorphize it, which is just the opposite of seeing it for what it is. To anthropomorphize a dog or a cat is not really to see them in greater depth at all. It's just to project onto them, to superimpose on them, interests and concerns and ideas of your own. To speak of, say, taking your pet rock for a walk is ridiculous because stones don't walk! *[Laughter]* You're just substituting the stone for a dog *[Laughter]* which means you're not really seeing it in depth at all. [105]

Siddhiratna: It's actually happening in America. There was a fad wasn't there?

S: Someone made a lot of money out of these pet rocks and one can say rocks not stones. Pet rocks. So we mustn't do this with human beings either. We have to see them as they are, clearly. So this applies to other things. See a dog as a dog, see a stone as a stone, a plant as a plant. You can't see it in depth until you've actually seen the surface so to speak, clearly.

Vajradipa: It raises other interesting possibilities doesn't it, because if we're talking about impermanence and things can be changed we're talking about the rocks can be changed or is that just going over the top?

S: Well the shape of a rock can be modified, but is that change in the same sense as when you speak of a human being changing in the course of his or her development?

Dhammarati: You might get quite a crossover between what's sort of inorganic and organic life forms become minerals, the minerals feed the plants and the plants feed the animals.

S: According to ancient Hindu teachings, Vedic teachings, the human beings feed the gods, human beings are the cattle of the gods - the gods feed on them, not by way of human sacrifice, but because human beings make offerings to the gods, the gods so to speak 'keep' human beings because they are useful, but there is

some meaning in this because you exist for the sake of something higher than yourself and that's the real meaning here. You're not an end in yourself. The evolutionary process or the series of transformations does not come to an end with you. You're not the roof and crown of things, not in your unenlightened state anyway. In ancient Mexican religion human beings quite literally were the food of the gods because they were literally sacrificed, their hearts were offered to the gods. The gods were kept alive with that nourishment, the sun was kept alive with that nourishment. So they believed. But that was a very terrible way of applying the principle but the principle itself one might say was correct. The need to live for something beyond yourself which represents your own next and your highest, or own next higher stage of development.

Vairocana: I think it was in one of the lectures on the Sutra of Golden Light when you talked about the gods having a sort of personal investment in human beings.

S: I don't remember that but it is like that. [106]

Vairocana: They would actually be concerned with human development as well.

S: Ah. In as much as a developed human being, an ethical human being, was reborn as a god and in that way the ranks of the gods were increased, and in that way the gods were able to win more victories over the Asuras.

Kulamitra: In a way that's true of spiritual communities isn't it.

S: Yes.

Kulamitra: We have a need... there's potentially people who are less developed than ourselves which we need to draw out to strengthen our community.

S: Indeed yes. They need you and you need them in a quite objective healthy way.

Anyway any further questions because we're not going to have very much more time?

Kulamitra: We could move on to the actual twelve links.

S: If you wish.

Sagaramati: Regarding avijja you mentioned that avijja hasn't got any cosmological, hasn't got any sort of

S: In the sense that according to the Theravada, in fact according to Buddhist tradition generally. It is not that in the beginning was avijja and then everything originates out of that. It's the first nidana in a chain constituting the so called individual being.

Sagaramati: The point I was going to make is - I can see that but - avijja does seem to have what was I going to say - it's more than the other links, it seems to have... it's a greater symbol in a way than the links that follow it.

S: Well one might say that the nidanas are a sort of very miscellaneous list. They're not really like the links of a chain because the links of a chain are all of a same kind - all on the same level which is not the case with these nidanas. They go sort of zig-zag sometimes and some are on a different level it would seem from others. It would seem that avijja is a nidana on so to speak a very deep level because. .. well also another point is that it's not that when in dependence upon avijja the samskaras arise, that avijja thereby ceases to exist. You could say that avijja is a factor in all the nidanas. Each particular nidana draws attention to, you might say, an aspect which is present in relation to its arising, but it is not that because the succeeding nidana arises that the preceding one ceases to exist. In dependence [107] upon the ground arises the house, but the ground is still there, but when the house arises it's house that becomes prominent - you forget about ground for the time being but it does continue to be there.

Vajradipa: What's the connection between the moha in the greed, hatred and delusion and Avijja?

S: These are usually considered to be approximately synonymous but it's usually said that moha has a stronger emotional connotation. In a way it's a more popular term. Moha is not just ignorance it's also confusion and bewilderment and infatuation. It's all those. In a way it's a more emotive term. One speaks of lobha, dvesa and moha - greed hatred and delusion come bewilderment come confusion come attachment come infatuation - moha is all those things. It's got a richer connotation than the term avijja.

Vairocana: I could get them mixed up when I come to things like vedana. Because sometimes you've use vedana in the sense of emotion. Anyway in the 'Three Jewels' you describe it as (unclear) sensation or emotion but you don't use the term emotion, you use

S: Vedana covers all that.

Vairocana: Sensation, feeling **and** emotion

S: Yes. Sensation in the sense of feeling - again there's a confusion - sometimes we use sensation in the sense of feeling. Sometimes we use feeling in the sense of sensation. Strictly speaking when for instance someone sticks a pin in you what you experience then is a sensation, a bodily sensation. We do loosely say you feel the pin but that is loose. When you experience, let us say, to use the neutral term, that prick of the pin that is a sensation. That sensation is painful. That's the feeling element. Because someone has stuck a pin in you causing you pain, you feel anger - that is the emotion.

Virananda: And that's vedana?

S: All these are covered by the term vedana though the word vedana is sometimes used quite loosely. For instance - contact - sparsa - that really covers sensation because it's not just an anaesthetised contact. Do you see what I mean? Sometimes contact **is** translated as sensation. It really means that. Vedana is more number two and number three, that is to say feeling come emotion.

Sagaramati: The thing about vedana is karma vipaka whereas emotion is to me karma. So I mean trsna will be emotion based on some passive feelings so I distinguish between feelings and emotions. Emotions arise out of feelings.

S: You could say that - no doubt there are borderline cases - but in a sense emotions are not completely within your control. In the sense [108] that you don't sort of will to have the emotion. It's a sort of quite spontaneous reaction. Just as the sensation is. Just as someone sticks a pin in you that sensation is just an

automatic reaction. You cannot not feel that pain. Of course you could I suppose if you were a yogi, withdraw your consciousness from the limb and not feel it, but apart from that you cannot but feel it. The same would seem to be the case say with feeling proper. You cannot but feel pain as pain and perhaps then you approach a point where you cannot but feel emotion as emotion. It's still remaining vipaka, but it's as though it becomes active when you sort of dwell upon it. You allow it to develop, even you make something more of it. Then it becomes more of the nature of karma.

Vairocana: Are the samskaras really sort of emotions?

S: Samskaras are usually regarded as volitions. Of course you can't exclude them. It's not that these nidanas are mutually exclusive and each represent just one cut and dried thing. In the case of samskaras, yes these are primarily driving forces, volitions, unconscious bias even you could say - tendency - and emotion is also involved. You can't exclude emotion but not that the emotional aspect is uppermost, so far as that particular nidana is concerned. There you're concerned that in dependance upon ignorance or because of ignorance those driving forces arise which have a karmic potency on account of which you undergo rebirth. Well the fact that emotion is involved that is not immediately relevant, not relevant to that part or that stage of the process.

Kulamitra: Do you have a favoured English translation of samskara?

S: Oh dear no. I sometimes use volitions, sometimes karma formations. There isn't one really. That's one of the most difficult points to translate.

Sagaramati: You did call it once 'psychic impetus'.

S: Did I? Well yes one could say that. Mrs. Rhys Davids sometimes calls them psynergies. We don't really have the equivalent word at all.

Kulamitra: With the vijñana I've always been puzzled why it's represented as a monkey climbing a tree. I just can't quite fit the image. I find that with some of them. I just can't quite see how that developed. Does it fit for you?

S: Well what is this vijñana? It's also explained as the re-linking consciousness because it is the first nidana of the present life so to speak. [109] So in a way it links the present life with the past life. So there's the patisandhi vijñana - the relinking consciousness. It's as though this consciousness arises in dependence upon the samskaras of the previous life and that's the monkey. This consciousness is the monkey, and then what does that monkey proceed to do? To experience the fruit, to pluck the fruit. The fruit represents all the experiences of this new life, the new world that confronts this vijñana. On its initial appearance.

Kulamitra: Does that mean there's already a suggestion there of the next few stages?

S: Yes you could say that.

Sagaramati: I've had another idea because the monkey, the mind always is all over the place, the monkey is always jumping about the tree, jumping here and jumping there.

S: Yes that's true, but also there is the point that the monkey is grasping at fruit - that represents the vijñana, arising in dependence on the nidanas of the previous existence, in this existence or the beginning or from

the beginning of this existence, grasping at the experiences by which it is now confronted in this new life and certainly the fact that it's a monkey and not an elephant or a bear means that it does so in a very haphazard and erratic restless sort of fashion. That adds to the meaning of the symbolism.

Kulamitra: In relation to this element, this link, I wonder if it's possible to actually say that we **choose** our rebirth and if it is what are the strongest factors actually governing that choice?

S: Well the Buddhist view is, the traditional Buddhist view, we do choose, though that may not be a conscious deliberate choice, it may be more a matter of a broad overall tendency more or less conscious. You just sort of gravitate towards a certain situation i.e. towards a certain birth. And the sort of situation that you gravitate towards is in accordance with your broad overall mental state. For instance just to be perhaps a little bit controversial, let us take the question as to whether you are reborn as a male or a female. Well is there any reason for that? Is there any karmic reason why one should be born as a man rather than as a woman according to Buddhism? What does Buddhism say about this? Has anyone got any ideas? Or is it just fortuitous without any connection with karma?

Kuladeva: I would have thought that since consciousness determines being that the kind of being that one becomes is related to one's state of mind, one's consciousness. If you're going to be reborn as a man [110] then it's because that's the best way of expressing one's consciousness and if you're a woman it's because that's the best way of

S: Because if you're reborn as a human being at all because you've got a broadly human consciousness and as I say, an Asura, because you've got a broadly asuric consciousness, all right it would stand to reason that in as much as you're reborn as a human being because you've got broadly human consciousness, you're reborn either as a male human being or as a female human being because you have either a male or a female human consciousness. So what is it that makes the difference, one might then say, between a male and a female human consciousness before they are actually embodied?

Virananda: Isn't it the degree of presence of one of the five hindrances - the one, desire for sensual experience - if you cultivate or haven't diminished that desire but in fact exacerbated it during your life, then it's likely that you'll be reborn as a woman, i.e. you're more attached to a sensual mode of existence. You want greater sensuousness.

S: Any other possible explanations?

Atula: Well there was an old joke when I was. . . but I think it actually bears some truth I remember one bloke saying to me once that a man spends nine months getting out of the womb and the rest of his life getting back into it. It does seem sort of there is a sort of gravitation towards that. It seemed to make sense to me.

Sagaramati: I thought it was to do with your interest. You could say your interest - there's a relationship between the samskaras and your interests and you take on a body etc. that will allow you to follow up those interests.

S: Right yes. So what are the specifically - what are the specific interests that can be followed through the masculine body and the specific interests that can be followed through the female body could one say?

Vajradipa: Well one is freedom.

Voice: Particular to the female body is motherhood.

S: All right so what is the difference between being a mother and being a father?

Vairocana: I think it goes back to what Vajradipa was saying - freedom. It's the gift of freedom. If you're a father....

S: it also goes back to what Virananda said, because as a mother, as [111] a female, you have a more extensive sensuous experience - if it is a question of choosing between say motherhood and fatherhood. So you could say and in fact Buddhist tradition does say this, that sense experience is more prominent in the life of the female, more important to the female than it is in the case of the male. Do you see what I mean? It's as though the, I don't know whether Buddhist tradition expresses it in exactly these terms, but it does say that the female is, as it were, more sense oriented, that the body and its functions, and especially its sexual functioning including the maternal functioning, occupies a more important place in the female life and consciousness than is the case with men. So it's usually expressed popularly by saying that if you are more attached to sense experience and especially to sexual experience then there is a greater likelihood that you're reborn as a woman. This is the traditional Buddhist view which obviously wouldn't be acceptable to some people nowadays, but this is the Buddhist view. So if one accepts that view that does establish a sort of minor hierarchy as between men and women. Again which is not a view in accordance with modern, or much modern, thought.

Kulamitra: But that narrows it down somewhat. Well OK the first narrowing down would be is it a human consciousness? Then is it male or a female human consciousness? Then there's some other criterion. Then you sort of keep narrowing it down until you end up with something very very specific.

S: Right yes.

Kulamitra: But is there **any** kind of fortuitous element or is it like all the way down the line more and more specific tendencies determining a more and more specific situation? OK you've established that this is the context, you're going to be a man and not a woman, so that limits that - then you're going to be a rich man let's say- then you're going to be a rich man with an unhappy childhood or something else because his father's a bad person.

S: Well I mean this raises the question of what is the part played by chance in human affairs at all. For instance your karma might have led you to be reborn in the way that you have been reborn and in the sort of family, country etc., etc. It might not have been in your karma to be involved in any war. But due to all these other karmic factors you are present on the spot when a war breaks out, and that could be without any direct karmic connection of your own with that experience of war, so that is fortuitous. So in other words in a very sort of complex situation even though you might have been brought into that situation on account of just a strictly limited number of karmic [112] factors, once in that situation you are exposed not only to those factors which are the direct consequence of your karmas, but to all the other factors which are connected with **those** factors. You are exposed to the total situation of which the karma resultant factors so far as you are concerned are only a small part.

Kulamitra: So you choose out of your tendencies, and the tendencies become more and more specific but the tendencies themselves are quite ignorant and incapable of understanding the implications of the direction they're heading in.

S: Oh yes. You could put it in that way. In other words when you find yourself in a certain world all sorts of factors are operating, all sorts of experiences befall you but not all the experiences that befall you will be directly connected with your previous karmas. Your previous karmas may have brought you into that world but they will not have brought you into that world on account of all the experiences which you then proceed to undergo there. But certain things which are due to you, karmically speaking, are connected inseparably with certain other things that are not due to you karmically, but you have to experience the whole lot because you can't experience the one **without** the other, it seems.

But to come back to this original question of what determines sex - and yes, Buddhism does believe that sex is determined by karma and broadly in the way that I've mentioned - is there anything in one's experience of women which would lead one to think that that was a reasonable explanation, or does it seem quite unreasonable?

Sagaramati: I think even just say the situation round here, the way the women - they seem to have a more homely attitude towards the surroundings they live in. Well they like all being together they haven't got much adventure. Apart from, I think Padmasuri is the only woman Order member I know who seems to have a bit of adventure in her. She's got a bit of initiative. The women do seem to sort of congregate and they like a sort of nice homely atmosphere and they seem to be quite happy and even wanting to settle in that whereas I don't think the men could actually.

S: But this is relating more to the question of freedom perhaps, not to the question of sense experience.

Virananda: They seem to be more in touch with their bodies, just being sensuous, less prone to maybe hate, or more worried by or thrown by alienation from their sensual experience.

Siddhiratna: What is it we're actually trying to arrive at or what is [113] it we are trying to find out?

S: Well the connection between the preceding state of consciousness and the subsequent embodiment?

Siddhiratna: And it's important to know whether you... how women

S: If you think first of all in terms of a human state of consciousness resulting in a human embodiment, well the next sort of subdivision is male and female because you're reborn normally either as someone who is definitely male or someone who is definitely female. So this would suggest - and this is what we are exploring - that there is a distinction in the preceding consciousness. That raises the question, well what is the nature of that difference? The traditional Buddhist view broadly is that in the case of the consciousness which is attracted to the female body or drawn to the female body, there is a greater weight as it were, of sensuousness - one could probably put it like that. So, what I am saying now is well, say looking at it the other way round, does one actually find that?

Siddhiratna: Yes. Is it actually true.

S: In other words I am saying well can it be actually verified empirically? This is what I am saying.

Kuladeva: One thing I've noticed is that men generally tend to look beyond themselves more than women and that might mean that women are more satisfied with the world that they find themselves in and its various forms of sensuous experience whereas men not being as satisfied with that are looking for something beyond it.

Kulamitra: I think it is broadly - not scientifically; I couldn't verify it scientifically - but I think you experience men and women as being distinctly different and I know by feeling, what those differences are, but it's quite difficult when you try and get it down into an exact analysis. But I mean, Danavira talked about men being more in a sense eye-oriented and sort of looking outwards and women being more touch oriented.

S: Well this is said to be the case by psychologists who have apparently conducted various experiments and so on. I think this is broadly accepted without the psychologists necessarily passing from that to a value judgment. They don't say that one is better than the other but they do say that there is that distinction.

Siddhiratna: Yet another aspect of that is that in schools women get or young girls get most of their information through reading and that [114] young boys actually get in contact with the world through their hands, through things that they do. So that would imply that women have a higher faculty for the imagination than men have in the sense that men have a fairly gross way of contacting the world while women use their minds more.

S: They use their minds more but whether that is imagination I think that's another matter.

Siddhiratna: In that it's literature.

S: It's said that women are better at arithmetic - that is at school girls are usually better at arithmetic, but some educationalists explain that in other ways saying that women are as it were more docile, less adventurous and they just stick to their studies in a way that boys very often don't.

Siddhiratna: Actually I have noticed that how many women take incredibly long notes in lectures.

S: So do some men.

Siddhiratna: I sort of notice women do it more. It's strange.

S: But also, to change the subject a little bit, there is the fact that women do seem to be much more concerned by everything, say to do with babies. Yes? Because clearly they're much more involved in that than the male is biologically. That must loom much larger in their consciousness. I find myself talking to women; they are more concerned with body related things than men are. They seem to be concerned with their bodies and the way they function, especially their sexual functioning in a broader sense, than men are. Women for instance seem to be more into perhaps things like massage and all that kind of thing.

Dhammarati: It's like each side's got pros and cons though because I'm sure that men for instance are much more interested in the hardware that's off the Falkland Islands right now than women are. So although you've got quite an outgoing thing it isn't necessarily a sort of skilful attitude. It's sort of tied up I suppose with the whole kind of hunter-gatherer split.

S: Yes. But to come back to the Buddhist point of view. In Buddhism there is a hierarchy as it were as *kamaloka*, *rupaloka*, *arupaloka*. You could say - I don't think Buddhism actually say this but it would be a quite legitimate interpretation - that if you regard the *kamaloka* itself so far as human beings are concerned as representing a certain band in the total spectrum, a certain part of the total spectrum, then if you say that women are more sensuously oriented than men they would occupy [115] a lower position in that *kamaloka* band than men do. Men would be a little nearer the *rupaloka*. In that way you would get a hierarchy set up.

So **if** that is the case and at this stage I'm only saying **if** that is the case, then it would be unrealistic not to base your dealings with women, let us say, on that distinction, on that hierarchy. Do you see what I mean? So is this valid? If it isn't, well one must construct that part of Buddhist thought differently, one must put forward other interpretations and explanations and so on. If of course you want to question the whole distinction of *kamaloka* and *rupaloka* well fair enough, you can do that, but then you are dismantling a lot of traditional Buddhism and you have to replace it with something. Do you see what I mean?

Dhammarati: There's also the question that, as well as it being valid what's the most skilful application of it?

S: Oh, that's true yes.

Mahamati: You've expressed it negatively that to be reborn as a woman you are well.. to be reborn as a man you would be less attached to sense experience. But how about expressing it positively in terms of what would the man's volition be going towards.

S: Well he'd have a stronger, more noticeable tendency towards spiritual life in as much as spiritual life represented a movement of ascent from lower to higher levels of consciousness and being.

Siddhiratna: From sensuous to less sensuous in a gross material sense.

S: Yes.

Atula: The trouble with that way of looking at things is that you get a sort of stereotyped idea of what a man is and what a woman is. And clearly a lot of women in the movement are a lot better than a lot of men who are not attracted to the

S: Well you must be careful of that because one can make broad distinctions where a number of individual instances are concerned; that does not mean that one doesn't recognise intermediate cases, but the existence of intermediate cases doesn't refute the broad truth of what is being asserted. One can say that, broadly speaking, women like to have babies well you can produce Ms a, b and c who don't want to have babies. That doesn't really refute the assertion that women like to have babies.

Kulamitra: But broadly speaking my gut reaction is I would go along with that. As long as you've got plenty of space for the exceptions [116] and for overlaps, broadly speaking I go along with that. But what interests me is I mean, I have quite a strong sensual aspect, where does it leave me as it were in relation to that? If I actually dwell on that, if I enjoy that, if I let it out freely does this mean that I am sort of heading towards womanhood? *[Laughter]*

S: This is the traditional view, yes. It's also a question - you can't sort of quantify it - it's also, it's mainly in fact I would say, a question of the **importance** of that element in your life. It's not a matter of the number of times or the number of women etc., etc. It is a question of whether that sort of interest is at the centre of your life or whether it's relatively peripheral. It can be still quite vigorous and quite active - and peripheral. What it must not do from a human point of view is to occupy the centre of the stage.

Kulamitra: It seems to me like, and I'm not just talking about sex, I mean, I say, include swimming in that - I find swimming a sensually enjoyable activity, or sunbathing.

S: If one broadens it out in that way, well this is one of the very reasons why one has become a human being and not a **higher** form of life. But then one can go also a step further and point out that the Buddhist tradition is that when you get onto the early regions of the *rupaloka* beings then are neither male nor female. So if one moves as a man towards the higher *rupaloka* levels you are moving towards androgyny. You are aiming to transcend the distinction of male and female; so that also must be borne in mind because Buddhism sees the distinction of male and female as quite provisional and relative and existing only on certain levels of existence - the lower ones. It sees sex distinction as existing only on the *kamaloka* level, that is among human beings as well as animals and Asuras. It sees it as existing among the gods of the *kamaloka* realm like the Four Great Kings and Indra but after that, no, there's no distinction of sex. Do you see what I mean? So I mean that also must be part of one's broader context, that one is in the course of one's spiritual life and one's higher evolution aiming to transcend that distinction.

Dhammarati: Is that the only criteria, if you like? Is that the only way of looking at sort of spiritual evolution? For instance could you take the angle that tied up with a man's relative freedom from sensuality and this outgoingness there's a certain amount of aggression and tied with a woman's sensuality there's a certain like concern for life. That you've actually in a way got some elements that are potentially spiritual in a female consciousness that are less easily developed in a male consciousness. Or is this hierarchy that [117] you've introduced the only sort of valid way of looking at it?

S: I would question very much a woman's care for life. I wonder whether women are really as caring for life as men are. Certainly a woman cares for her own child, for obvious reasons - it's a biological phenomenon, but very often you find that women are less caring about other people's children than men are. I mean their caring seems to be strictly limited almost to extensions of their own bodies. It's as though men have a greater capacity to take a sort of broader view. Do you see what I mean?

Dhammarati: Aye, although I must say it certainly isn't my experience. In the community I grew up in you'd walk into somebody's house and you'd be fed by the woman of the house and ...

S: Ah well then I say it's a sort of straight extension of the biological function and doesn't go very far. Well take another example - abortion - I mean I've been, even fairly recently, quite shocked by the readiness with which quite a few women, even within the FWBO, can consider the possibility of an abortion. Almost in a casual sort of way. Whereas if there really had been that feeling for life, well I doubt whether they could have had that attitude. I feel more shocked by the idea of taking life in that way than a lot of **them** do. So this is one of the things that made me question whether women were really so concerned with life as sometimes one is led to suppose and led to think.

Kulamitra: Getting back to that aspect of the sensual element in a man's life....

S: Yes I want to clarify this a bit because it's not so much a sensual element but the importance that is attached to that. Do you see what I mean? It is not even just genital. Because for instance, in the case of the woman there is not just the question of the sexual satisfaction and so on and so forth but the whole experience of bearing the child which since a woman has that experience which a man doesn't have, the body obviously occupies a more central place in her experience. So when one says, when one speaks of a woman or the consciousness preceding human birth as being more sense oriented one has got that in mind as well - as well as the more specifically genital experience.

Kulamitra: It seems to me it would be a shame if a man actually was oriented around that - sort of most oriented around that, but at the same time if you don't experience it as a man I think you become quite dry. [118]

S: Well you **may** not experience it as a man. I think we have to be very careful here because there are some men whom you might say well they are nearer the upper end of the kamaloka band and they're not so sense oriented as some other men and I think we have to be very careful that we don't sort of almost try to impose on those men an ideal, if that is the right word, which is not really appropriate to them. I've actually encountered this in two or three cases, maybe young men who genuinely don't seem to have much interest in sex, well older men sometimes egg them on - 'come on you ought to, it's good for you, it's all part of being a man etc., etc.' - and perhaps they haven't got that sort of inclination in that sort of way, and quite genuinely so. They're not repressing anything, they're not dried up. It is just they are a little bit more deva-like you see, than other men. So one has to bear that in mind also. There is a range of human types, both male and female, well, the same thing with some women. Well they're less interested in babies than **other** women are. One has to accept that.

End of Side One Side Two

Virananda: Presuming that we do accept this, the battle, an important battleground of the spiritual life is overcoming the attachment to sensual experience. It would be a more significant battleground for them than it is for men.

S: Right, well that is a logical conclusion. Actually this is what I find, because obviously I have quite a lot of dealings with women and discuss things with them just as much as I do with the men, and I find this sort of question coming up again and again and again in a way that it **doesn't** come up with men. In fact recently discussing the matter with one particular woman I said I'd come gradually to the conclusion that if a woman really wanted to have a baby one should say absolutely nothing against that, other factors being equal; that is to say if she is in good health and so on and so forth. Because if she does really want to have a child, not having it will have a quite negative effect on her. So even from a spiritual point of view, assuming she's got some spiritual aspiration to begin with, it would be better for her to have a child and be preoccupied mainly with that for sometime and then come back, so to speak, to the spiritual path.

Virananda: Just to continue on that tack a bit. Would it be more natural for women who are trying to follow the spiritual life to be on the path of the ascetic?

S: It would seem, if by women you mean average women, I would say it would be less likely for them to be on the path of asceticism. It [119] would be more difficult for them, for that sort of woman - the woman who is say in the majority and who happens to become interested in spiritual life, I think if ascetic means bypassing her biological needs including the need for motherhood, I think it is quite difficult, more difficult, than it is for a man correspondingly.

Kulamitra: What do you think the equivalent battleground, to use that word, is for a man?

S: Oh, I think biologically there isn't really anything quite like that. But on a slightly different plane maybe - though here I'm being a bit tentative - maybe competitiveness. Maybe. This is something that we have to think about.

Siddhiratna: It's interesting Bhante that in Buddhist terms, I don't know where or how, in Buddhist terms women are seen to be more rooted in sensuous experience etc., but as I understand it, in Western Europe the birth rate has dropped quite considerable especially, say, in this country and Germany - maybe not so much in France. I'm not sure what that implies but something like that women there's less of an emphasis, there's less reason for procreation in terms of population therefore economic stability to support sramaneras and all the rest of it - then they don't need to and if they're not encouraged to. Does this sort of imply that they don't actually want to?

S: No, it doesn't seem so, because, studying them, one gets the impression that they are less happy.

Siddhiratna: This I'm not sure about either.

S: Well I say this as it were comparing women as I've seen them in India and women as I see them here, and I cannot ignore the fact that Indian women do seem happier and one could say more fulfilled. And it's as though in the case of a lot of women in the West there's not the complete biological fulfilment. As though it's though that has been sort of repressed, discouraged or whatever, and there's been nothing really to take its place. I'm not saying that it's not possible for something to take its place in the long run but it is as though most women in this sort of situation have not as yet found anything to take its place and therefore are often dissatisfied. Like a man without a job you might say.

Siddhiratna: Yes at a bit of a loss in a way. But in terms that you've done a number of seminars with women and the contact you've had with them, what's your general impression of where women, especially within the movement, think that they are at in relation to spiritual development? [120]

S: Well first of all I'm not going to generalise about women from my experience of women within the movement because I think the women within the movement are quite exceptional, if only by the virtue of the fact that they are within the movement at all. So one can't generalise about women in general, but I can certainly say what I've noticed. Say, when I take women on a study retreat it's quite noticeable for me anyway, they're no less into the study than the men are. They're no less into the Dharma, they don't take less interest, and they don't seem to have less feeling for the Dharma. So I could say that so far as I'm concerned my study retreats with women have been as good as my study retreats with men. I think I can say that. And the women have got as much into the Dharma as the men have got into the Dharma. But what I **do** see is also that women are sort of much slower in sort of even putting it into practice. It's as though there's less **drive**. It's not that they don't want to put it into practice, I mean very often they do, but it's as though there's less real **drive** behind them. Do you see what I mean? And I think this **may** be connected with the whole fact of their greater sense orientation.

Siddhiratna: What do you mean? Put what into practice exactly?

S: Well to put the Dharma into practice as though yes they definitely have a feeling for it and they definitely understand it and they want to devote themselves to it; but it's as though it's much more difficult for them to mobilise all their energies in the wholehearted way that men can and sort of break through obstacles. It's a question of mobilisation of energy. Do you see what I mean?

Siddhiratna: Sort of. I mean. do you mean that they don't form teams that

go out and start centres or....

S: No at present I'm not thinking in terms of external activities, I'm thinking of purely spiritual activities including say meditation. They seem to sort of jog along at a pretty even pace pretty faithfully, but to sort of gather up their energies and sort of make that final push which will break through, that seems much more difficult for them. Therefore they seem to make the transition from being say a good Mitra to being an Order member, to being committed, with much more difficulty and much more slowly. Sometimes I feel as though they haven't got what it takes very often to sort of push themselves across that dividing line. There's a lot of very good women Mitras, they're really good, but some of them have been good Mitras for years and years and it's as though - I mean I've discussed this with the women Order members themselves - it's as though the women Order members even can't push those [121] women Mitras across that line.

Siddhiratna: There's a real contentious area here isn't there, because I remember you saying that women Order members are a lot more ruthless about who they propose for ordination than men are, which sort of somehow implies they have a higher standard.

S: No I wouldn't say that. The women order members tend to see the women Mitras quite clearly and they can see that they haven't reached that point and they say so quite frankly, but they don't seem able to help them get across that or to get further on. You see what I mean? They can see what the situation is but they don't seem able to mobilise their own energies to help those women Mitras mobilise **their** energies just to push on that bit further.

Siddhiratna: This is a very curious situation because one of the odd complaints that you hear from women Order members, especially say in Order meetings, is that there's not enough of them. That we aren't enough, we can't take all the retreats that we'd like to because there aren't enough women Order members. You'd expect, because of that lack in their own terms, they'd actually really want to put energy into getting other women ordained.

S: Well actually in principle they do. They always have been. But in practice they seem to find it very difficult to mobilise that amount of energy. I've expressed it in other contexts by saying that it's often that women seem to lack stamina. They can't sort of go **all out** to do something. You can't imagine a team of women creating Sukhavati.

Siddhiratna: Not really.

S: Even if they had building skills and all that you can't imagine it. I can't anyway. Do you see what I'm getting at?

Siddhiratna: Yes.

S: So it's as though their energy's so sort of firmly, sort of locked up in their bodies that it's very difficult for them to mobilise it in such a way as to sort of have a breakthrough where a decisive breakthrough is needed, though they can sort of move on sort of pretty steadily, they can do that sometimes better than men. They're less flighty than men, contrary to the usual view. This is what I personally think. Women are less flighty, men are **more** flighty, women are less fickle, broadly speaking, than men. That's why they're better students very often, why they pass examinations more quickly and easily; not because they're necessarily brighter but they apply themselves more steadily and they don't get distracted. Men are much more easily distracted than women are so far I've felt.

[122]

Siddhiratna: It's in that area of their, the fact that their bodies actually seem to dominate a lot of their activity as it were; see I don't like the distinction between men and women, as women being sort of secondary, men being primary. It's not that I'm against it, it just feels a bit wrong in some ways but I always come back. I always fall short with the fact that they do seem to fall ill and...

S: I've tried pushing women sometimes but I've had to stop because the poor things start breaking down and you just can't do that.

Siddhiratna: It's a sort of last problem.

S: So my own observations do fit in with Buddhist tradition, so I can't deny that and so therefore I don't accept what I call the modern pseudo-liberal ideology. If my own experience **contradicted** Buddhist teaching then I'd have to question that teaching, but my own experience as far as it goes does not contradict Buddhist tradition, it bears it out, so what can I do. If my own experience and Buddhist tradition agree, well for me the matter is settled.

Dhammarati: Just to extend that, the sort of negative side of that I think, is that a lot of women feel, for one reason or another, victimised, and I must say from a lot of men I've felt contempt and I think listening to you it really does seem quite convincing but I feel there's a sort of care there. But somehow it gets out right. There's a polarisation set up, there's contempt there and women feel less able to grow. So what's the skilful application if you accept this hierarchy, how do you

Siddhiratna: Yes, given the limitation of their bodies or whatever what's the most positive things that sort of one

S: First of all, contempt must be absolutely out. There's no more reason for a man to feel contempt for a woman than an Order member to feel contempt for a Mitra, even if you accept that the woman, even for the sake of argument you accept that she's on a lower level of evolution, there shouldn't be any contempt. That is an essentially negative mental state. The attitude should be one of helpfulness and care. But then some women would say that that was patronising and they wouldn't accept that help and care and then the situation becomes difficult. So if the Mitra, for instance, to give the same illustration again, says well no I'm just as committed as an Order member, I know just as much, I'm not going to accept any guidance from an Order member, then what can you do? Again yes, there are some women that men can learn a lot from, no doubt about that, but broadly speaking it would seem to be that man helps woman rather than woman helps man in sort of [123] evolutionary terms. But no, contempt should be quite ruled out. And I think, even leaving aside this whole sort of 'women's-lib' ideology with which I quite disagree, the fact remains that individual men quite often treat individual women quite badly, and within the spiritual movement there really can be no place for that. I mean for instance I got a letter from, say, someone in another country let us say, not in England, saying that one of the things that displeased him about the men's community that he was living in was that a particular Order member, a particular male Order member, always referred to women in the crudest possible terms using various four letter words, and that really upset him. So I'd agree with that. Yes one should be upset by this sort of thing - this is quite sort of anti-spiritual. Well it's not human, not to speak of spiritual. So in that sort of way well yes, I would agree with the sort of feminist critique. From a Buddhist point of view that sort of language or behaviour or those sort of attitudes are quite ruled out. But then I don't see that position as inconsistent with going along with the traditional Buddhist view - for me they're not contradictory. But I do know that in the case of the women, well they sort of accept **my** attitude because they feel I do take trouble with them and I do care for them and their

development. But they may not feel that with other men who might have the same philosophy, so to speak, but whose behaviour is different.

Atula: Yes, that's exactly what has happened.

S: So it **isn't** a question of being patronising. It's **not** a question of just sort of cheering up the little woman or anything like that. And also yes, some women are, one might say, more evolved in some ways than some men are, one has to recognise that too, but that on the whole is exceptional, but still the exception must be recognised, quite happily recognised.

Siddhiratna: I think that many, well at least the women Order members I know around, say the LBC, are actually quite open to talking about this kind of thing.

S: Oh yes. When I've talked with women Order members collectively about these things, whatever I've said there's been no reactivity at all. They may not **always** agree but they consider quite calmly.

Siddhiratna: They'll certainly debate it but I think what the danger I feel that there is in a way is that one might end up going back to a sort of early Pundarika sort of antagonism between men and women which I think we should really try and avoid. But on the other hand some good things came out of it. [124]

S: No I'm not personally happy about antagonism or sex-war. I don't think that is positive. But I must say that sometimes the guilty parties are the feminists, the extreme feminists, and sometimes some of them import some of those sort of attitudes into the FWBO. They bring them in from outside. Sometimes they even slightly influence the women Order members. At present I don't see the men as being the aggressive parties. Apart from individual lapses of behaviour it's more often than not the feminist element within the FWBO.

Siddhiratna: Is there a feminist element?

S: Yes there is. A slightly feminist element.

Siddhiratna: Could you say it is around in London or is it elsewhere?

S: It's mainly London, though I believe there's a bit of it in New Zealand. They have extreme feminist women coming along to the Auckland centre sometimes, kicking up a bit of a fuss. I met one or two of them when I was out there. I sometimes say, well I agree with feminism up to a point. The point being that I agree women like everybody else should have the opportunity to develop as individuals and nothing should be allowed to come in the way of that. I say that just from a **Buddhist** point of view. But when it comes to women feeling that they are obliged to hate men, shouldn't practice metta bhavana towards them and all the rest of it, well there I draw the line. Or when they start interpreting history almost exclusively in terms of man's exploitation of woman - I don't go along with that because I think woman has also exploited man. It seems to me it's pretty mutual. Maybe in a different way, but certainly the exploitation has been there.

But in some ways, if women directly ask one what one believes sort of philosophically, one must say so. One can't sort of beat about the bush. If one really finds that traditional Buddhist teaching agrees with one's own experience, what can one say except to acknowledge that teaching and say well this is actually what

you accept. Some women will see that as being, or constituting, a negative attitude towards women but I don't personally agree with that.

Siddhiratna: My own feeling about this is basically that - I remember you saying it years and years ago at St. James actually - that almost there were two different races, there were two different kinds of creatures and I think the positive aspect of that is that if it is a bit like that I mean don't deny the possibility that they can become enlightened etc., and how they achieve that is not something I can make judgements about because I'm not one of them. And the only thing I feel I can do is a) I mustn't get in their way and b) I can encourage them where it's feasible. Otherwise it's completely up to them. It's not my [125] affair in a way.

S: Well for me that isn't such an easy let out because they actually come to me. So I have to think very seriously what is best for them, I mean as individuals. I can't jump to the conclusion that what's good for the men is good for the women. The women Order members **see** this now. One or two of them have said to me recently well, the fact that the men have a Tuscany doesn't mean that we should have one. For us it may not be necessary or we may need something different.

Kuladeva: Is that actually the case because I remember at a Mitra convenor's meeting two or three months ago this question came up. One woman mentioned that they had discussed it at one of their Order meetings and that they felt at this particular Order meeting that if women had the same kind of treatment as men, women Mitras, that more women Mitras would be ordained.

S: I don't agree with that because actually the woman Mitras are looked after by the woman order members rather better I think than the men Mitras are looked after by the men Order members. But some may think as you said, but certainly some women Order members and Mitras have, just this last week or two expressed to me the view that they needed probably something but it didn't have to be exactly what the men had had, which seemed pretty reasonable.

Vairocana: Well going back to what you said about that, men breaking through - the Tuscany thing seems to be, or in my imagination anyway, a situation where a man could possibly break through....

S: I doubt if it would work like that for women. They'd certainly have a good useful three months but I think you'd probably find not much change at the end.

Vairocana: That's what I meant.

S: Though you would find some change.

Vairocana: That's what I meant. They'd have less chance of breaking through, so therefore the Tuscany thing wouldn't be much point for them.

S: I think with them it's probably more a question of a steady, long continued effort rather than a sudden intensification.

Virananda: Is man's ability to mobilise his energies connected with the nature of those energies being well the best way I can term it is. ... more fiery.

S: One could say there's a biological way. Man can mobilise his **sexual** energies more quickly than a woman. He can mobilise his physical [126] energies maybe because he was the hunter and so on and so

forth. So I personally have to consider all these things very carefully because women do come to me and they ask me advice and they ask for guidance and so on. Sometimes they are very amenable to that so that gives one a big responsibility. But if I **am** to give any help it can only be on the basis of what I **honestly believe**. If I am asked to accept extreme feminist ideology and accept women on the basis of that, I just can't do it, it wouldn't be honest. I have to help if I help at all on the basis of what I really and actually believe and how I understand the Buddhist tradition, and that is more or less as I've explained. On that basis I'm quite willing to do what I can but not on a false basis. I can't. But I know that creates difficulties because some women on the periphery of the movement might think, well Bhante's quite kind and helpful but he's still got some of these male chauvinist ideas. Well that's the way they see it, but actually it isn't like that. Yes well in a sense you could say it is like that except that what they regard as male chauvinist ideas, well I regard as fact. Well they're all part of Buddhist tradition and teaching. But I think sometimes some men in the movement are in a very ambiguous position because they want to help the women where help is called for, or want to relate to them positively at least, but on the other hand they sort of half believe these sort of extreme feminist theories or don't really feel able to contradict them or differ from them because they're afraid of **seeming** sort of male chauvinist. So I think that places them in a wobbly position. It might be better if they nailed their colours to the mast a bit more.

Kuladeva: The weight of public opinion seems to agree with that view more and more.

S: Which view?

Kuladeva: The feminist view. I mean I've noticed this both on the level of alternative culture in London, that it's dominated by feminist ideas and also on another level, it's beginning to infiltrate the more orthodox culture, for instance the Labour party - it's putting forward a number of feminist

S: Yes, they're going to have sex equality units in all productive units or something like that if they get back to power. But you see there is no more reason why we should go along with this if we don't really believe in it than that we should go along with the Buddhist Society's version of slightly Christianized Buddhism. I mean it's really ridiculous if we break with say the Buddhist Society because we don't want a half Buddhist and half Christian sort of mixture but then we go along with other ideologies which are no less unbuddhistic, not to say anti[127]Buddhistic and try to mix Buddhism in with them a bit. It's ridiculous.

Atula: I think that up to a point that the more moderate feminism is up to a point quite reasonable.

S: Right, yes.

Siddhiratna: Somebody - I think it was Noel - the other day was saying that she's been involved in feminist activities as it were and she was saying that when she came along to the FWBO she noticed that the women that hadn't got involved with feminist groups as it were were actually a lot more attached to the guys they came along with than she was and that she'd come along because she felt feminism for her had reached its limit. She wanted something more. She felt so much more free as an individual than the women that she knew. The women seemed as if they were ten years out of date and all sit very quiet and meek standing next to hubbie as it were. Whereas her thesis is that if they'd been more involved with feminism in a way they would actually be there more as individuals and less accompanying their man which I thought was quite interesting.

S: I think one has to draw some distinction. Say you can sort of be with your husband positively, even in England I think and you can also come along on your own in a not completely sort of positive fashion.

Siddhiratna: Just the individual?

S: Yes, but I would say the fact that a woman comes along on her own so to speak doesn't... from that fact one shouldn't necessarily conclude that she must be in a positive mental state and more of an individual. Though again if one does want to say, well even criticize, women who are over-dependant on men in their lives, well we don't need the feminist critique there. From a Buddhist point of view we can say there should not be that sort of dependence of one individual on another. We've got everything that we need within Buddhism itself. So I have been a bit concerned with this sort of mixing in, as I said, of these extraneous ideologies with the Dharma. I think we have to watch that. And I think feminism is one of these extraneous ideologies that we have to keep an eye on. If it's as I said, feminism up to a point, that's all right. If it's just insisting that women should have the opportunity to develop as individuals just like anybody else, well that's all right, but we don't need modern feminism to tell us this, it's been part of Buddhism from the beginning. And also if we do see things more hierarchically than many people do nowadays, well it doesn't mean that people are justified in making accusations that we are male chauvinist pigs and all that. Because we don't accept absolute equality between men and women. [128] It doesn't mean that because we don't accept that, we all go round kicking women or keeping them down - far from it.

Siddhiratna: The hierarchy in the FWBO is a natural hierarchy which I'm not sure about that because last week you were talking about there wasn't any natural hierarchy.

S: There is a hierarchy so to speak between say the Friends, say the Mitra, the Order member who has gone for provisional refuge then the effective refuge, then the real refuge. Well there is a hierarchy there but it's a real hierarchy.

Siddhiratna: I was thinking more in that you have quite young Order members doing very kind of senior responsible jobs and quite senior responsible Order members doing whatever it is they are doing.

S: Our hierarchy of responsibility doesn't correspond with the 'hierarchy' inverted commas, of age. In a more normal sort of society there might be a greater approximation. I noticed for instance in India that young Order members weren't listened to as much as older Order members. This was a bit noticeable.

Siddhiratna: Do you think the use of the word or the notion of hierarchy is actually as useful as it might be because I was suddenly thinking the thing about friends, Mitras and Order members is levels of commitment, or in people without the commitment, levels of involvement.

S: But we need a general term and there doesn't seem to be an alternative to hierarchy, although it's not a term I generally use nowadays, I don't use it outside the Order usually.

Kulamitra: It does seem important to just have a general idea of yourself, a realistic view of yourself and then develop from there, doesn't it. I mean it seems to me that if you've imposed an unrealistic view of what you **should** be on what you actually are, whether this applies to you as a man or a woman or what. You've got to know more or less, roughly where you stand and move from there.

S: Because I find for instance that extreme feminist ideology is sort of demanding that I see women in a way other than that I see them. I'm being asked to deny my own real experience which I cannot do.

Kulamitra: But presumably also someone in that position if they're seeing **themselves** unrealistically.

S: Yes. They will think that you are seeing them unrealistically.

Kulamitra: Yeah, but they'll also find it difficult to develop because they don't know where they're starting from and what they're aiming at.

[129]

S: That's true. Well then maybe in a way it boils down to this, that women like men must know where they are, before they can start evolving and if from 'women's lib' or any other source they've got a false idea about themselves, that will come in the way of their development.

Anyway I think we'd better end on that note.

End of Tape Five Tape Six

S: All right is there any Question on these two sections which I hope you have been going through. XIV and XV?

Vairocana: The first bit here concerning the positive nidanas. It says that it was only recorded once in the Pali Canon and Carolyn Rhys Davids she sort of attacks and says it's an oasis of affirmation in the midst of an arid desert of negation.

S: That's putting it rather strongly of course. It only occurs once in that particular full form. I mean I have pointed out that we could regard the seven Bodhiangas as a sort of abbreviated version of these positive nidanas, and any sort of series of positive steps where you do get a sort of process of accumulation could be regarded as in principle identical with or as illustrating the twelve positive nidanas, But the twelve positive nidanas as such are a very rare occurrence indeed in the Pali Canon. There is a possibility - I think I discovered another passage where they are referred to or could be regarded as referred to, but I can't remember the reference now.

Vairocana: Does that mean the Buddha actually taught in a predominantly negative form then?

S: Well if you want to be very strict and scientific we have to admit that we don't really know in what form the Buddha taught. But we have got these various teachings in the Pali Canon attributed to the Buddha, some attributed to disciples and it does seem that if we studied these, if we tried to understand the historical development of these teachings, it does seem that there was a more sort of positive emphasis - I won't say earlier on in the Buddha's career, but certainly earlier on in the history of his, what shall we say?, his spiritual movement.

It's as though as time went on and especially among those who became to be called Theravadins, as time went on, there seemed to be much more of a negative emphasis than a positive emphasis and eventually of course in that other branch of the movement which afterwards came to be known as the Mahasangha, or Mahasanghikas, a more positive emphasis did develop in various ways.

Kulamitra: Does that mean that the actual section of the Pali Canon [130] where the positive nidanas are mentioned is what we now think is part of an early strata of written Buddhism?

S: No it isn't as simple as that because the Pali Canon wasn't written down until about 500 years after the Buddha's death. So that the process of development took place while what we now have as the Tipitaka was

still an oral tradition, and it's very difficult to sort of trace the development of an oral tradition in the absence of literary records marking the different stages of development. One has to **infer** them. I have gone into this on other occasions, that one can see a linguistic development. Some linguistic forms are clearly later than others, some terms are later than others.

You get doctrinal development in the sense that there are more simple formulations of the teaching which as far as one can see, are earlier and more complex formulations which as far as one can see are later. In this way one can distinguish, by applying these various methods, one can distinguish in the Pali Canon, different strata and it does seem that the positive teachings are to be found more in the earlier strata and vice versa. One can broadly conclude that. As I think I have mentioned this before, the Theravada as a school seems not to have made full use of the riches of Its own Canon. There are quite a lot of teachings in the Pali Canon - for instance the teaching that the 'chitta' is pure by nature or that the chitta is radiantly pure and becomes defiled only subsequently. That teaching is not developed at all within the Theravada, though the actual text is there. There are many other such instances. So the Pali Canon itself, especially in what seems to be its earlier strata give a richer and fuller account or presentation of the Buddha's teaching than one would be led to expect going by some modern Theravada expositions of the teaching. They don't in a sense do justice really to their own tradition.

Kulamitra: Given that, I mean something that struck me was that it seems from the way you're talking, especially in the first section, Samsara and Nirvana, that that development began a long time ago. It's not something that's 100 years old.

S: Well there certainly was a 'negative', inverted commas, element in the Buddha's own teaching. One might even go so far as to say that as regards formulations, there might have been a stronger negative - what shall I say? - element in the Buddha's own teaching than positive element, at least formally and linguistically. But having said that one still has to say that that element was developed and dwelt upon out of all proportion subsequently by the Theravada tradition.

[131]

Kulamitra: What do you think it was that enabled you to actually see so clearly the value in the positive teachings of growth and development when so many other people were emphasising ...

S: Well I consulted my own needs. I mean I was trying to lead a spiritual life. I was trying to develop, so I was looking out for what could help me; and I could only conclude that some of our friends in the Theravada camp, so to speak, were not doing that because one can't really, as I've said somewhere, nourish one's spiritual life on negations, however accurate and however justified they may be in themselves, but you can't base your spiritual life on negations. I didn't find it was enough to think merely in terms of cessations. Just of getting rid of craving, just of getting rid of ignorance, that didn't seem very inspiring or practically very helpful. Though, yes, one recognised certainly, yes craving must be got rid of. Ignorance must be got rid of - one saw that very clearly - but that didn't seem very inspiring as a goal, as an ideal, just that. There needed to be something more, there needs to be something, for want of a better word, positive. It wasn't just a question of throwing aside all the defilements, as it were, or just a question of shedding all one's leaves, it was also the question surely of the opening of some kind of bud, the blossoming of something within oneself. I'm not saying a negative form may not in the last analysis be quite accurate metaphysically speaking, as it were, but it's not sufficient psychologically; it's not sufficient with regard to the needs of the spiritual life itself.

I mean one of the things that seemed so surprising when I came to England in 1964 and I took up my abode at the Hampstead Vihara and started hearing or overhearing some people's conversation about the Dharma, or I started talking to them about it, thought they were English people they seemed to have got hold of it in an incredibly negative sort of way. They did actually think in terms of rooting out craving. That's all right surely, but they thought only in those sort of terms and they were really quite strange sort of people. They seemed to be very rigid, very repressed. They seemed to have quite acute psychological problems. A number of them were undergoing some kind of psychiatric treatment or undergoing psychoanalysis. A few of them had a history of schizophrenia. They were sort of unhealthy, many of them alienated, quite a few were elderly. So it didn't seem surprising that a very rigid presentation of Theravada Buddhism in quite negative terms shouldn't have appealed to them.

I can't claim any special genius for having discovered - well I really didn't discover it, I followed up hints in Mrs. Rhys Davids writings and in Doctor Beni Madhab Barua's writing - I can't claim any great genius but simply that I was just trying myself to make some effort [132] actually to **practise** Buddhism - that's all it really amounted to.

Atula: Is that why in some ways the predominance of the negative in the formulations come down in a sense, because there has been more of an academic approach to Buddhism?

S: I wouldn't say it's just been an **academic** approach, because one has to give the full weight to the negative side. One has to have a balanced view - give importance to the positive side of the spiritual life, what you really actually develop by way of positive qualities and also what you get rid of in the form of negative qualities. The two in a sense actually balance. But psychologically speaking I think the positive aspect is much much more important and needs to be emphasised much more.

Atula: I seem to remember reading in 'Buddhist Thought in India', Conze seems to dismiss the Yogachara as a sort of subtle soul theory creeping into Buddhism. It's often sort of worried me.

S: Well you see, one might say from an empirical point of view that inasmuch as one's experience is limited to the mundane and inasmuch as say nirvana is trans-mundane or transcendental, one can only conceive of nirvana in **mundane** terms by way of a negation. One cannot but say well nirvana is the entire absence and cessation of everything mundane. So that is a quite - what shall I say? - quite understandable formulation. But that is not just something to be understood intellectually. It's not enough just to understand that intellectually. That should be a sort of profound metaphysical realisation which will have its own, surely, sort of unexpressed 'positive', inverted commas, side. But you for the time being confined to mundane experience, don't have anything from that mundane experience except by way of remote analogy that you can put into the content of that nirvana or that transcendental experience.

But having said that, in order to get there, in order to be **able** to experience that cessation as one cannot but regard it as, well you just have to envisage the ultimate goal in more positive terms and think of the spiritual life in more positive terms; think of developing positive spiritual qualities, otherwise you just don't get moving.

Vajradipa: A small technical point. I noticed that talking about the positive nidanas they seemed to start as you were saying here from death, old age and death. We've come to experience something from feeling, between feeling and craving arising as dukkha. Is it actually best to keep it there or. ...

S: Well the standard twelve membered set, the twelve positive [133]nidanas starts with suffering, doesn't it. In dependence upon suffering arises faith, so one can think of suffering in this or that specific form. It does correspond to old age disease and death. But what actually is the question then?

Vajradipa: Well it just seems from here, the positive nidanas seem to have started from using old age and death as... well we have taken it that depending on feeling arises dukkha.

S: Where do we say in dependence on feeling arises dukkha. How does that come into it?

Vajradipa: It's getting off the conditioned existence. There's that point where we can break the circle so to speak.

S: Ah yes but feeling, you can think of feeling in positive terms as well as negative terms, and when one experiences old age, disease and death well that is painful experience, that is painful feeling. So still that feeling factor is there.

Sagaramati: Some of the links of the twelve negative nidanas. You actually can swop them over. It depends on what period of time you are actually in, because old age and death, like that's the future but if you look at it in terms of the present then it would be feeling.

S: Or you could say if you take avijja and samskaras as representing the mundane, well then you could envisage them as a first positive nidana arising in dependence upon the samskaras.

Sagaramati: Talking of the samskaras you mention that the asamskrta sunyata of Nagarjuna corresponds to the positive spiral. That wheel of conditions sort of augments one factor or one factor augments the other. Could you say how that asamskrta sunyata corresponds with that particular issue.

S: Well, one is concerned here with expressing the unknown in terms of the known. All that one knows or that is for one the known, one experiences or one expresses in terms either of space or time. In terms of co-existence, in terms of juxtaposition or in terms of succession, in terms of sequence. So if one thinks dynamically, if one expresses oneself in terms of time, then you have a series of nidanas arising subsequently in dependence on the preceding one and you can have this positive series, you will have a transcendental series, that is to say an irreversible sequence or series of positive nidanas. So the asamskrtadhatu really corresponds to that except that it is conceived of as it were spatially, it is conceived of as something static, something fixed. Do you see what I mean? But really it is the same thing nonetheless. Strictly [134] speaking when one comes to the Transcendental one can't even really speak in terms of time. It's as though there is a series of Transcendental nidanas, positive nidanas which succeed one another within time but it's as though eventually they go **beyond** time. One could put it like that, and that sort of beyond time into which they go and which since it isn't time one can only think of in terms of space, well that is the asamskrtadhatu. In that way the asamskrtadhatu represents the further stages of the sequence of positive nidanas - the sequence of positive Transcendental nidanas - when they can no longer be adequately conceived of in terms of time. The correspondence between these transcendental positive nidanas and asamskrtadhatu is not very direct inasmuch as one is conceived of in terms of time and the other in terms of space, but they refer really to the same 'thing', inverted commas, or 'process', inverted commas. So the distinction between the ordinary nidanas, the samsaric nidanas, let us say, and the Transcendental nidanas, is as the distinction between samskrtadhatu and asamskrtadhatu. The one being conceived of primarily in dynamic mode and the other in static mode. I haven't gone into this properly anywhere but it is touched upon in that - where did you get hold of that, that essay?

Sagaramati: It is here.

S: Oh I mention it here! Oh well then I have gone into it in greater detail in one of those old articles that is going to be brought out we don't know by whom or by what or where or how or with what funds now.

Sagaramati: Is it going to be your old 'Stepping Stones' or

S: No it's too long for that. I wrote it in '49 and it came out in 1950 in Ceylon . The revised title - I shortened it was - originally it was 'Buddhism as philosophy and religion in original and developed Buddhism'. I think I cut that to 'Religion and philosophy in Buddhism'.

Kulamitra: It says here 'philosophy and religion in original and developed Buddhism is the title from 'the Buddhist', Colombo, 1950. You refer to it at the very end of that section on Samsara and Nirvana.

S: Ah yes I've lost track of my own writings you see. Yes that's right yes. I hope that does come out. I gave Asvajit these four essays to be brought out. You don't know what stage that reached?

Virananda: I've been trying to get Asvajit to hand over the manuscripts to me but they've yet to be typed up. So as soon as I've got them. Hopefully I'll be able to bring them out this year.

S: Good. Anyway that's the only place where I've explored that. In that essay. It needs much further and much fuller amplification.

Sagaramati: It's as if when you're reading something you have to know whether what you're reading is explained under the idea of time or space because it confuses.

[135]

S: Right, yes. That is if one is, or if the Buddha is saying anything or giving any teaching which has reference to, let's say the absolute, just to use that term, or which has reference to, one might say, what discloses itself to the Buddha's Transcendental vision, well then he can only speak of that in terms, if it's to be in any way or rather if he's to use language at all, can only speak of it in either spatial or in temporal terms. So one has to be able to know which sort of language is being used and one has to be able perhaps to translate one language into the other or perhaps make use of both languages simultaneously and get what I've called a sort of bi-focal view of reality.

Sagaramati: There is even a correspondence between what you call the doctrinist doctrine and doctrinist methods. In methodological terms that's the timal sequence, and in the standic spatial terms that's the doctrine as doctrine, the doctrine as formulas. Nirvana is sort of near in spatial terms but in terms of time it's far.

S: Perhaps. *[Laughter]* I'll have to think about that.

Jinapriya: This is a technical point. I think possibly to do with limitation of language more than anything but Doctor Barua infers at the end of the section on page 116 of the old edition that 'the rotatory play or strife between the opposites is restricted to the kama or non-jhanic non reflective spheres of consciousness' and I was thinking then the idea of kusala and akusala, good and evil, they only come into play in the kamaloka in as it were this life.

S: I wouldn't agree with that. No. I think he should have said only in the mundane which would include the *rupa* and *arupa*. Because the jhanas are mundane, you can have a reaction from the jhanas. Though it isn't a reaction quite so directly to such an **extreme** unskilful state. You could say that there is not a rotatory play **within** the jhanas but at any moment if the jhana is merely jhana, that is to say merely mundane, the jhana can become a preceding factor of a succeeding factor which is **less** wholesome. So there is a rotatory play. If that was not possible a jhana would be by definition transcendental and not mundane. In other words if you got into the jhana you would never get out, when we know that doesn't happen.

Jinapriya: I'm trying to put it in my understanding but also in *jhana* perhaps polarising oneself to the skilful side of the samsara you could say at that moment in time....

S: Yes one has sort of found oneself at one end, as it were, of two poles. If there is a skilful pole and an unskilful pole, well normally you oscillate between the two but when you're in the mundane *jhana* state [136] you are as it were holding yourself there virtually by force. You have to keep up the effort, keep up the mindfulness; the instant you slacken well then the pendulum swings in the opposite direction and you're back in the unwholesome, that is to say assuming you were in the *rupaloka* before, you're back in the *kamaloka*.

Virananda: So quite categorically it's not possible to get stuck in the *jhanas*?

S: Well it is not possible to get stuck in the *jhanas* if the *jhanas* are not accompanied by actual insight.

Sagaramati: I had that feeling with whatshisname, Ramana Maharshi and I remember you saying that he didn't have a lot of charisma or transcendental insight but you thought he always dwelt in like dhyanic states. Like he didn't seem to come down.

S: Did I say dhyanic states? Perhaps I should make that clearer. He had a sort of philosophy, he had a sort of teaching which was sort of vedantic or at least learned men who gathered around him very quickly identified him as a sort of vedantic teacher. I had my own doubts about that but that's a quite separate question. But his teaching was the formulation of his experience. It was based on his experience but I'm not saying that when he taught, when he gave his particular teaching he was always at that time experiencing the experience which he had originally perhaps and on which he based that teaching. Do you see what I mean? But there is not doubt that his mind was of such a nature that it didn't seem to be on an ordinary conscious level. Normally of course he did speak, though not too much, he did speak, but it's not easy to speak while in a dhyanic state. So my inference was that he had sort of some experience of *arupa jhana* states and that his philosophy, his teaching, was a sort of formulation of that or based upon that or presupposed that, but I didn't mean to say that I thought he habitually dwelt in *arupaloka* states. That would have not been possible if he had been teaching moving about.

Sagaramati: I think you said something like he seemed to be able to achieve that at will, as if once he'd finished talking say he wanted to get into a higher state he just went into it.

S: I think it probably would be correct to say that his mind was so habituated to meditation, for want of a better term, that if he stopped speaking, which means a sort of distraction ceased, then his mind reverted to a more concentrated state. I think one can say that. Exactly how concentrated or what degree of concentration he attained it's difficult to say, perhaps it varied. But he certainly had that kind of aura as it were.

[137]

Sagaramati: How would someone like him be able to (unclear) From what I've read he wasn't really attached to very much, certainly on the mundane level, so there's not anything as it were crudely reactive that could have acted as a magnet to drag him out of these higher states. I could just imagine him going on and on and on in higher states but never actually dropping out.

S: Well Buddhism does envisage beings remaining in these higher states, persisting in these higher states, for aeons on end. One must remember that. I had a sort of curious sensation almost much of the time with him that there was just something missing. He was very very good and very very pure, very genuine and there was a quite wonderful atmosphere around him but there was something missing, quite definitely. He was as it were pure but limited.

Kulamitra: Talking about the *jhanas* in this sort of way in the life of the Buddha it seems in his own experience with all his teachers he did have quite exalted dhyanic experiences, but there seems to be some sort of change in his whole attitude and therefore his practice just before his Enlightenment when he sits to meditate - it seems to be from a different basis. Could you say something about your opinions about what sort of change in attitude took place or what change in his practice?

S: Well there is an account, there is a tradition to the effect that before he gained Enlightenment or when he was practising self-mortification he remembered his early meditative experience under the Jambu tree when he was a child or very very young anyway, and that is said to have set him on the right path, that recollection. If one does accept these accounts and if one takes them literally, one can only assume, though there are still contradictions, that the Buddha as a child had a genuine experience of higher states of consciousness - perhaps. . . well yes *rupaloka* states one would imagine - and that subsequently when training under his teachers he came to look upon meditation in a different sort of way. He tended to think perhaps under their influence more in terms of a forcible attainment of higher mental states, higher states of consciousness, rather than in terms of gradual growth and unfoldment and he persisted in this rather wilful way. I mean the way of asceticism itself which was rather wilful. So it was only having sort of failed to achieve things in this wilful sort of way especially as expressed in terms of a life of self mortification that he realised that that wasn't the way. It wasn't so much perhaps that self mortification wasn't the way, so much as that wilfulness wasn't the way, even meditation practised from the basis of wilfulness wasn't the way. Even if you did get up to a higher

[138] state of consciousness, even if you did manage to reach the *jhanas* you just sort of touch them. You held yourself by force just for an instant but He realised that that wasn't enough. You couldn't create a basis of positivity within yourself in that sort of way, and he seems to have realised this according to tradition by recalling that early childhood experience when he might have said to himself, or thinking of which he might have said to himself. ' well I didn't make any effort then. I wasn't struggling or striving. I just sat down under that Jambu tree and I was just quiet and peaceful and my mind spontaneously went into that higher state. Maybe that is the way'. So he gave up the self mortification and he gave up the wilful striving. The apparent contradiction comes in, say the fuller accounts of his early struggles when we are told that under this teacher he attained to seven out of the eight *jhana* states and under the second teacher he attained to all eight of them as though he had sort of fully mastered them. So then that introduced a contradiction because if he had attained those states under those teachers well why, when his self mortification failed and he recollected his early childhood experience, did he think well maybe that is the way, because the accounts which we have of his experiences under his two teachers suggest he'd already **found** that meditative way. Do you see what I mean? So one can explain this in either one of two ways. First of all that under those teachers he had succeeded by will power virtually just in sort of touching those states but had been unable to sustain them Though the texts do not actually say this - that must be admitted. The other is that we have to question this whole story of his experiences with those early teachers. It seems quite possible that he just

sort of studied with them, practised meditation but he did not actually attain the *rupa jhanas* and *arupa jhanas* in the way that the text actually says, because what happens as the story is told it gets elaborated. So it's even doubtful whether in the Buddha's original teaching there was a list of eight *jhanas*. Some scholars maintain that originally there were only four. But if a later compiler was sort of reciting and he came to a point where the tradition said well the Buddha meditated, well he'd add spontaneously he attained first this *jhana* then that because he'd take it for granted, having no historical sense, that well if he practised meditation he **must** have gone all through those eight so he, in perfect good faith, actually **enumerated** all those eight. But we can say even in addition to this there's the whole question of what the Buddha actually learned from his two first teachers can be regarded as almost an open question because there are so many different accounts. Asvagosha, admittedly it's much later, gives a totally [139]different account. He describes the Buddha as studying under one of these teachers at least, the Sakya system of philosophy as it must have been developed hundreds of years after the Buddha. So the accounts which are given of the Buddha's early spiritual experiences are quite often given in terms of later developments of the Buddhist tradition itself. So I think I would go back to the earlier explanation and say that what the Buddha realised when he came to a dead end practising self mortification was that wilfulness was not the way, and there would have been an element of wilfulness in all his strivings so far, including his striving, his practice with these two teachers. I don't think.....

End of Side One Tape Six, Side Two

.... much more a question I think of a basic shift of attitude

Vairadipa: Is it possible to say a bit more about that attitude because you go into it a little bit in here. One about the self reliance and its limit. You're saying in the sublimer realms of spiritual experience the ego sense becomes so attenuated and refined that it's almost as if it's not actually you're doing anything. And it links up a bit later when you're talking about varying sort of sublime bits of nihilism and eternalism. You say things like with eternalism you're concerned with the absolute and the Pure Being, Godhead and Divine Ground, and then nihilism which is like the annihilation of the soul in god. It's all very very subtle. Is it possible to say much more?

S: One has to say something clearly. Maybe in principle one can't object to **any** of these formulations, even theistic ones. But all that the Buddhist insists on, all that the Buddha insists on, is that you don't take them literally, you don't cling onto them. You've realised that they're quite inadequate but they're only **provisional**. They are just formulations to help you along and which you have eventually to abandon. Buddhism states this principle quite clearly. Christianity doesn't in any form I think. Maybe the odd mystic had an inkling of this here and there, but in Buddhism it's part of the regular teaching. The Dharma **itself** is only a raft. There's no parallel teaching to that anywhere in certainly orthodox Christianity. So one **has** to use these terms, and maybe one shouldn't be too squeamish about using terms like the absolute, absolute mind, even in certain circumstances Godhead, but always putting inverted commas and always making it clear that these are provisional formulations only and do not really do justice to reality and must be left behind in the end. Even **Buddhist** formulations must be left behind. We don't spare them, far from it. I have a sort of theory which I haven't expressed before but at least we'll get it on tape in case I die tomorrow. We'll get it on tape even [140] though in unpolished form. I won't give Sagaramati something to work on for the next thirty years! [Laughter] I mentioned about this series of the eight *jhanas*. There are four *rupa jhanas* and there are four *arupa jhanas*. Bear in mind this is all sort of exploratory. It's all sort of work in progress as it were - things I've been thinking over. You've got this series of eight *jhanas*. Now some scholars as I've said are suspicious about the eight series. Some of them think that there were originally really only four and that the others got sort of tacked on afterwards. They point for instance to the curious

episode of the Buddha's Parinirvana, that immediately before the Parinirvana the Buddha ascended through all eight *jhanas*, then came down to ordinary consciousness and then went up to the fourth *jhana* and attained nirvana from there. So they think this is an indication that actually the Buddha attained Nirvana, Parinirvana, from the **fourth** *jhana*, but they felt that by the time that that particular Sutta was compiled this tradition had developed or found eight *jhanas*. So clearly if the Buddha had passed away he would have passed away from the eighth *jhana*. At the same time being quite in a sense honest they couldn't throw away the tradition that he had passed away from the fourth *jhana*, so they combined the two. He may even have traversed firstly the eight *jhanas* and **then** the four and then passed away. It was a sort of compromise. This is the explanation given by certain scholars.

So it seems to me that you could look at it in this way, look at this question of the four or the eight *jhanas*. You could take the view that there were only four *jhanas* originally and that what became the *arupajhanas* represented originally the Transcendental but not the Transcendental as static, the Transcendental as dynamic. Do you see what I mean? But when you started thinking statically and more negatively well then you sort of weren't satisfied with that sort of Transcendental series, you sort of crowned it with a static negative nirvana and then demoted the *arupa* states as it were, to the mundane. This I think is a possible explanation, because don't forget the *arupaloka* are the psychological counterparts of the brahmalokas. Now usually it is said that the brahmalokas are part of the mundane but actually there are a **few** texts which show traces of the view that the brahmaloka is regarded as sort of Transcendental. Even in Buddhaghosa I've tracked down a reference which seems to suggest that it is possible to regard the brahmaloka as Transcendental rather than mundane and in a way that fits because the Buddha was using existing terminology, and if he was speaking in terms of brahmacharya well would he have meant just a charya aimed at the mundane, even at the heights of the mundane; and clearly this term brahmacharya was in very common use in the early stages of the Buddha's teaching as far as [141] we can see. Do you see the sort of thing I'm getting at? There's sometimes a sort of contradiction. For instance sometimes the path is shown as culminating in the brahmaloka. Now the later, if this sort of theory is correct, the later interpretation of that would be that, well, that just represents the mundane, that just represents heaven and nirvana is beyond that, but what if at that particular time when that teaching was given there wasn't that distinction between brahmaloka and nirvana. Then the brahmaloka does become the ultimate goal, that is to say the furthestmost reach of that purely Transcendental series of nidanas. There's this Sutta, the Mahagovinda Sutta where Mahagovinda secludes himself for the three months of the rainy season, practises the metta bhavana and Samatsumara, the brahma Samatsumara, the eternal youth, appears to him and Mahagovinda puts a question to him and the question is 'paputi matranam amatam brahmalokam' [*transcriber's approximation to the Pali quote given!*] that is to say how may a mortal man attain to the **immortal** brahmaloka? the amattam brahmalokam. So what is usually called amatta - deathless - it's nirvana. So usually one would regard an amattam brahmalokam, an immortal brahmaloka, as a contradiction in terms but clearly it is not so regarded here. You could argue well it's only Mahagovinda speaking, but then Samatsumara does give a teaching - I don't remember the exact words here - he gives a verse, but the sum and substance of it is that the immortal, the undying brahmaloka is reached only by the complete destruction of egotism. So that is clearly an **insight teaching**. So one could look at things in this way. This also gives one a more positive view of the teaching. It's of course a bit heretical in terms of later Theravada Buddhism, but you could regard this series of *arupalokas* or brahmalokas as representing a Transcendental series, an irreversible Transcendental series, but subsequently when interpretations of the Dharma became more rigid and more negative they were relegated to the mundane, regarded as a higher region of the mundane and only something which was expressed in purely negative terms came to be regarded as the Transcendental.

Kulamitra: So if what you're proposing was actually the case it would mean, right from the very early days in the course of teaching, there had been a positive way of talking about nirvana as well as a negative way.

S: Yes. So that when we find in certain teachings, in certain passages in certain suttas the Buddha talking about, that is giving teachings say to lay people about attainment of the brahmaloka he is not directing them, because they are lay people, to the mundane, he is directing them to the Transcendental, except that here the Transcendental is indicated [142] by the term brahmaloka.

Atula: I remember reading one sutra, I think it's a Mahayana sutra talking about the point where the Buddha was in the field watching his father plough and he seems to talk in terms of sort of experiencing compassion rather than

S: I don't remember how late those accounts are but yes there is that account. I think it comes in 'the Light of Asia', I don't recollect what traditional account it's based on but yes there is that version as it were.

Atula: I just wondered if that's the Buddha sort of looking back on (unclear)

S: I don't think that's a Theravada tradition though, but if it is a Buddhist tradition at all and if it can be regarded as authentic well then yes it suggests that there was a sort of dimension of positive emotion. It wasn't just a sort of calm meditative state. There was even some concern for other living beings, but one would have to establish where that text comes from and exactly how old the tradition is if one could.

Sagaramati: If that was the case, if the *arupajhanas* were largely Transcendental the terms that they were referred under in the. ... Infinite Consciousness and Neither Perception nor Non Perception, would those terms be later additions to them?

S: Well there are two questions. One is the question of the correlation of the objective worlds with their gods, so to speak, with the subjective psychological meditative states. The other is the question of terminology and interpretation of that terminology because for instance, all right, the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness. Well if we regard the *arupa jhanas* as mundane then clearly that infinite consciousness is not identical with nirvana, not identical with the Transcendental, but what about that Pali teaching about this radiant consciousness accessible from every side. Does that not seem like an infinite consciousness? Could you not speak of the Absolute in terms of infinite consciousness or the Transcendental in terms of infinite consciousness. And that next stage does speak in terms of Neither Perception nor Non Perception. So you could regard that as a matter of interpretation as expressing the absolute because there there is no distinction of subject and object, but on the other hand if you wanted to regard that as mundane well then you say ah well there's no perception of either subject or object but there's a very **subtle** perception and therefore it's mundane. It is a little forced if I may say so. But all this is involving or implying a quite radical reorganisation of Theravada teaching as it were. It seems to make sense but it is just work in progress at the moment. I've not even **spoken** about this before much less still written [143] anything about it. But I am combing through the Pali Canon. I started in Tuscany. I combed through the Majjhima Nikaya carefully and will continue this on the next Tuscany. It's a useful opportunity to do that sort of thing.

Kulamitra: If things were as you say in that sort of way, would those four *arupajhanas*, if they were Transcendental would they still be a sort of series. Would they still be...

S: Yes irreversible transcendental series yes. In other words you're not concerned with a static absolute which is there and at which you arrive. You're concerned with an ever progressing series of transcendental nidanas which are continually transcending themselves. There's no full stop in the spiritual life. Admittedly this is only regarding the Ultimate let's say, not even the Absolute because that's a static term, you're

regarding it in terms of time, not in terms of space, and that is no more valid than regarding it in terms of space, but I think it is more helpful. Because also it's not a question of when you come to the absolute so to speak well there's a total cessation of the mundane. You could say it's like that, but it's not a very helpful way of looking at it. It probably is more helpful to think in terms of a series of *nidanas* each one more positive than the last and the series just sort of vanishing into the distance, vanishing into a dimension that well you make no effort even to try to imagine.

Virananda: In terms of the series it does seem that you lose what is a very clear distinction between *samatha* and *vipassana* type meditations. Is that so?

S: Well it depends on your conception of *vipassana*. If your *vipassana* consists in the manipulation exclusively of negative categories well then you do lose that *vipassana*. But it's also worth recalling that when Mahagovinda had that vision of Samatsumara he'd been practising *metta* and *karuna bhavana* for that period so maybe.... and also it is said that the *metta bhavana* is a means to the *brahmaloka*. So if you devalue the *brahmaloka* as mundane you devalue the *metta bhavana* too. You see how it all hangs together?

Kulamitra: Usually it's said isn't it that you would purify your consciousness going through the *jhanas* to the fourth *jhana* then you would come back down through the *jhanas* to a level where you could conceptualise it. **Then** you would attain insight.

S: But that it is rather saying that tradition suggests that if you go through, as it were, the four *jhanas* that is enough; that it isn't really necessary to [144] go through the four *arupa jhanas*. In fact it's even suggested that the four *arupa jhanas* are sort of dimensions in a sense almost **within** the fourth *jhana*. That is also said.

Virananda: That teaching that Kulamitra's repeated, it does seem to devalue *samatha* meditation techniques somewhat. Why bother getting into the higher *jhanas* say if you can get just a preliminary *dhyanic* state and then in turn start conceptualising

S: Well you can't. One is taking the process too literally. The neighbourhood concentration to which you, so to speak, come back after traversing the four *jhanas* is not the neighbourhood concentration with which you started; it's a much fuller more **easy** natural relaxed sort of state. It's only in a way technically the same state. It isn't really the same state. Let me give a comparison. For instance you're not eating food, then you have a good meal and you stop eating food. So you're in the same state as before? Is the subsequent state of not eating food the same as the preceding state of not eating food. You've returned to the state of not eating food but you've got a full stomach this time. So in the case of the *jhanas* well you've sort of absorbed the *jhanas* in a way, your being has been suffused with them, even though now you're not actually fully technically **in** the *jhana* state, but the fact that you have **had** that experience and you **have** been in them has affected - **is** effecting - your whole being and is making it more able to develop insight.

Sagaramati: I thought they were returning to the same sort of mental functions but the state of mind is not the same state of mind.

S: Yes you could distinguish in that way. You returned to the same function but in a different state.

Kulamitra: Would you go straight from the fourth *jhana* into the *arupajhanas* even if they **are** Transcendental *jhanas*? Is that how that progression would take place do you think?

S: Well they are presented in the tradition as a series, a continuous series. There seem to be some difficulties about that view.

Vajradipa: There's something actually interesting about the neighbourhood concentration. When you come back to that you do traditionally look at the four marks of dukkha, anitya. I'm not quite sure of the exact translations but it's like aimlessness is a realisation of emptiness which does seem to have really the same kind of feel to them as the *arupa*.

S: That's true, yes. [145]

Vajradipa: Signlessness.

S: Even if we had a sort of chart or diagram the *arupajhanas* are represented as sort of (*unclear word*) stages further on. One has to be careful one doesn't interpret that too literally. In a sense one could be coming back if one could in fact think of them in so to speak Transcendental terms. There's also the point that in the Buddha's very early teaching or what seems to be the Buddha's early teaching the teaching is much more in terms perhaps of - Mrs Rhys Davids makes this point I think - of a journey through worlds. It's not couched always in such exclusively subjective terms and there is this sort of teaching about the anagami. He's reborn isn't he. He doesn't come back to this world. He's reborn at the peak of the *rupaloka*, not the *arupaloka*, the *rupaloka*, in the *suttavasa*, and he gains nirvana from there. So it's as though well he's released already though he's reached up to that sort of irreversible transcendental series. Do you see what I mean?

Sagaramati: You could say how is it possible if **he** can't even be reborn in the *arupajhana* state who else could be born in such a state?

S: Yes, because theoretically it should be possible for you to be reborn in an *arupajhana* state. So **who** is reborn in the *arupajhana* states? - apparently nobody. And the anagami **is** regarded as progressing from one *arupajhana* to the next until he reaches nirvana. So in a way it is as though that sequence of transcendental nidanas was the absolute. For all practical purposes he's liberated, one might say, really. He's not really in the mundane at all. Though Theravada tradition maintains that in a sense he is because he isn't fully liberated but you can only say that by assuming this sort of static nirvana sort of crowning the *arupajhanas*, and then again that links up with the Pure Land and even the Tibetan view of say this liberation in the after-death state. Because you are say according to the Sukhavativyuha sutta you're reborn in the pure land and liberated from there. It seems to be just another way of looking at the same thing. Not that you go to a heaven temporarily. No, the heavens are lower down. It's as though you're already on that Transcendental path. At least on the first of those irreversible positive Transcendental stages and by the very nature of that way of looking at things there are **further** stages, because you haven't got a static absolute at which you arrive once and for all full stop, everything finished.

Atula: Can you see looking at the Buddha's life in those terms of developing (*unclear*) at one time.

S: Well I have pointed out I think that in terms of the descriptions of the [146]Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment one can't really regard it as an attainment just at one particular point as it were. I pointed out that those four or five or seven weeks after Enlightenment may well represent a sort of extension and consolidation of an experience even of a central experience, or one might think of Enlightenment, the process of attaining Enlightenment spread out over that whole period. Not that there was an instant at which it was fully attained because that suggests well it **is** something static and to be attained once and for all.

Sagaramati: you could even say before he was born he must have been an irreversible bodhisattva.

S: That is the Mahayana view of course. And also one could say, well, Sariputra and Maudgalyana, they were Arhants, they had attained the Transcendental but the question is well what's the difference between them and the Buddha. It can't be just this mechanical one that he realised it first, but **he was further on**. They all had a Transcendental realisation, they've all liberated from the mundane, from the round, but the Buddha has attained to an even higher stage of the Transcendental.

Atula: Yes, that makes the Buddha's.... so much more..... You seem to get in a lot of difficulty when you're reading the scriptures that there's just this distinction just between like the Buddha attained it first.

S: Because it doesn't seem like that when you read the scriptures because the Buddha seems to tower above his disciples even though in theory according to this account, they've reached exactly the same realisation. But he still seems to be beyond them and they still seem to be looking up to him and Going for Refuge to him and that's intelligible if you understand it as meaning that the Buddha is a few stages further on in the Transcendental process but that even he has not come to a dead full stop.

Sagaramati: It's as if they had attained the same path that he was on but...

S: Yes the same irreversible side.

Virananda: Does this conception of the irreversible *arupaloka jhanas* also link in with say conceptions of future Buddhas dwelling in high heavens in the Mahayana?

S: I'm not sure about that. Bringing in - not to say working in of - the Mahayana there is quite a different question, though I think, as I said, that the further back one goes say in the Pali Canon the more one unearths what seem to be these earlier strata of teaching and the more positively one interprets the material that one finds in the Pali Canon or rather the more one sees that it [147] is possible to interpret or even that one **needs** to interpret the Buddha's early teaching, the Buddha's own teaching, in more and more positive terms, the more close one comes to the Mahayana certainly in spirit, and therefore the more one is prepared to concede that well perhaps the Mahayana in spirit at least is more faithful to the original Buddha's teaching. *[pause]* Anyway this is all somewhat - well it isn't revolutionary I suppose, that's too strong a term - it certainly represents, again bearing in mind it's still work in progress and sort of thinking aloud, it represents possibly a sort of quite significant recasting of the material that we find in the Pali Canon and it represents perhaps a sort of going back to something more like what the Buddha probably actually himself taught. Also it makes sense of certain passages in the Pali Canon that it's difficult to make sense of otherwise; and it also represents as far as one can see a more attractive and practicable and appealing and worthwhile version of the Pali Canon or certain material in the Pali Canon than the current Theravada version.

Sagaramati: When you say you're going through the Pali Canon are you going through the Pali Pali Canon or the translation.

S: No I'm going through the English translation and I'm just doing that for the time being, but if I do any real work on the subject then I'll have to consult the Pali original on those passages that I regard as significant. That will be really necessary. *[pause]*

Vairocana: In the twelve positive nidanas could it be said that the main bit is dependent upon concentration arises knowledge and vision of things as they really are. Would that really be the point where one would attain Enlightenment and the rest is a sort of

S: No, that is the point at which one switches over to the sequence of Transcendental positive nidanas and therefore becomes irreversible. From there you cannot fall back, you become a stream entrant or, as it's also said your dhamma eye opens.

Kulamitra: If you're seeing Enlightenment in dynamic terms anyway isn't that point of irreversibility in a way sufficient? I mean after that you just enjoy

S: It's sufficient yes, you just enjoy your own progress. Even from the point of view of the Theravada accounts, the later ones, you don't have to bother after that. You can't fall back. You can apparently fail to proceed but even that is perhaps a bit - I'm not sure about that - but one is sure you can't fall back. At the very least you remain in the enjoyment of that state. But I think by the time you get as far as that your very nature has become such that you wish to proceed. It's [148] as though what you should do and what you want to do are no longer in conflict.

Kulamitra: We normally come across Enlightenment as the goal of Buddhism and having a goal that's seen statically but if things are seen dynamically each does become quite different doesn't it.

S: Yes, one could say that one should regard stream entry as one's goal. This raises another question that apparently - again according to some scholars - the Buddha himself did not originally have this distinction of the four much less still the eight noble or holy persons the Arya Pudgalas, but in what seems to have been the very earliest sort of version of the teaching, the Buddha spoke in terms of 'one who had gone upstream' and that would seem to suggest one who had reached that series of Transcendental positive nidanas, and then it seems that the concept of stream entry was introduced and then arahantship and then other stages were filled in. So it's as though we're going back to what seemed to have been the original conception of going upstream.

Sagaramati: It's as if the only people who bothered to sort of formulate all these things and draw any conclusions weren't doing much practice! And therefore what's come down to us is the legacy of people who maybe weren't practising the Dharma.

S: Though of course we do have as part of the legacy these earlier formulations from which we can reconstruct I think a more faithful version of what the Buddha actually taught or what the Buddha was actually getting at. You get a clear picture. You probably could even write a short article presenting these points as a sort of possible way of looking at the teaching because it is systematic isn't it. I am still thinking over, I want further confirmation to look into any possible objections. If you can think of any objections, by the way, please let me know or if you find any sort of text which appears to contradict this way of looking at things or to call it into question. But again doesn't it seem strange that the Buddha according to a number of earlier accounts spoke in terms of the brahmacharya? This is what he said to the first sixty disciples, 'go forth and teach the Dharma which is Kalyana in its beginning middle and end, proclaim the perfectly pure **brahmacharya**'. The brahmacharya is the Dharma. perhaps we can take that quite literally. It's the walk, as Mrs Rhys Davids would say, to the Brahma realm, the immortal brahma realm which had not yet been called Nirvana.

Sagaramati: In the Udana doesn't the Buddha when he sees Sariputra coming over the horizon say these are brahmanas these are [149]

S: Well it is well known that the Buddha did use the word brahmana as a term for his own spiritual ideal. He tried to divest it of its caste associations and the brahmin was one who had attained the brahmaloka. That was the whole point of the Buddha's dispute with so many brahmins, that they had not attained it nor their fathers or grandfathers and so on.

Kulamitra: Do you think that possibly the Buddha reinterpreted the whole meaning of the word brahma?

S: Yes. Though he represented his reinterpretation as a getting back to the original meaning.

Kulamitra: But parallel with that the old interpretation is continuing in the Vedic tradition and that in a way later on the Buddhist view of those words became identical with the old Vedic way of seeing it as a sort of higher godly realm and losing the Buddha's new meaning of that word.

S: Yes, well certainly the Hindus regarded the brahmaloka as something static. In the Pali Canon we have this sort of account of the higher realms, sort of degrees of reality one might say in cosmological terms, and we have a description of these different brahma realms which as far as I know is not found in any Hindu text. And also it's interesting that many of the brahmas are conceived of in terms of light. There are brahmas of infinite radiance and the brahmas of, as it were, musical radiance and so on.

Sagaramati: In the Digha Nikaya - the Brahmajala sutta - he goes on to say how a monk would actually go about actually thinking (unclear). Which of the levels are they referring to? Are they *arupajhanas* or....

S: They seem to be referring.. well put it this way, we have got that correlation of the *arupajhanas* with the brahmalokas but how early is that? So therefore unless one establishes that, one can't necessarily argue from the assumption that the *arupajhanas* really do correspond to the brahmalokas, so that what applies to one so to speak applies *pare passu* to the other.

Sagaramati: So is that Digha Nikaya passage later?

S: Well I think that is something I still have to investigate. Because that sutta clearly envisages the possibility of a monk being born or reborn from those higher realms and misinterpreting his own recollection of them. So that clearly there is a descent here from the brahmaloka so one could say well clearly one is not irreversible from that state. One has to look into that.

[150]

Sagaramati: Is it at the end of the world cycle there's.. it's like from the objective sense you've got a dense materiality and in the other sense you've got... are those the brahmalokas?

S: Yes.

Sagaramati: Would that be therefore a later addition or is that an early formulation?

S: That's again difficult to say. There are these cosmological suttas - perhaps they don't pertain to the earliest strata of the teaching. The Digha Nikaya as a compilation is a little bit late. It seems to have been

completed by the time of Ashoka as a compilation. One cannot really say much more than that. It contains **some** very ancient material. *[pause]*

Virananda: Wasn't that another way of... Higher realms were present in Hinduism and were present when the Buddha was teaching. Was also what you refer to in 'Hedonism and the Spiritual Life' - levels of bliss - could that be taken as an indication of degrees of reality? Need that actually stop at say the bliss of brahma?

S: Even in Buddhism it's said Nibbanam paranam sukkham - in the Dhammapada - Nirvana is the highest bliss. So according to this dynamic interpretation there is no highest in the absolute sense. There's higher, yes, and higher and higher indefinitely. So one could say, yes, that degrees of bliss are correlated with degrees of reality.

Vajradipa: The *jhanas*. The four formulations of the *jhanas* aren't exclusively Buddhist are they?

S: No they're not. In the sense that those who were not followers of the Buddha and were not practising his teaching are represented as attaining those *jhana* states including those who lived before the time of the Buddha.

Sagaramati: Do you know when the word 'brahma' first appears?. You've got the Vedas and the very early Indian traditions. Does the word 'brahma' appear in those pre-Buddhistic works?

S: I really need notice of that question but I would say this. As far as I can recollect brahmana comes before.... that is to say the brahmana as a term for a certain kind of person comes before brahman or Brahman as a term for, so to speak, the Absolute. I won't be completely sure of that. I'd have to check that but I think it could be so. But in any case the origin of the word 'brahmana' is interesting. I think it is usually interpreted along **these** lines. It's connected I think with a root, with a verbal root meaning to grow, even to swell ...

End of Tape Tape Seven

[151]

S: (Pali word - unclear) corresponds to maha, that is 'that which is big', or 'great', 'or 'become great'. So the Brahmana is the one who has grown, swelled, become great. So what does **this** mean? It is one who has grown or swelled with a sort of divine afflatus, is the inspired one, he's the shaman, originally, who is sort of filled with whatever he is filled with; he sort of swells up, and perhaps starts speaking, calling and invoking, and who calls upon the gods. Mantati, the mantras are his calling upon the gods, his invocations of the gods in that sort of state of almost shamanistic delirium as it were. So of course eventually Brahmana was explained as 'one who knows Brahman' - that is the Hindu version, or the Brahmana is 'one who has attained the Brahmaloкас' - that is the Pali Theravada version. But that seems to be the original etymological explanation, that he was a sort of shamanistic figure really, swelled up with inspiration.

Virananda: Is the etymology of nirvana ascetic?

S: No, it's usually derived from (niri), to blow, to blow out, to extinguish. *[pause]* I don't know much about this, but as far as I remember, in Sanskrit grammar, in orthodox Sanskrit grammar, there is a series of what they call *dhatu*s or verbal roots, which are sort of the origins or sort of clusters of related terms, much the same way as certain ideograms in Chinese are the nucleus of a whole lot of other derived or derivative

ideograms. But these verbal roots, these dhatus, are not quite roots in the modern scientific etymological sense.

Virananda: Aren't they very primitive verbs?

S: Well, what is a primitive verb as distinct from a modern sophisticated one? *[Laughter]* I'm not at all versed in grammar from this point of view, I'm only recounting something I've heard in India about dhatus as they are called, these verbal roots. But they are not roots in the scientific sense, I do know that. But the study of these dhatus is regarded as quite important. From a philosophical point of view obviously it is quite important to be able to trace a word back to its appropriate dhatu. So the word 'Brahmana' is often traced back to this verbal root, this dhatu, meaning 'to grow' or 'to swell', or 'to become great', 'to become big'. Whether that would be regarded as a scientific etymology I don't know.

[152] Sometimes these sort of dhatus do correspond to what modern philologists would regard as the actual root of the term, sometimes not. *[pause]*

It does just occur to me, and this is just a bit tentative, that one could say that there are Brahmalokas and Brahmlokas. There are Brahmalokas corresponding to that intermediate segment, that is to say that part of the positive nidanas which are just positive and not transcendental. And it would be - though again this is quite tentative and speculative - those who had attained to **those** Brahmalokas that could come down or be reborn in a lower sphere, but not those who had passed on, via the point of no return, to those higher, as it were Transcendental, Brahmlokas. This would need to be followed up - it might fit, it might not.

Sagaramati: We talk about insight into things as conditioned. I'm trying to bring the unconditioned into that. Could you say that insight into things, and seeing them as conditioned, is like static - it sounds very static - you see something as conditioned, it's very fixed; but insight into things as conditioned is in fact seeing that they're not really like that.

S: One could say that you can regard things as conditioned in the sense of their being either made up of parts - which is the static way of looking at it, the analytical way - or conditioned in the sense of arising in dependence on causes and conditions - and that's the dynamic way of looking at it, even the synthetic way of looking at it.

Virananda: You mentioned, in this section that we've already covered, but we didn't go into, that each of these approaches, the analytic and the synthetic, can be taken to an extreme. You mentioned the extreme of the analytic as being the real dharma entities. What would be the extreme of the synthetic?

S: I would imagine, I'm not quite sure of this, I'm just sort of answering off the cuff, it would be to imagine that there is some **thing** which changes. Do you see what I mean? Instead of just the process of pure continuous change there is a something which, remaining unchanged itself, undergoes these changes.

Vajradipa: That creates the changes?

S: No, an unchanging subject of change, which is not the Buddhist view at all. That could be regarded, not so much the extreme [153] view, as a sort of literalistic understanding of that dynamic view of things; that something remains essentially unchanged; that only **states** change, that you are still you, whether you're good, bad, or indifferent, the same unchanging you - that would be a mistake.

Virananda: Is that the atman doctrine?

S: That would be the atman doctrine, yes. Gosh that gave you a shock didn't it! *[Laughter]*)

Vajradipa: Someone agreed with him!

S: No, not that someone agreed with him, but that he saw the hideous, death-like face of atta lurking there.

Virananda: So what is the view, the wrong view, that is held by the extreme of the analytic method? Is that again another version of the same atta?

S: No, I don't think there is a traditional version of this. I think this is my interpretation.

Virananda: Your interpretation of extremes, you said?

S: Yes, because the Theravada would not I think probably. That is the Sarvastavada would not agree that it was inadmissible to break down the changing object into unchanging particles so to speak. The Sarvastivadin does in fact appear to do that, so you could not regard the doing of that as a sort of illegitimate extreme. You notice in either case you arrive at anatma in some way. *[pause]*

Sagaramati: Going back to that earlier question - you talk about conditioned things. I think the mistake I'm making is I'm carrying on the thingness onto the unconditioned and saying well I can understand what a conditioned thing is in a way, but when I switch to the unconditioned it doesn't seem to mean anything.

S: As though you've just got a sort of abstract thing from which conditions have been removed, but not thinking that..... well it's not that there are conditioned things but there is just conditionality. In Mahayana terms, of course, when you say that the pratitya-samutpada is sunyata you're not saying that there's a sunyata as a sort of thing underlying the process of pratitya-samutpada, and that you proceed to identify the two, but the very conditionedness [154] is sunyata, but not that there is a sort of separate process of conditionality which is sunyata in the sense of being identical with something which is sort of posited as different from it.

Sagaramati: You can see that in terms of your mind because in terms of an individual's mind there seems to be two ways of reacting to reality, but in terms of ordinary phenomena, you see something as unconditioned, it's just as it is, seeing it in terms of conditioned and unconditioned just doesn't seem to make sense - it's just whatever it is.

S: I think it is better to think in terms of the Round and the Spiral, the Round and the Path. But coming back for a moment to Brahmas - I hope my mind isn't on these too much, but for instance - when Mahagovinda sees Sanatkumara. If one looks at this figure of Sanatkumara, he seems to have certain resemblances to the figure of Manjushri or Manjugosha. He's called for instance Pancasikka, he's identified with Pancasikka five crests, and Manjugosha has five crests, doesn't he, and also is Sanatkumara - ever youthful, Manjushri is kumarabhuta. Do you see what I mean? So there is another theory, that these, so to speak, higher Brahmas, in the Mahayana become the Bodhisattvas. Do you see what I mean?

Kulamitra: So in that sense when a higher Brahma appears to you it's a sort of visual form of insight.

S: You could say that.

Atula: Where would Brahma Sahampati who appeared before the Buddha fit in?

S: Well probably he is a lower Brahma. I'm not quite sure exactly where he comes - if he comes at all in this regular scheme - but perhaps one could say one has first of all got the Kamaloka, let's say; at the very bottom one has got the hell-beings, then next up one has got the Pretaloka, then the animal realm, then one has got the human realm, then one has got the asura realm, then one has got the realm of the four gods, the heaven of Indra, and then one has got some other gods too. I forget their names ...

Voice: The gods of the thirty-three?

S: That's the heaven of Indra: the gods of the thirty-three. Are there a couple of ... oh the Yama gods. So these are all in the Kamaloka. So the gods here are subject to unskilful as [155] well as skilful mental states. Then you've got the *rupaloka* with first of all let us say the various Brahmaloas. One could regard these Brahmaloas as corresponding to those nidanas which were only positive. So those nidanas which are only positive - these are the Brahmas of the world of form one could say, the devas of the world of form, or devas and Brahmas of the world of form. But then of course one has got those Brahmas which correspond to the irreversible path or nidanas, and those Brahmas correspond to the *arupaloka* which is now of course regarded as transcendental. Do you see what I mean? So one has got a regular sequence, a regular hierarchy; and those Brahmaloas from which one comes down as it were, well those are the Brahmaloas of the *rupaloka*. The Brahmaloas of the *arupaloka* are tantamount to the Transcendental, the Transcendental nidanas. But with regard to this question of Bodhisattvas being identified with **these** Brahmas, well it's a question of cultural forms. I mean is one literally to think say that traditional iconography really does represent say a Bodhisattva? I mean does he have to have, literally, five crests or whatever? But is not the reality to which you apply these terms culturally conditioned so far as your perception of it is concerned. So if it is a question of people conditioned by sort of Vedic traditions and so on, social ideas of ancient India, well they see this being as, for want of a better term, as Sanatkumara. But then later on when Mahayana has developed in its full glory, then they see that same being in a somewhat different form. There's some resemblance because of continuity of Indian tradition, cultural tradition, but there's some difference too in accordance with the more recent developments, let's say, of the Mahayana. You see them as what we call a Bodhisattva. Meanwhile the doctrine has developed or its significance has been brought out, you attach more importance to compassion so you regard the Bodhisattvas as essentially compassionate figures. Well that compassionate element or aspect is also evident in the case of Brahmakumara, Sanatkumara, in the Mahagovinda Sutta. So you've got therefore let's say animals and the mythological beings; you've got human beings, you've got what are sometimes called the sensual gods - maybe they correspond to artists; you've got devas, say corresponding to angels, and you've got Brahmas, the higher Brahmas corresponding to Bodhisattvas.

Kulamitra: So when we were talking the other day about the possibility of dwelling in meditation on that whole sequence, you are [156] dwelling on the possibility of an endless development of consciousness.

S: Yes, and feeling yourself being sort of carried away by that stream. You give yourself to that stream which is carrying you from higher to ever higher states. Maybe it isn't an actual experience to begin with, but you sort of imaginatively identify yourself with it even if you don't in the full sense really experience it, but you get some feeling for it, you get some glimpse of it - to change the terminology.

Atula: And you begin to experience the world in a very different way. I've been reading Blake's 'Songs of Innocence and Experience' again. When Blake talks about the state of innocence he talks in terms of a protected state: the child is aware of the father as God and Christ as very positive figures as though that's the way, that's the point of innocence. It's not as though there's any knowledge in that state, but you experience the world as though it is protected, like there is something more positive to look up to. I haven't been in a

really high *jhana* but it seems that when on retreat you actually experience the world in that way. It is not as though you've got any particular tome of knowledge, it's just that there has been a complete switch over.

S: It's more you experience it in terms of just pure sensation without superimposing ideas or judgements or values.

Atula: Sometimes it goes on quite from day to day on a retreat.

S: Perhaps that is the state of innocence ... before the fall? However that's going into another mythology.

Sagaramati: In this hierarchy people will be whisking through it; it's not a static thing, who Manjughosha might be or who Avalokitesvara is - they will be changing - could you have that?

S: Yes.*[pause]* Well, in the case of Bodhisattvas even, Bodhisattvas have their stages, according to the Mahayana sutras don't they? There are ten stages, ten bhūmis, so it is not that the Bodhisattva state itself is one that is standing still. One need not think of it as sort of culminating say Buddhahood once and for all. Perhaps we could even say - this is being a bit untraditional and a bit paradoxical - there are no Buddhas, there are only Bodhisattvas.

Sagaramati: Would it be possible for someone, say, to become like Manjughosha, [157] like Manjughosha moves on to something else *[Laughter]*, and somebody else comes along ...

S: Well, this is a question of whether you are regarding, say the figure of Manjughosha as an actual being, an individual being who is in that state, or whether you regard that figure of Manjughosha as a symbol, a personification for that state itself, you see the point of the distinction? If you regarded Manjughosha as simply the symbol of that particular state, well the symbol remains unchanged even though the state is not the absolute definable state and you could speak in terms of becoming Manjughosha in the sense of reaching that state, but if you think of Manjughosha as an individual who at present is in that state, well there's no question of you as another individual becoming Manjughosha.

Kulamitra: You could think in that way of assessing a man like Blake, couldn't you? That Blake now symbolises say the artist but actually may have passed on himself to being an angel.

S: Yes, right, or a musician, or a scientist even! *[Laughter]*

Sagaramati: Talking the other day about needing something a bit cruder than a transcendental term to sort of visualise, it seems easier if you just if you try to see it as a symbol - it doesn't seem to work so much - but if you do think there is a being there, and then regardless, people might see that as a michaditthi, but you know in terms of method it would be more effective.

S: Yes.

Sagaramati: But could we visualise these devas? The Bodhisattvas are quite a way away, could we actually visualise ...

S: I think it is a question largely of one's feeling for these things because...

Vajradipa: Ambition.

S: No, I was thinking of a feeling in more cultural terms. I mean is a deva real to us? Do we respond emotionally to the iconography of a deva? This is really the basic - if we do find it, there's no problem but maybe we don't. Perhaps we respond more to the iconography of the angel. Well then we have to make some intellectual adjustments but maybe intellectual adjustments are easier to make than emotional adjustments ... or rather easier to make than emotional adjustments when there's no emotion there! Was it in this group that I talked about what Ruskin said about Apollo? [158]

Voices: Yes.

S: You see that is relevant here, isn't it?

Jinapriya: I think in the last (word unclear) you said that if someone thought they were in touch with the Buddha you would think it probably actually wasn't the Buddha they were in touch with. Isn't that something similar to what happens with us and the Bodhisattvas? We may visualise this sort of Samayasattva but aren't we likely to be related to it like perhaps we would a deva?

S: Yes indeed, and in fact traditionally in terms of iconography Bodhisattvas have deva-like forms.

Jinapriya: I mean aren't they devas with lotuses ... the Bodhisattvas I think that's how it differs sometimes.

Kulamitra: If that would fit with the thing of them being your, is it your Ishvadevata? Your chosen deity is a Bodhisattva form.

S: Well, one says 'Bodhisattva form' but what does one mean by 'Bodhisattva form', because how does a Bodhisattva form as form, that is to say visual form differ from a deva form, or how does a deva form differ from a princely form?

Sagaramati: Well he would symbolise. A Bodhisattva would be a symbol as well as a deva form whereas a deva would be just a deva form.

S: Yes. So, for it to be possible for the deva form to symbolise the Bodhisattva you've got to have some experience of Bodhisattva independent of your visual perception of the deva form. So the important thing is to be in touch with what the symbol... no, what the **form**, let us say, represents, otherwise just to construct the form in your mind or even just to visualise it even vividly isn't so important. *[pause]* Also you've got to have a sort of - what shall I say - imprecise unformulated sense of the Bodhisattva. How you actually see him, more literally speaking is another matter, maybe comparatively secondary.

Jinapriya: Presumably that actual visual form is likely to change somewhat anyway. What we're using is presumably inheriting medieval Indian forms.

S: Well, in a way we haven't inherited it, we've sort of borrowed it. Maybe we should sometimes look at it the other way round, try to let's say forget all about Indian iconography, and Chinese and Japanese and Tibetan iconography. Just forget, and think, well just try to feel that one is in contact with a being or a presence which is sort of infinitely wise and infinitely compassionate, but you can't see, that has no form, but just

[159] try to get the sense of that sort of being and then sort of say to yourself 'well, what would that being look like?', and then try to make up the form oneself, not having recourse to lotus thrones and blue lotuses round the ears and waving swords. No, just think for **yourself** what would that being look like, supposing they saw such a being, supposing such a being appeared to me, well how would he appear? And then you would have to bring in items from your own experience which were **meaningful** to you. Somebody might think he'd appear in a blue robe because that had a certain significance for you, a certain emotional significance. They might think it's a very young face - well what sort of face? What sort of hair? You might see that Bodhisattva appearing with beautiful **golden** hair, whereas Indian iconography always speaks of long black hair. You might even feel he's wearing a crown - maybe that seems more natural to you, a crown -with jewels in, not one of these sort of Indian head dresses which you've never actually seen anywhere - doesn't really mean anything to you traditionally in terms of **your** culture. Maybe your Bodhisattva would wear a crown. Do you see what I mean?

Virananda: What about, you might invent a whole world to place him in.

S: Well you might carry on indefinitely. You might like to think of him sitting on a throne of **roses**. You probably haven't **seen** a lotus flower, not a real lotus flower.

Jinapriya: How would you feel about us doing that in the context of our practice, where the ambiguity in terms of the iconography is there?

S: Well, so far we've taken our cue so to speak from traditional iconography, but perhaps we have also at least sometimes to try to do things the other way. I don't want people to sort of stampede into it and follow a new fashion - we must be very careful about that - but it might be appropriate on some occasions for some people at least to sort of practise or experiment the other way round.

Sagaramati: Maybe on a solitary where you were more sensitive?

S: More time and more sensitive, and were by the very nature of the situation in a general way more dependent upon your own resources. You might even say to yourself: 'well supposing Manjugosha was to appear to me, would I really see him like he looks in these Tibetan *thangkas*. There is a **real** Manjugosha what does he really look like? Well you might think he doesn't really look like anything. He appears in this way to an Indian Buddhist, in that way to a Tibetan Buddhist, in that way to a Japanese Buddhist, all somewhat related, [160] but supposing he appeared to me, how would he appear?' And try to work it out in that sort of way, and try to actually see that sort of visual form as he would be likely to appear to you, which means saying or asking well what visual form would actually convey to you what a Bodhisattva is supposed to be? Would it be long flowing robes and hair and beautiful crowns and tiaras; would it be that, would it be something else?

Sagaramati: I don't think he'd have a sword.

S: You don't know, your unconscious might have other ideas [*Laughter*]. He might come with a hundred arms each waving a sword of a different kind. I mean, some people like Prakasha, they seem able to perceive things in visual terms derived from their own culture quite easily and quite vividly, but for most people it isn't as easy as that. I notice that Prakasha doesn't go in much for oriental iconography. He seems to draw on Western tradition, well not always quite accurately, he doesn't even seem to follow Western traditions strictly. For instance I noticed in one of the essays in 'Through Eyes of Fire' describing some of his visions he saw I think it was the Virgin Mary in a blue mantle and red gown, whereas as far as I know

she's always represented in a white gown and blue mantle. White and blue - those are her colours; red and white are the colours of Christ in a Catholic iconography - so he plays about a bit apparently or his unconscious plays about a bit even with the traditional Western iconography. It doesn't strictly follow. Well he might even have seen once an exceptional sort of picture in which the Virgin Mary did wear a red gown.

Kulamitra: Do you find **your** unconscious settling quite happily for the Eastern iconography?

S: My unconscious seems to be at home in both.

Sagaramati: You did say, I remember you talking about Blake's images and you said that when you first came across him you felt an antipathy towards him, it was something you didn't actually like about him.

S: Right, that's true, but they're not very traditional. I feel quite at home with Medieval and Renaissance symbols and figures. Quite at home with figures of angels, but I also feel quite at home with devas and Brahmas, and Indian and Tibetan and even Japanese Bodhisattvas. I feel quite at home with **Egyptian** mythological figures. I think the only mythological, some I don't, I don't feel at home with say the Mexican mythological figures - they just seem to come from some place I don't [161] want to have anything really to do with. I don't find them very congenial. *[pause]* I don't respond very strongly to classical Graeco-Roman figures, they leave me a bit cold. There are one or two that feel to be a bit significant. Aesculapius for instance. But Apollo, yes, he's quite pretty, quite pleasant, but there doesn't seem to be anything deeply symbolical there as far as I am concerned, it's just aesthetic. **Ah!** There's one exception which I encountered - I don't know what you'll make of this - in the Naples Museum, some ten or so years ago, and that was the figure of the Diana of Ephesus with those rows and rows of breasts, and with, almost mummy-like otherwise and the two arms sort of extended. That seemed to belong to a quite different realm, a genuinely archetypal realm, this is what I felt, it seemed quite different from all these other cold white stone statues.

Virananda: But isn't that very early, earlier Cycladian around that period?

S: No, this particular one wasn't though it may be a very early tradition. It was quite a fine work of art. It was sort of quite mellow, old gold colour.

Jinapriya: What was it called again Bhante?

S: That was called Diana, well it was Artemis but it's the Ephesian form. There is this famous temple of Artemis or Diana in Ephesus which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world; and the particular form of Diana or Artemis which was worshipped there was of Diana or Artemis as I think the mistress of beasts, and with rows and rows of breasts; the whole of the chest, so to speak, was covered with rows of breasts, and as far as I can remember she wore a sort of mural crown, a crown like a sort of fortress, and the two arms are extended like this. It has a sort of resonance, symbolic resonance, that the other statues in the museum didn't have. It is sort of life-size. So this figure stood in that section and I think there are many sort of copies and imitations and minor forms of it all over the Mediterranean world.

Jinapriya: What museum was it?

S: This was Naples. I think there are other versions, well yes there are other versions, but this is a particularly fine one. I got a postcard of it which I don't have now, but one does find pictures in books on Greek and Roman art.

Sagaramati: Do you mean Greek, meaning slightly pre-classical (word unclear) They are very
[162]

S: Yes. They seem to be closer to the archaic sources, the archetypal sources.

Vairocana: Do you think the Egyptians are much closer to the archetypal?

S: Possibly, possibly.

Sagaramati: Some of the early Greek ones, they are very similar to the Egyptian.

S: I mean there are even Greek winged figures which are similar to angels, quite a lot of them in fact.

[Tea break]

Atula: Could I take you back to what we were discussing. I had a question I can't quite remember it. With the arising of the samskara in the second karma cetana - consciousness, I can't really quite understand what, how that differs from say five and six, difference between five and six where you get again consciousness, the mental consciousness attached to the samskara.

S: I'm still not clear.

Atula: We've got arising on the samkara, that is the karma cetana, you get the consciousness arising.

S: Ah, yes, vijnana.

Atula: And then going on to the *rupa*, the nama-*rupa* and the causal the sense consciousness from that, so is one consciousness being the result of the previous birth and then that gives rise to the present body ...

S: I think what one has got to understand here is that the nidanas aren't all mutually exclusive; there's a lot of overlapping between the nidanas. All the nidanas are complex, but at each causal stage this or that aspect of the total nidana is relevant or significant and the nidana is named accordingly, but other aspects of that same nidana are there which are not relevant to that particular causal situation, so they are not explicitly mentioned. So therefore it's as though certain elements, certain factors, reappear in different nidanas. So when one speaks of 'in dependence upon the samskaras', the last nidana of the previous life, 'arises vijnana', this is vijnana consciousness in a very general sense, and especially, sometimes it is called the 'relinking consciousness' because it's the [163] link between the old organism and the new, the organism of the previous life and the organism of this life. And in (word unclear sounds like via) it has the general sense of just awareness, awareness, what shall I say, 'jnana' is awareness and the 'vi' is discriminative awareness, that is to say awareness which takes place within the subject/object framework. Then in dependence upon that arises nama-*rupa*. Here there is a greater differentiation; there's a differentiation between... the relinking consciousness is like, or awareness is like, the seed, it is almost like on a different level, the chromosomes containing the genetic code, but anyway those things are just present in seed form, and then of course in the next stage in dependence upon the vijnana arises nama-*rupa*, well then a differentiation has taken place, there is not just that seed: discriminative awareness, it's differentiated into an actual object, a body, and an actual subject distinguished from that body, in other words nama-*rupa* - there is a further process of, stage of differentiation; and then in dependence on that nama-*rupa* arises salayatana the six sense-organs, again greater degree of differentiation. Then in dependence upon those arises contact. They come into contact

with their respective objects - further stage on; that as a result of that contact there arises feeling, pleasant, painful or neutral. That's the end of the effect process of the present life, then the cause process starts up, either with craving ...

End of Side one Side Two

Atula: Go back to the second one, like, like it's like there's a movement, and then that connects from the general tendency of that from the past, that actually brings about a form through which that can sort of negotiate with the world, or with whatever situation it's in.

S: Another point which the later Theravada goes into quite a bit in the Abhidharma, that there are different kinds of causality, different kinds of causal relationship, that all the nidanas do not arise in dependence on the previous nidana in the same sort of way, i.e. by way of the same type of causal relationship, though that makes it a bit more complex, so it isn't a straightforward, one phenomenon arising in dependence on another phenomenon in a quite straightforward way, and then in exactly that way, that very way, another phenomenon a [164] arises in dependence upon that phenomenon, the same type of causal relationship, no, it is not like that.

Kulamitra: Could you give us any examples to illustrate that?

S: Oh dear, I don't know if I could. There are twenty-four of these paccayas and they all come into play, sometimes several of them you know come into play. The Theravada has specialised in this sort of thing. One doesn't find it in the Sarvastivada. But, for instance, supposing you take the arising of the six sense organs in dependence upon the *nama-rupa*. Well you can see for yourself that isn't quite the same sort of thing as when for instance craving arises in dependence on pleasant feeling. Do you see what I mean? There is a different kind of causal relationship. In the first case you have got one thing sort of **growing** out of another or developing by way of a greater differentiation; but in the case of craving arising in dependence upon pleasant feeling, well you've got a sort of mental - for want of a better word - reaction to an experience that is befalling you. It's a quite different sort of..... broadly speaking yes, one arises in dependence on the other, but it is not the same sort of causal relationship. In fact some of these causal relationships in the list of twenty-four wouldn't be recognised as strictly causal in modern Western thought, it's after all, conditionality. Even co-existence is regarded as a sort of conditionality. There is the fact that two things exist - so to speak - side by side. or that they arise together - that is called co-nascence condition.

Virananda: If when you are looking at the pratitya-samutpada, and your looking at consciousness, and someone asks 'when does self-reflexive consciousness arise?', how do you deal with that question?

S: At which stage, Hmm. Well I would say that it was at the stage of vijnana, though it is there embryonically not fully developed, because it's the human consciousness. I mean where is the human consciousness?

Sagaramati: Could you relate it to things like your dreaming. In a sense when you're dreaming you've got a human consciousness but it's not self-conscious as in your waking state, it's in a sense the same process that comes into the dreaming state.

Virananda: so any sentient form of life will have consciousness but it will also have this embryonic self-reflexive consciousness then? Any form of sentient life, it will have consciousness, it will have vijnana, but it will also have in embryonic [165] form at least self-reflexive consciousness.

S: The chain of the twelve nidanas seems to apply to human beings. It is not a sort of general evolutionary explanation. It seems to apply to the rebirth of, well let's say intelligent beings, which will include gods and men, **possibly** some higher animals. Though of course this is interpretation because the tradition doesn't see it in that way because they didn't have a sort of evolutionary theory such as we have.

Virananda: But at the same time those twelve nidanas are represented as on the outside of a whole system ...

S: But there's another point that one can only speak of let's say rebirth, if there is in a manner of speaking an individual to be reborn. I mean using popular language and not getting muddled about the atman and all that sort of thing, so you can't have an individual rebirth for something which is essentially collective, and lower forms of life are collective rather than individual, do you see what I mean?

Tejamati: Like ants, insects?

S: Plants.

Virananda: What about hell-beings?

S: Well where have they come from? *[pause]* Well they've come from the human realm haven't they? They are intelligent, they are intelligent beings.

Sagaramati: In terms of the niyamas, this is something that can relate to the karma-niyama. Whereas the collective relates to the below the karma-niyama.

S: Right, yes. For instance I remember in discussion with a Sinhalese monk friend of mine in Calcutta in the early fifties, he was a science student, he was a bhikkhu from Colombo I think, we became quite good friends, we had some good discussions, he used to love intellectual discussions. So there were several of us together one day, and this bhikkhu had just been attending a science lecture, so he said to me 'does the amoeba have karma?' You may have heard this one before, 'does the amoeba have karma?' So I thought, and I said I put a counter-question, 'does the amoeba have consciousness, does it have individualised consciousness?', because only then can the karma arise.

Kulamitra: Does this go back to what we were saying the other day, [166] that in a way consciousness is a very broad term. On the one hand it can encompass individual consciousness, and on the other hand it is almost like it can encompass the biological; and we talk about sentient life as if it all had a consciousness in the same sense.

S: I think one might say that in Pali, the word that is used more often for what **we** would call 'consciousness', or where we would use 'consciousness' is sanna, because there is a classification of beings according to whether there is, well what we would call one body and several consciousnesses, or a number of bodies and one consciousness, and the term here as far as I can remember is sanna, not chitta.

Virananda: How do you spell that?

S: S-a-n-n-a with two little wavy lines over the 'n'. It is the same word ... yes one could say 'consciousness'. It is the same word as occurs in the five skandhas.

Sagaramati: You called it a 'recognition', it's more 'recognition'...

S: Perhaps in the context of the skandhas it takes on a slightly different shade of meaning. And it occurs as one of the *arupalokas* doesn't it? ... or in the term for one of the *arupalokas*.

Kulamitra: I don't know if this is right, but I remember, it struck me that in this Buck's '*Cosmic consciousness*' he talks about firstly percepts, then receipts, then concepts. Things that can perceive don't necessarily have the ability to conceive, and presumably it is only when you can actually conceive that in a sense there is an individualised ...

S: Yes because only then can you conceive yourself. You don't **perceive** yourself (word unclear), do you, but you conceive yourself.

Sagaramati: The one's much more creative, one's a concept and the others more active.

Kulamitra: On the animal level, the percepts can get quite complex but still not attain to the level of concepts, like rats running through a maze and things like that.

S: They can work out problems even, can't they?

Kulamitra: But even though it's quite complex....

S: They can learn quite quickly so it seems.

Kulamitra: Sometimes it almost gives the illusion of consciousness in an [167] individualised sense.

Sagaramati: They are doing experiments now with mirrors. And they've found, I think the orang utan and some other animal; they actually can see in the mirror, they actually recognise what they see in the mirror as actually them, in a rudimentary sense. There's a lot of animals that can't. They might fight it or they might ignore it, but monkeys, some forms of monkeys can definitely see it's them.

S: Well clearly it's the rudiments of self-consciousness. That suggests that ruling consciousness, self-consciousness is not in itself Transcendental. We went into that the other week didn't we? I have read about such experiments but I'm not really at all up to date in them. I don't know what the latest results are.

Sagaramati: ... Sunday Times magazine...

S: Ah.

Jinapriya: Just to clarify that, are we saying that if a being hasn't got individualised consciousness it can't as it were work within the framework of karma? ... traditionally animals aren't included are they as being subject to karma, in terms of the wheel of life and things.

S: Well it's as though there are two sorts of versions of Buddhism; a popular and a sort of not so popular. For instance the Jataka stories mostly are relating popular Buddhism, and it's there you get the stories of animal rebirth and so on. But if, supposing one has thought of a human being as being reborn as an animal, well what would happen? It was almost as though the individualised human consciousness would have disintegrated altogether if that is possible. So in a **sense** it would seem that a human being cannot be reborn

as an animal, or you might only admit the possibility of a human being's human individualised consciousness being degraded to such an extent that it could conceivably sort of reincarnate, to use that term, in one of the more advanced higher animals. But is it really conceivable, say, that a human being could be reborn as an ant? Do you see what I mean? Is that really conceivable? I don't think it is. I mean rebirth into another realm is only conceivable where the two overlap as it were - as in fact the human realm and the higher animal realm do.

Jinapriya: The point I'm trying to clarify is then presumably it's like if an animal, as it were, evolves towards being born ultimately human ...

[168]

S: When you say, 'an animal evolves', does one mean as an individual or the animal species.

Jinapriya: Ah.

Kulamitra: Below a certain level the biological isn't actually complex enough to receive a consciousness in any sense.

S: Again one raises the question: 'what does one mean by 'receive the consciousness'? In what sense, in what manner, on what terms, does an individualised consciousness become associated with a particular physical body. I mean if the two are too far apart can one speak of an embodiment at all? It's as though for there to be an embodiment the individualised consciousness has to be sort of able to use the physical body as an instrument.

Sagaramati: As if it's got to have a subtle body prior to the physical.

S: Yes, right.

Jinapriya: So it would seem that the idea of karma is not generally applicable to the animal realm.

S: It would seem so, yes.

Jinapriya: I must admit (words unclear) found ...

S: In other words you can't really conceive of a human being on account of bad karma being reborn say as a rabbit.

Jinapriya: Or even an animal having the karma to be reborn as a human.

Kulamitra: Sometimes when it's talking about karma, it has got to be volitional action which implies choice doesn't it. If you accidentally step on an ant, it's not karma, if you choose to step on an ant it is. An animal, a low level animal, it doesn't make a choice, it's got no sense of right and wrong to choose between.

S: I think one can see the possibility of choice only in the case of some of the apes, and also perhaps in some animals which have had a close association with human beings, especially some dogs. I think even in the case of cats this doesn't seem to happen. They have associated with human beings longer than dogs have but they don't seem to have the power of choice. You can train, you can teach a dog.

Sagaramati: A dog has got the ability to become attached to you, a cat hasn't.

Jinapriya: This is really amazingly reassuring actually because [169] *[Laughter]* I remember it is a little niggle I have often had at the back of my mind. I remember when I first came along having a ridiculous argument with some certain Order member who seemed somewhat to be advocating that, he'd always put this whole law of karma into question a bit because I just couldn't see how it could ...

S: Some representations of the Wheel of Life do tend to mislead us because in that little segment devoted to the animals, you have got rabbits hopping about, and you've got lions and tigers, which does suggest **you could be reborn there**. I think that is really quite misleading.

Tejamati: So are you saying then that traditionally those sort of animals would not appear in that realm?

S: Well they do appear traditionally, but according to doctrine, I think they shouldn't. It's popular Buddhism, at least that particular segment is popular Buddhism. It's all right for teaching the villagers 'well look, if you don't follow the Teachings you will be reborn as a dog, as a cat, as a cow, as a donkey.' Well maybe it's all right on that level, to keep one on the straight and narrow, just like the Catholic priests who say you'll be reborn in hell. If you smoke cigarettes you'll be reborn in hell, if you look at girls you'll be reborn in hell, if you don't go to mass every Sunday you'll go to hell. Well maybe it's all right on that sort of level - maybe.

Sagaramati: In the Tara practice you are meant to imagine all the beings in the realms chanting the Tara mantra. I just couldn't imagine a sheep *[Laughter]* ...

S: Well there's a lot of human beings I can't imagine chanting the Tara mantra, but you sort of recognise some sort of insipient urge towards Enlightenment in all forms of life, even in a general or evolutionary sense. It's as though that urge is imminent and they are reciting, they are imminently reciting an imminent Tara mantra, you could put it like that. Or just forget about sheep.

Kulamitra: I thought there was a case, somewhere in the Pali Canon, of two people, one of whom was trying to act like a dog, and the other act like a cow, coming to see the Buddha, and each asked about the other one, what would happen to him? And the Buddha saying, 'well if he succeeds in acting like a dog he'll be reborn as a dog, if he succeeds in acting like a cow he'll be reborn as a cow', I mean, I got told this by another Order member. [170]

S: He did say 'if'.

Jinapriya: Ah yes, I think the end of that though is yes, if he succeeds or if he doesn't he'll be reborn in hell.

S: Because of the micchaditthi. So that means he would be reborn in hell in fact, because you couldn't be reborn apparently as a cow. It is as though even if you succeed, if, well what is the result? You will just be reborn as a cow, but if you fail you will... well what does hell represent? - an extreme state of alienation you could say. If as a human being you try to behave as a cow, well you become terribly, terribly alienated, and after death that would be the state that you would be in.

Virananda: If we are talking of a fall from the human to the animal realm as being a fall from individual consciousness to collective consciousness, couldn't we see this as possible say as being reborn, say, as a tribal man, and then from that, going down in that way.

S: Well this raises the question of allegorical interpretation of the different realms depicted in the Wheel of Life. I suppose one can, but that means one interprets them all as referring to this life itself, and mental states experienced in this life itself, and people who give that sort of interpretation of the Wheel of Life are those who are not very happy about believing in rebirth. Even if you leave out the animal realm you've still got the others to be reborn into, including the human realm. I don't think you can have a consistently, or an exclusively allegorical interpretation that rules out rebirth in fact. I don't think that would really be true to Buddhist teaching, however crude and exoteric the popular teaching about rebirth may be.

Vajradipa: All this talk is raising some difficulty in my mind really, because to understand say human beings essentially as consciousness or self-consciousness, and (words unclear) for all sentient life, how do you start making some kind of sense to inanimate life or inorganic life, because that is also not separate as it were?

S: Well what does one mean by 'make sense'? Doesn't the general theory of evolution make sense of it?

Vajradipa: Well even thinking the thing that you are impermanent, everything is in change. There's a way of change which presumably is, what we're doing, is better than other changes. Everything going in more or less the same direction, or is that really a miccha ditthi?

[171]

S: One could say that, and speak of a general overall trend of evolution, culminating, not too anthropomorphically I hope, in man. Man himself not being an absolute culmination, but a stepping stone, so to speak, to something even higher.

Sagaramati: Is there any way of getting rid of the conflict between.... you mention that the spiritual life isn't mechanistic, it's not just a sort of mechanical sort of process, and on the other hand you've got well the idea of evolution which implies that there's.... well you can't help but reify it as some force that has definitely got a direction. So you've got these two extremes; you've got a mechanical one on the one side and a teleological one on the other.

S: I sometimes say, when one speaks of the law of gravitation one doesn't really mean that there is something called the law of gravitation behind objects which actually fall to earth sort of making them fall to earth. I mean language almost obliges us to think in that way, certainly obliges us to speak in that way. We don't really **have** to think in that way, though it requires an effort because it means our thinking would be going against the apparent assumptions of the way we speak.

Kulamitra: So you mean, these laws in a sense are just generalisations from observation, and all you're really saying is that well objects do fall to earth in such a way and biological species do evolve.

S: Yes, biological species do have life and they do develop, they do evolve, and it isn't a purely mechanistic process, but that doesn't mean that there's something called Life, with a capital L, sort of behind the whole process driving it forward. The life is inherent in the process, inseparable from it. I think this is probably the main point in the way of Buddhist philosophy.

Sagaramati: But there does seem to be a direction. It's not fortuitous.

S: Why should that give rise to a problem?

Sagaramati: Er, is it a problem? *[Laughter]*

Kulamitra: All you're saying is that's the way things are.

Sagaramati: There is a difference between an explanation and a description ...

S: There needs to be an explanation of why things should be as they are rather than other ways. In its most basic form, from the point [172] of view of Western philosophy, this is supposed to be the question which Spinoza put to himself, 'why should there be anything in existence rather than that there should be nothing at all?'. Why should there be 'existence' - and there clearly is of some kind - rather than non-existence? Well that's another question, but yes you might say, 'why should there be, what is the reason why there is an evolutionary process, why do lower forms of life develop into higher?'. The assumption is of course that it is not accidental. I think Darwinian evolutionists I think hold that the process is due to, in a manner of speaking, accident. Well that means that there's a negation of philosophy straight away, but assuming one doesn't accept that, well one is justified in asking well why evolution rather than non-evolution? That brings us into questions about the nature of existence, but perhaps one has to ask whether that is in fact a question at all. Or what does one mean by asking that sort of question, in what sense does one ask that sort of question?

Sagaramati: I think when you ask that question you are asking the question: 'what's the purpose of my life?' I mean that is what you are asking, 'why is there existence instead of non-existence', because there seems to be some aim to existence, which is in terms of a better existence.

S: But any statement about the totality of existence, I mean any question about the totality of existence by very definition cannot be answered because you're asking for a ground - even a cause, but if the question is about the totality of existence itself how can there **be** a ground?

Kulamitra: Even if as you suggested in the other session, consciousness was as it were drawing the biological up. I mean even that doesn't give an answer to the question ...

S: Yes, why should there **be** a consciousness and a biological, and why should the one draw the other up? Also one might say, going back to what I've said just before that, that even supposing one takes the view that you cannot ask what is the origin of the totality, because that presupposes something existing apart from everything, and by definition that is included. But that means you're thinking in terms of finite systems, are you justified in thinking in terms of finite systems? Then of course you have to start asking the question well is it possible for my brain to comprehend the nature [173] of existence. Can the subject comprehend the object? It raises questions like that, or is it not really strictly impossible? Or is it really a meaningless question? Is it possible for the subject to know the object? Or a subject to know the totality of all objects? What does such knowledge mean, what does it imply, under what conditions is it possible, what limits does it have? These are the sort of questions that Kant asked. No doubt you are all familiar with the reply he gave. So it does mean that one does begins to get into deep water.

Sagaramati: Couldn't these things be seen as like koans?

S: Well yes, they could indeed. Or one could throw up one's hands in despair and just retell once again the parable of the man wounded by the poisoned arrow - which is a neat way of getting out of such difficulties in beginners' classes.

Kulamitra: It seems to me though Bhante, that there is some point in going so far, especially if you are investigating evolution, if you come to the conclusion deeply enough that well the purpose and the possibilities that you could either develop or not, then that becomes satisfying as a concept. I mean if you really saw that as an insight, that would presumably satisfy you, that that was a real possibility and that that was what you wanted to do.

Sagaramati: I don't think I'd be really satisfied because you are on that level anyway you're not satisfied, and I find that question comes up again and again - it's not a great thing, it doesn't sort of lead me to a hedonistic life or anything like that. I know there is some form of development and it seems the best thing to do so I'll continue, but ...

S: It's not really that there is a reason why one should develop and therefore one does, but it's as though as a human being one's inherent nature is to want to develop, and one fulfills one's nature by developing. And if one fulfills one's nature, or if one is fulfilling one's nature one cannot but be happy because that is what happiness consists in. So it just depends whether you are of a more or less inquiring mind, whether you actually ask well what is the reason why one evolves or wants to evolve or develop. Most people would not even ask the question because, any more than they would question the very nature of their existence, the nature of their being.

[174]

Virananda: Blake and perhaps others like him would say that one of the curses of the society in which we live is that people have adopted a way of looking at the world which makes a distinction between live beings and dead inanimate matter.

S: Buddhism would go even further than that. We've adopted in a manner of speaking a way of looking at the world which is in terms of an exclusive subject and an exclusive object, and all these so called philosophical questions that we have raised so far assume the absolute validity of that distinction.

Virananda: Sorry I didn't follow that, are you saying that there's no validity in that distinction or that Buddhism reinforces the distinction?

S: Well no, supposing, let us say, that Buddhism does, as it does in fact, maintain the non-validity of the distinction between subject and object, if you're asked, or if you raise a question which involves, or the answering of which involves the assumption that the unchanging subject can know the unchanging object or totality of **all** objects, well how can that be regarded really as an ultimate question or an ultimate answer. It is still within the realm of delusion so to speak. So what truth can be expected there? **Is** it possible for instance really for the individual as a sort of separate subject to stand apart from the evolutionary process and consider it as an object and try to find an explanation of it? Is that not a sort of operation which takes place within the subject object framework, and therefore from a Buddhist point of view: the framework of delusion.

Sagaramati: I think the only practical side to that is that it does put you in touch with a sort of mystery of life. You just forget about the mystery of life, but now and again you ask yourself this question ...

Jinapriya: I think that is the emotional base to it isn't it?

Sagaramati: I don't ask myself that question to see how bright I am. It doesn't happen like that.

S: One is asked : 'what makes me tick?' Sometimes it is an interesting question. 'What makes Sagaramati tick?' - the koan for the week. *[Laughter]*

Sagaramati: (Words unclear).

S: OK Let's leave it there. If it hasn't cleared up anything I hope at least it's stirred up the mud! *[Laughter]*

End of Side Two.

[175]

Next Session

S: All right who has any questions on those last sections?

Vairocana: The difficulty I really have is really this thing between meditation and wisdom. I can see how there's more between morality and meditation. It helps to develop skilful mental states. I just can't quite grasp the **nature** of insight really. Whether it's a gradual process or whether one has flashes as you talked about here, of insight. I just can't grasp what it is that is actually happening. Is it a sort of continuous stream all the time that (unclear) gradually pours into, or is it just sort of flashes?

S: Well in a way I think it is an artificial distinction and an artificial difficulty. It rather reminds me of discussions in the field of science, when scientists speak of, I think it's particle theory and wave theory. Well one can speak in terms of particles, one can speak in terms of waves. They're equally valid ways of speaking. In the same way one can speak of continuity; continuity say as between samatha and vipassana. One can also speak in terms of discontinuity between them. Do you see what I mean? The flash seems to suggest discontinuity, but flash is a metaphorical expression so it might be worthwhile just going into it a little bit - what we mean by a **flash** of insight. Perhaps one should try to translate that into non metaphorical terms. If one translates that into non metaphorical terms what does one get? How would one express the metta?

Vairocana: You just see it for an instant I suppose and then afterwards it's like you've got just a memory of that experience. That's the way I would see it.

S: So first of all there is no insight; then for a quite short period there **is** insight and then again there is no insight. This is presumably what one means by a **flash** of insight. But there is more that could be said. What about for instance the **intensity** of the insight for the period for which you do experience it. Flash suggests something very bright in the midst of surrounding darkness. So if one follows the comparison through, if one translates the metaphor into non-metaphorical terms faithfully, it's not just a question of a period preceding insight and then a period of insight and then a period of non-insight. It's a question of a period of insight of some intensity. So what does that suggest? If you have an insight of some intensity, well what does that imply, what does that involve? One might say what makes it intense, and also what makes it almost instantaneous?

Vairadipa: Perhaps it's the actual effect it has upon you.

Dharmananda: Presumably the concentration of your mind in that state is [176] very intense, but that is something that you would build up to, rather than something experienced very instantaneously.

S: Yes.

Sagaramati: I imagine what makes it intense is well it's a bit of a shock - an emotional shock.

S: So why is it a shock?

Dharmananda: Because you haven't seen it before.

S: Not just that, because there are lots of things that you could have not seen before perhaps, but that wouldn't exactly come as a shock.

Sagaramati: It must go so much against your previous way of thinking.

Vajradipa: Reassessing everything.

S: Right. So different. So this would suggest that if the flash of insight or rather let's say for the moment the insight, does represent something completely different, something unaccustomed, something that goes against your whole way of looking at things so far, your whole attitude towards things so far, then the assumption would be, one imagines, that it would be very difficult for you to apprehend that or grasp that. So therefore you'd experience it just for a short time, that it **would** therefore come in a **flash**. Do you see what I mean? Perhaps one can draw a comparison here with dreams. I've made use of this before but you might not have heard of it. One might have had the experience of waking up from a dream and just at the moment of waking up you get a glimpse just for an instant of what you've been dreaming about and it vanishes, and you try with your waking consciousness and your memory to grasp it, but you can't. It's just like some animal has just disappeared; you just saw the tip of its tail disappearing round the corner, or into a hole, and you can't get anything more than that. You know that there's a whole animal there. You know that you only saw the tip of the tail, and in the same way in the dream, you know that there's a whole dream there but you can't grasp it. It's disappeared. You just get the last little bit of it and try as you might it's so different from the experiences of your waking consciousness that your mind, your waking mind, can't grasp it. So it's as though one's insight, which represents, according to Buddhist tradition a sort of experience of the unconditioned, one's mind cannot grasp that. Well in a sense it grasps it but it's just for an instant. It can just no longer grasp it then it just loses it. So therefore we experience this, metaphorically speaking, as a **flash** of insight, and it would seem that that would seem quite well in a way expected, that would be the way that we experience it to begin with. The only way in [177] which it is possible to, so to speak, prolong that flash would be if there wasn't such discrepancy between the whole sort of present trend of our being and the nature of the unconditioned, and this only comes about, one might say, when there is a very firm basis of samatha because this purifies and refines and concentrates the whole being in such a way that it can more easily support the contact with the unconditioned - to speak in those terms. So the experience is not just momentary, one can sustain it at least for a **few** moments; so that it isn't experienced just as an instantaneous flash but as something more than that.

Vairocana: Someone who reached the life of say stream entrant, would it be that they had this sort of continuous stream that's not brilliantly illuminating whereas a fully enlightened person would have the continuous stream but with quite a lot of intensity?

S: Well you see in the case of stream entry, stream entry takes place when the first three fetters are broken. These are two different ways of looking at the same thing. So for those three fetters to be broken there must be a quite sharp, a quite decided experience of say the unconditioned. Otherwise the experience would not have that quite tremendous effect.

Kulamitra: Talking in those terms of a flash. Sort of the impression I get is of someone who.. well you're hit by something out of the blue, something unexpected and therefore it does come as a great shock and a great surprise and it's gone. But what if you began practising meditation without ever having had an insight in that sense and you continue to practise quite well, and quite diligently and you attain the *jhanas* and only then had some experience of insight; would it have quite the same kind of flash-like intensity to it? Or would it seem more like well the way you'd been orientating your life?

S: I would say **not**. No, because even the *jhana* state is mundane. If one proceeds on the basis of distinction between the mundane and the transcendental - conditioned and unconditioned. I mean in a sense it's as different from a samatha state, it's as different, being unconditioned, from a samatha state, a *rupajhana* state or a *rupaloka* state, as it is from a kamaloka state. The difference between the two is insignificant in the context or in relation to the unconditioned but nonetheless it does seem that if one has got this extensive experience of samatha it sort of cushions the shock. It's still a shock but you can sustain it. It doesn't actually knock you right over. You can absorb something, you can be transformed. [178]

Kulamitra: So you said that you could see it as discontinuous or as continuous. So the only sense you could see it as continuous is that you're more able to absorb it. That's the sense in which it is continuous.

S: Yes and no. You could see it as continuous. If for instance you had a very strong experience of samatha and a very light, a very **slight** experience of insight by way of vipassana so that you could hardly tell where the very refined *jhana* experience ended and the very slight vipassana experience began. You see what I mean? And it's as though you take the you take the transcendental in sort of homeopathic doses. That seems sometimes to have to sort of percolate through.

Kulamitra: But those sort of very slight experiences would they have the effect of....

S: Well eventually you might find it very difficult to tell at what point your stream of consciousness so to speak, from being predominantly mundane became predominantly transcendental. You might find it very difficult to pinpoint that but nonetheless there would be such a change over. One could describe that, speak of that process in terms of continuity rather than discontinuity. On the other hand you might have a very decided sort of shock. You might not have done very much meditation but due to some experience of life or another you might have had a quite profound insight experience which might have shaken you quite a lot. I mean someone came to see me not so very long ago when I was in Norfolk and as soon as I saw him it was clear that he had had some sort of shock, and I thought it must be some sort of well, insight experience and this did turn out to be the case and he was in a bit of a sort of state of shock. He hadn't been able to adjust to the experience even intellectually, he hadn't come to grips with it conceptually at all. [pause]

Kulamitra: But would such a person be a stream entrant if they had that experience even though they hadn't come to terms with it.

S: Not necessarily, no. It does seem that for a stream entrant to (be possible) either it must be a tremendous sort of single impact so to speak of the transcendental or a whole series of such impacts increasing in intensity and eventually doing the trick.

Kulamitra: Right. So I mean I usually thought of stream entry as being like your first real contact with the Transcendental, but it's more of a sort of tipping of the scales.

S: Yes because the word **real** itself is ambiguous. Yes but the tipping of the scales does express it quite well. So the scale can be tipped [179] either by a single sort of very heavy weight being placed in one scale or a number of little grains being piled up over quite a long period. So in the first case one would speak more appropriately in terms of discontinuity in the second case more appropriately in terms of continuity.

Vairocana: There's two Eightfold paths. There's the mundane and Transcendental and you don't get on to Transcendental until you are a stream entrant. So I mean to come back the mundane, the mundane say prajna, I think I remember you saying one time that you thought that prajna at that point could be an intelligent understanding of existence. I mean....

S: Well that's more like the second kind of prajna, that is to say the cinta maya prajna. On the basis of what you have heard and learnt you've done some individual thinking, you've grasped the matter intellectually for yourself.

Vairocana: When I think it often arises from quite strong emotional experience that maybe you suffered quite a bit then you came across Buddhism and it's almost as though it's purely coincidental in a way. That you've had this emotional experience so you sort of get onto the path without insight. Do you think for most people.... or I suppose just for that emotional experience that's just coincidental in a way for most people that come into Buddhism. The suffering the fact that they suffer, they just get into Buddhism in that way. Do you think for most people it is an emotional experience or it is insight?

S: You're asking me about how people say come to actually start following a spiritual path. Whether it is an account of some understanding or whether it's an understanding of life - the nature of existence - or whether it's on account of a certain emotional experience. Well clearly with one person it may be the first and with another it may be the second. It may be a combination of the two. One person may come to Buddhism as a result of studying the latest discoveries in modern physics, another as a result of a bereavement.

Vairocana: But could emotional experience be considered perfect vision as well or would it have to have a nature of insight to be perfect vision?

S: Well when one speaks of perfect vision one has gone beyond really that distinction of intellectual and emotional; but in one's initial approach there may be a predominance of emotion or a predominance of thought. And in any case samatha precedes vipassana. Samatha itself represents a sort of degree of integration which would [180] if not completely transcend at least very much soften the distinction between your understanding and emotion, thought and emotion. *[pause]*

Kulamitra: I can't actually find the place in the text now but somewhere you were talking about bare insight. Where does this come in?

S: This comes in in connection with the modern so-called vipassana tradition. Bare insight is sukha vipassana. Sorry sukha vipassana strictly speaking is dry insight and bare insight is one could say sutta

vipassana. Sutta meaning also pure, bare, just mere. Some forms of this tradition hold or at least held that one could have a vipassana experience without samatha, without samadhi. This is not really agreed even by the Theravada tradition, though some of the modern vipassana teachers did maintain that there was a samatha, a samadhi associated with the vipassana but it was momentary only. But it would seem to me, and this is the opinion of most meditation teachers in the East including in Theravada countries, that the idea of a bare or mere vipassana rising without any samatha or samadhi, or simply momentary samatha or samadhi, is really a sort of abhorration, it's a sort of psychological impossibility, not to say a psychological monstrosity. But it seems to me that some of the advocates of the so called vipassana meditation - that is to say some of the more extreme ones - are really confusing insight with intellectual understanding. Otherwise it wouldn't have been possible for them to think that vipassana could arise without samatha.

Virananda: This is not the same as the new Burma method which goes straight from the *jhanas* into insight through respiration mindfulness.

S: No. One has to be careful not to overgeneralise, because this tradition is now represented by a number of different teachers and pupils of teachers and there's quite a wide variety now - say twenty years after I wrote these words - among their approaches and their views in this particular respect. **Some** of them now, not teaching so to speak pure vipassana meditation according to some of the other teachers even introduce metta bhavana which was almost anathema formerly to these sort of teachers. So it is to some extent a difference of degree. Samatha sometimes gets smuggled in somehow, though theoretically it's not supposed to be present. I mean the so called New Burman Satipatthana, yes, did advocate mindfulness; mindfulness of the movements of the body, respiration and so on, but certainly not to the point of samadhi and not to the point of (unclear). They didn't hold that that was necessary.

Sagaramati: Is that the technique that Goenka teaches?

[181]

S: Yes Goenka seems to teach a modified version of the technique. He is one of those who does teach or allow the metta bhavana. Significantly at least formerly - I'm not quite sure what the position is now - any devotional practices were not allowed. They weren't allowed in these vipassana centres.

Sagaramati: Did he have a definite reason?

S: Well they believe that, they were concerned with the development of vipassana, and they believed that things like devotion, like samatha were quite irrelevant, belonging to a much lower stage and they believed that one needed to produce vipassana directly without sort of wasting one's time with things like metta and devotion and sraddha and repeating mantras or offering flowers and all the rest of it. But in theory one could say that's all right but they seemed to have ended up, in almost all cases, with just a theoretical understanding of, well, the Abhidharma virtually. And also they didn't just sort of study if you see what I mean, They weren't theoretical in that sense. I mean they also did things. For instance they deprived themselves - or the teachers deprived their pupils of sleep for long periods and they did these mindfulness exercises in a certain way. That set up various repercussions, various psycho-physical repercussions, and these they tended to interpret as spiritual experiences. I think perhaps I have to find out what exactly these newer vipassana teachers are now teaching, because as I have said some of them have modified and maybe it would be useful to find out what exactly is happening now. Some undoubtedly do continue teaching the system in the old very vigorous sort of way but others again don't. Also I think this approach appeals to the pseudo-scientific approach to Buddhism. You discard the specifically as it were religious features. You don't have to even be a Buddhist for instance. You don't have to commit yourself to the spiritual life. You

can just approach it as a sort of psychological exercise. You're not even obliged to be emotionally positive or to experience metta or sraddha and so on. And this is justified as a sort of direct approach to the unconditioned.

Jinapriya: Often people come to Buddhism as it were because they do have an insight experience themselves, but in what way - I mean that wouldn't be built on samatha though, would it?

S: One has to be careful that one doesn't use the word insight or insight experience **loosely**. One could say using non-technical language they have a certain understanding, they've see life in a particular way, they see a bit more clearly or a bit more straight than people usually do. That doesn't necessarily mean that they've had [182] an insight experience in the full traditional Buddhist technical sense.

Jinapriya: The Insight with a capital 'I' is into the Transcendental as it were.

Tejamati: Could you say what an insight is then in the full traditional Buddhist sense?

S: Well, in the traditional sense it's an insight into, that is to say understanding of, dukkha, anicca, anatta and no doubt asubha as well, as I've set it out in 'The Three Jewels'. In more Mahayanic terms of course it would be an understanding, a prajna experience, so to speak, of sunyata. In Yogachara terms of the one mind.

Tejamati: So anything less than that you would consider to be a small insight, a little insight.

S: Yes. Of course you can have initial letters of varying sizes or you can have details of one small one and one big one. Do you see what I mean?

Jinapriya: But it's the one with a capital 'I' that must be based on samatha.

S: Yes, yes.

Vajradipa: There's something very interesting in what we've just been saying, that insight can occur for different people for different reasons.

S: Yes.

Vajradipa: But the ones that are more emotionally based is quite different to that which is more intellectually based. It seems like the flick over is easier for one person in one area than in another. Is that actually true?

S: Perhaps also one should be careful not to speak of insight being based in this or that way so much as of finding expression in this or that way. Supposing one speaks in terms of insight experience, well insight, this is a bit sort of cognitive. The terminology is cognitive to begin with. It could just as well be a more sort of emotive terminology. So it's not so much that you approach the Transcendental either from the intellectual angle or from the emotional angle. Once you've **had** the experience of the transcendental it's as it were the whole person that experiences it. You don't experience it just with your intellect or just with your emotions. It's so to speak the **whole** of you that experiences it. It's a total experience. It affects **all** of you. But then in accordance with your temperament, your cultural background and so on you **may** express it in [183] predominantly cognitive or predominantly emotional terms. It's not that the experience itself, the

insight experience itself, has either a sort of intellectual or an emotional basis. It isn't in any case a one-sided sort of thing in that kind of way.

Kulamitra: There is something here which is called Apana samadhi which is translated attainment concentration. Is that the same as insight?

S: Oh no. After the samadhi is this full samadhi. Here one distinguishes between the upachara samadhi or neighbourhood concentration, when you are as it were let's say half way between your ordinary conscious state and a jhana state. Apana samadhi refers to being fully in the state of jhana which I think one could take as meaning fully into the *rupaloka* as distinct from the kamaloka.

Jinapriya: On page 150 of the old edition you make a reference to the two types of samadhi depending on whether they are karmically wholesome or karmically unwholesome. Now you elucidate the karmically wholesome but I wondered what you meant by karmically unwholesome.

S: Well this is samadhi in the ordinary sense of concentration. The illustration which is usually given, by Buddhaghosa for instance, is that of a cat watching a mouse hole. I mean here the concentration, the samadhi, is associated with strong feelings of greed or hatred or delusion or any combination of those. That would be regarded as unskilful.

Jinapriya: Presumably that would only be the intensity of neighbourhood concentration because *jhana* is presumably.... that can only be with states of skilfulness.

S: Yes. I mean the more concentrated the mind becomes which means the more integrated, the more skilful it also becomes and vice-versa. Lama Govinda has gone into this quite well in 'Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy'. He explains how or shows how the higher one rises in the scale of consciousness the fewer are the mental factors involved. It is not so much that consciousness becomes progressively more impoverished, it's more that the elements of the consciousness are blended more and more harmoniously so it becomes more and more difficult to isolate those elements as distinct phenomena.

Jinapriya: Could you repeat the title again?

S: 'The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy'. Sagaramati is **well** acquainted with it. He might even be persuaded to take a study group on it.

[184]

Sagaramati: It would take a few months.

S: The early chapters are a bit dated but the main body of the book is very useful.

Sagaramati: I've got a question on ethics. It's to do with sex.

S: Well sex has got nothing to do with ethics.

Sagaramati: Yeah, well this is what I mean. It says like the Arahant is such is one incapable of behaving in nine ways, to wit theft, lying, intoxication - they are easy to understand in being unskilful in themselves, but it says not practising the sexual act. The sexual act to me is a neutral thing.

S: Well this was a point which was discussed in the early days of Buddhism. There is some record I think of that discussion in the (Kathabaktu?) the so called points of controversy. Some monks at that time did hold that the arahant was capable of seminal emission and considered it to be the result simply of eating and drinking without there being any unskilful mental state present.

Sagaramati: I mean it's easy to see how lying or thieving, I can understand that's an unskilful mental state because you actually.. to me the basis of morality is

S: Although again even there one has to be careful. There is the classic instance, all right supposing someone is chasing another person with intent to kill him and you are asked by that person who is chasing where has that other person gone, well if you said he's gone there when in fact he's gone there does that count as a lie. Or even if it **is** technically a lie in the sense of being not a statement of fact, is it unskilful? So therefore there is not even **that** hard and fast distinction between that particular precept and the one that you are asking me about.

Sagaramati: I can understand what the other precepts are an expression of. Fundamentally the principle is you're not going to cause harm to any living being, but I don't see that having sex with someone is actually causing any harm to them. I don't see what it is an expression of except conventional morality, I don't see how the sexual act is basically unskilful because I can see how the others could be. I can understand the principle behind them.

S: Or perhaps one should put it in another way and say that the sexual act as it is usually experienced is almost always accompanied by unskilful mental states to such an extent in fact that for all practical purposes we have to regard the sexual act itself as being unskilful. In other words the idea of a sexual act which **is** [185] skilful is so remote from people's usual experience. You might perhaps conceive of some bodhisattva-like figure engaging in the sexual act with only skilful intentions but it's almost impossible to envisage the - it **is** impossible to envisage the ordinary person. Do you see what I mean? Because there is certainly desire, there is certainly craving. I think a good test in this respect is the question of jealousy. Well we know that in the case of sexual relations jealousy is something that very very easily arises, so if that factor is present or if there is a possibility of that factor being present well clearly the sexual relation itself is unskilful. Though perhaps you might say if you come back at me quickly enough well I've slightly changed the subject that we're discussing because there is not just a sexual act but a sexual relationship, but perhaps it doesn't make all that much difference. One could certainly say that if a series of sexual acts with one and the same person link up in such a way as to constitute a sexual relationship, I think sexual jealousy is bound to arise with 99.9 people out of a hundred and to that extent the relationship is unskilful or at least contains a highly unskilful element. There is also while we are looking at it, there is the element of unawareness. In some ways that's strange that the sexual act is usually an experience of some intensity but at the same time it's an experience of unawareness. One is as it were carried away; in a sense one doesn't know what one is doing, and once a certain point has been reached one is no longer able to restrain oneself so one loses self control, one goes **out** of control, so can that be skilful? And if there is any possibility even or even any suggestion that the act is going to be interrupted, the reaction then would be one of extreme anger or even hatred. So that suggests that the act is of an unskilful nature. So I think you'd have to be really put to it to make out a case for the sexual act being even neutral, except perhaps in the case of advanced bodhisattvas, so where does that leave one?

Sagaramati: If one isn't an advanced bodhisattva.

S: Am I being too rigorous or does anybody disagree with this?

Virananda: I was just wondering how do you answer the question someone might make the point that we need a certain amount of unawareness. It's not as silly as it sounds in fact, because we need to sleep say, the state of relative uncontrol. If we don't get sleep we go to pieces, we need sleep.

End of Side One Side Two

Does that make the sleep state itself not neutral, i.e. unskilful?

S: Well the sleep state itself is **not** a state of unawareness, it's a state of unawareness in terms of the so called normal waking state but [186] what about dreams?

Sagaramati: But if you can't recall your dreams could you say that you were possibly aware whilst you were dreaming?

S: Oh yes! Because you can be aware in respect of things, or you could **have** been aware in respect of things that you have now forgotten. The fact that you cannot remember an incident now does not mean that at the time of the incident you were not aware. It's the same with dreams.

Sagaramati: I always associate - if I can't recall an incident where I have been particularly aware - I always tend to think that I wasn't really very conscious.

S: Ah that is certainly true on the level of waking consciousness, but that doesn't apply to dreams because in fact it may be the other way round because your dream experience may have been of such intensity but on the other hand of such a different order that the waking consciousness is unable to grasp it and that therefore one as it were forgets it.

Virananda: Which you couldn't make that kind of claim for an intense experience of sex in that same way. The waking consciousness can't actually grasp it. *[Laughter]*

S: Ah, but then yes there are two things here - one can not grasp something because it has gone out of your reach and is gone beyond your reach, or as it were sunk below it. Do you see what I mean? Because one isn't as it were sort of conscious of an excess of light at such times so much as sort of being overwhelmed with darkness. Well even in metaphorical terms that is what one experiences.

Virananda: Well you see that's so often the metaphor one has of sleep. It's more thought of in terms of being overwhelmed by darkness rather than light. That's the popular metaphor for it, and yet we do seem to need this sleep state. It seems to be, it's there for our health.

S: So are you arguing that the unskilful, unconsciousness of sex is necessary for as it were psychical well being?

Virananda: Well there seems to be a case. I'm not attached to that argument in the slightest. I'm just presenting it. I wondered how it would be dealt with. You have dealt with it to some extent. I'm just continuing on.

S: But there is also the question for instance, well all right supposing [187] you need these sort of periods of rest let us say, for psychical health, well there is meditation, which by definition is a state free from

unskilful elements, unskilful factors. One might say well in the case of sex if admittedly unskilful factors like jealousy, possessiveness, anger, hatred are involved, can that be really described as rest? It seems a state of **un**rest rather than rest. Or is one referring merely to the experience of some people of sort of discharge of accumulated tension.

Sagaramati: I read somewhere in a book by, is it (Janof?), the man who wrote 'the Primal Scream', and he was saying that people had certain tensions, physical tensions round the genital areas and the sexual activity was like something they had to fulfil, but after they had this catharsis the tensions disappeared and the sexual activity was not so important. It was if the tension of the way in which they were living actually stirred them up sexually. They felt they had to release the tension and the way to do that was through sex.

Jinapriya: Would you probably agree that quite a lot if not most of the so-called sexual tension is psychologically based rather than a physical animal based (thing)?

S: It would seem so. One can observe animals in this connection. One can observe for instance people living as a lot of people live in villages where there's, for various social and cultural reasons, a minimum of external stimulus. They seemed not to be troubled the way that people living in a place like London are.

Kulamitra: I mean we seem to have gone from what an arahant might do to what we might do but surely if you're talking in terms of tensions and if you're talking in terms of losing awareness in sleep presumably these are also areas in which an arahant has transcended.

S: It is of course said of the Buddha that he did not sleep in the ordinary sense. I don't remember any statement to the effect that the arahant also does not sleep in the ordinary sense. I think most people who might have considered the subject might conceive that the arahant's consciousness is as it were slightly shaded from time to time or slightly shadowed from time to time but no more than that.

Jinapriya: Somewhere in the scriptures doesn't the Buddha say that the arahant's Enlightenment is no less than his own?

S: This introduces another subject altogether. There are some texts of the Pali Canon, yes, which do say that but again there are others [188] according to which it would seem that the Buddha has attained a state, whatever that may be, which transcends the state of the arahant.

Jinapriya: I mean certainly he's done it on his own and it would seem well he's done it and they didn't do that but whether that means there is a qualitative difference.

S: Well there are texts which support a qualitative difference as well as a difference in what I call the external relations of Enlightenment.

Kulamitra: Getting back to ethics. Another area that I found a little difficult to understand the real meaning of is the extra precepts which can be taken along with the five precepts - that is abstaining from untimely food, from dancing, singing, instrumental music etc., large lofty beds, and in particular the large and lofty beds has me absolutely baffled. I mean **why** should it be unskilful?

S: Well what do you think the Buddha, if one can attribute these precepts to the Buddha, was getting at? Bearing in mind cultural conditions. *[pause]* Well put it in this way, if you go to India even today, certainly say the South of India do people normally sleep on beds, any kind of beds?

Kulamitra: Well no, I suppose not.

S: No! So to sleep on a bed therefore in that sort of context would be what? Say a bed provided with mattresses and pillows etc., etc.

Virananda: It might be more comfortable. *[Laughter]*

S: But ethically speaking?

Jinapriya: Putting on airs and graces.

S: No not just that.

Tejamati: it's coterminous with the holy life.

S: Yes, a bit more than that. It's **luxurious**. You see when I was in South India I found the ordinary Hindus **never** used a mattress, never slept on a bed. They slept on a **reed mat** on the floor. No more than a **reed mat**. That was the most common way of sleeping. I mean the idea of sleeping up on a bed with a mattress - even one only half an inch thick, and a pillow - for them represented luxury; and supposing it was a very big bed, very broad so that you could sprawl out on it etc., etc, well this would be regarded as **extremely** luxurious, and that is what it was like in the Buddha's time. So it's not just a question of using a bed of a particular size and shape - it's suggestive of a comfortable, even luxurious way of life which is [189] quite inappropriate for one trying to lead a spiritual life. But what constitutes luxury may vary from one culture and one climate to another, but that is the principle that is involved here.

Kulamitra: So you're stepping down from the five precepts which seem to be quite universal in their application to something much more specific to that time and culture.

S: Yes these ten precepts are to be observed by the sramanera and there are eight - actually nine because when you draw up a list of eight two out of the ten are combined into one - so actually it's nine that you have. These are observed under the strict Theravada system by upasikas and upasakas on full moon days and so on.

Kulamitra: What would be the equivalent here? I mean presumably the idea was that you extend your practice.

S: A more simple life. A more mindful life. A life less directed to the satisfaction of unskilful desires.

Kulamitra: So could you say that say this is the sort of thing you try to do on solitary retreat? To actually extend yourself.

S: I think I would be inclined to interpret this if one retakes the precept at all in a very broad sense as indicating a very simple life. Making do, if that is the term, with a minimum of material possessions and comforts and luxuries and so on. I mean how far we should take that, that's another matter. Where does reasonable comfort end and self indulgence and luxury begin? And clearly the nature of the climate needs to be taken into consideration. In India all you need usually is a cotton shirt. You need more than that here, so more than that in this climate does not represent luxury, it represents a necessity. All right within the

context say of a spiritual life here in the west and within the FWBO what sort of things would be luxuries, the sort of things that presumably one should be trying to rule out?

Vairocana: Colour television sets and things like that.

S: Well even a colour television set, would it necessarily be a luxury? Supposing that you just watched selected programmes which were of some interest, even **value** from a cultural and spiritual point of view, would that television set necessarily be a luxury, especially if you didn't buy one of your own but shared the community one? Would it necessarily be a luxury?

Vairocana: No.

S: Not necessarily. Again surely one must relate it to other needs and obviously one can think in terms of meeting what might under some [190] circumstances be luxuries, only when needs - your own and those of your dependants - have already been met. So what would be a real luxury?

Jinapriya: Quite complicated food dishes and things like that.

S: Yes right.

Sagaramati: Sweets.

S: Sweets.

Jinapriya: Three types of breakfast cereal.

S: Well what **is** a luxury? How would you **define** a luxury? Perhaps that will make it clearer.

Vairocana: Well something that you don't really need.

Jinapriya: Well the need is presumably based on unskilful psychological overtones.

S: Because a second car very often is a luxury. Certainly a third car.

Kulamitra: It's sort of an area of indulgence of yourself isn't it. I mean sort of getting a taste of something which might initially be justified as a need but extending that just because you've got a taste for it and you want more and more and more.

S: For instance you might need a suit. Say, to take a specific example, if you as chairman of the LBC you might need a suit for certain purposes, but supposing you were to have a dozen suits, well that might be considered as a luxury because you don't really need a dozen, if one or two or at the most three would be enough. But if you had a dozen well that would no doubt be an indulgence. They would be luxuries. Or for instance supposing you wanted say to furnish this room or if the community wanted to furnish it, well clearly settees and things like that have got to be upholstered, but supposing you were to buy some very expensive tapestry, well that within the context of your life here, that would be luxurious surely.

Kulamitra: Well people in expensive houses have gold-plated bathrooms. Nagabodhi said in the Maharani of Jaipur's palace she had a gold plated toilet seat, which is ludicrous really.

Jinapriya: It's a demonstration of wealth really.

S: I hope Nagabodhi's got a photograph of himself sitting on it! *[Laughter]* I met him the following day, or I met him the following day, after his visit to the Maharani and he seemed quite overwhelmed by the experience. I don't know whether it was an **insight** experience but he was certainly overwhelmed! *[Laughter]*

[191]

Virananda: On this same page that Kulamitra got the precepts from I noticed further up you run through the ten precepts. I was wondering where harsh speech had got to.

S: I think it was dropped out, if I remember rightly. That was one of the things we established in Tuscany. It just dropped out.

Virananda: It's on page 128 *[pause while page numbers are compared in the different editions]*

Kulamitra: This that I just quoted. I think I found another on page 141. *[pause]*

Sort of following on a bit from the whole thing, well what constitutes luxury and what you can actually do without, it seemed to me that probably towards the end of the sila section, going into mindfulness, that there's quite strong emphasis on the monastic lifestyle as the only real basis for meditation practice and just going through quite a few paragraphs I felt that. Do you still feel that that is the case?

S: Well what does one mean by monastic lifestyle? I think maybe that has to be clarified first.

Sagaramati: Again a very simple straightforward life. *[pause]*

S: Not only that. A monastic life or lifestyle is a life or lifestyle that is very definitely oriented in a particular direction. It's got a very definite purpose and therefore it's a purposeful life. It's not a life that consists of just responses to whatever comes up. You're much more sort of in charge of your life. In the case of most people they've got into a certain pattern - maybe they've got a job, wife, family and so on, so that pattern being established well how do they react to other things? They react in a quite sort of casual way; not in accordance with any principle but according with the feeling, the need or the greed of the moment. There's no overall objective towards which they are working, and in the light of which they scrutinise the various experiences or possibilities of experience that come their way. Do you see what I mean? I mean for instance if you are a person living in that sort of way and you travel on the Underground and you saw those advertisements beside the escalator, well you just let your mind wander after them and think well maybe it would be nice to have a holiday there, or it would be nice to have an affair with a girl like that etc., etc. But if you were living so to speak a monastic life, you would sort of guard your senses much more, in traditional terms, and you wouldn't allow your mind to wander in that sort of way because you'd be bearing in mind what your real objective was - that you were trying to develop as a human being, you were trying to become more of an individual. [192] You'd be keeping your self, your energies, your forces, your interests much more together. Do you see what I mean? And any sort of extra, ethical silas, rules that you observe, would be not for their own sake but to help you achieve that end. So one might say that the monastic life is essentially a life in which one's energies and activities are systematically geared to what you recognise as being the ultimate goal. You don't respond to phenomena just at random, in accordance with your instincts to your conditioning. That's the **real** distinction, not whether you are

ordained or whether you wear a yellow robe etc, etc. The spiritual life one might say, by its very nature, is monastic in **this** broader sense.

Virananda: It strikes me that the following of phenomena is the same as what's so-called following fashion and so much people just spend all their time following the latest trend or fashion. Following the news, following fashions in dress, eating and lifestyle.

S: All that is say detrimental to your own personal integrity. Your integrity as an individual. You can feel yourself being sort of nibbled at all the time and carried away.

Virananda: It's a fact that almost every area of our life nowadays is dictated by fashions or it can be....

S: Even fashions in poetry.

Virananda: Oh indeed yes, and you can be quite unaware of them and think well I'm writing good poetry because it's the same as A, B and C who are established or just in fashion maybe.

S: This is sort of one aspect of what I feel about what I've called 'pseudo-liberalism'. A lot of people I think who are caught up in pseudo-liberalism don't realise that they are caught up in the fashion. They seem to feel that well they're into the truth as it were, a sort of timeless truth, but actually it's just a sort of fashion, and they don't realise that. I mean you could think that you were being very progressive when you're just making as it were real progress or represent really progressive elements in society, culture - you're merely just following a fashion and it may not represent any real advance at all!

Sagaramati: It's an assumption if it's modern and it's the latest it's actually better.

S: Yes right. This is the old delusion of progress that 'later than therefore better than'. I mean this has received a bit of a knock in recent times but there's still that way of looking at things, isn't there. Well this is the latest, so well this is the best. Latest means best. Though [193] people are perhaps feeling rather puzzled by the fact that well we don't seem to be producing better musicians than Bach, Mozart, Haydn and so on. We ought to be really, but in the arts it doesn't really work like that. The best seem to come at the **beginning** rather than at the end. *[Laughter]*.

Kulamitra: But even given that that's the kind of view of what a monk really is you have still got the question of well different situations within which to try and be or become like that. I mean householder bodhisattvas and philosopher kings are very rare. Well I was wondering in a way whether... more like the lifestyle that we do associate with a vicar in the good sense. Not just that internally he's quite directed but externally he's living a very simple life. He doesn't have so many things to guard his senses against really. Whether this is really an essential support for deep meditation practice.

S: It does seem that it is to begin with, especially in the case of people who by nature or by temperament are more susceptible to external impressions. It does seem that some people are more than others, less susceptible, and therefore it does seem that some people need, in order to get really into meditation, which means into really altered states of consciousness for some time, need to place themselves in those circumstances or under those conditions where there won't be more than say a minimum of stimulation. And we know that this is what happens when people go on a solitary retreat or go to Vajraloka even on an ordinary retreat. I think it's common knowledge now. That is why a mixed retreat seems to be a contradiction in terms. I mean I think the only way in which one can justify mixed retreats is for the sake of

new people, new friends, beginners who would feel perhaps uneasy coming to any other kind of retreat so that in the long run it helps involve them in the spiritual life. Otherwise I don't think one could really justify mixed retreats. Am I treading on dangerous ground? Any mute disagreement? *[pause]*

Let me say something which is probably going to be a bit controversial. It's going back to Sagaramati's question or topic at least, about sex, and it arises to some extent out of this question of the mixed situation and the mixed retreat. One **could** argue a case for it being not so much a question of sex as of woman. This is where we get onto controversial ground. Do you see what I mean?

Jinapriya: No I don't. Can you explain that further.

Vairocana: Feminine aspects of yourself that you

[194]

S: No, no.

Kulamitra: Do you mean that there are more likely to be more unwholesome states of mind associated with women rather than with men?

S: Well put it this way. I have said even years and years ago that if sex grew on trees there probably wouldn't be anything wrong with it. Do you see what I'm getting at?

Voice: No.

S: Well let's put it this way. Let's be a little bit sort of controversial, and Sagaramati will have to be a bit careful who he lends this tape to. In the course of say ordinary sexual, well let's say experiences, relationships, well what are the two main factors? What are the two things mainly that happen? I'm speaking within the context of the predominant heterosexuality. Well put it this way. Through sex what do you come into contact with?

Jinapriya: How you meet someone, do you mean?

S: No to put it quite simply, quite basically through sex what do you experience? In the first place?

Tejamati: Your desires, your cravings?

S: We won't make it moralistic, well just sex, yeah, that's the first thing. What's the second thing that you experience?

Sagaramati: Attachment.

Jinapriya: Your body?

S: No, that can come at a later stage, or may come at a later stage. Well it involves you with other people, another person. Maybe this is so basic we tend to overlook it or at least don't consciously consider it. So within the normal heterosexual framework of things well that means you're involved with what or with whom?

Jinapriya: A woman.

S: Yes. So I think in a way that these are, in a way, two distinct things - that the experience of sex, and **through** the experience of sex becoming involved with women. Now when you become say involved with other people - let's leave the specific case of women out of it for the time being - what happens? If you become deeply involved with other people in any way what happens? What is likely to be the effect upon you?

Kulamitra: They will have an influence on you.

S: So if you involved through sex with women, well what will be the result of that?

Voices: (Unclear)

S: So then one might ask is it desirable that women should have an influence on you or very much of an influence on you. What is the **nature** of that influence?
[195]

Jinapriya: That they've got something that you want and therefore you're likely to behave in an acceptful [sic] way so that you can get what you want.

S: In other words they will gain influence over you, even power over you. Though of course it works the other way round too, because after all you've got something that they want. But anyway we can go a little bit farther than that. Is there any sort of conflict, could one say, between what women generally want and what men generally want? I mean apart from sex. Or is there any difference in their outlook upon life that one sees?

Voice: I would say there is.

S: There is. Well what would you say was the nature of that difference?

Kulamitra: I find it very difficult to define. I mean I know there is one and in a way I do know what it is and in a way for that reason I know what you are getting at, but I find it quite difficult to define. I mean there is a difference in outlook and therefore there is sort of a difference in the influence that they have over you as opposed to influence that you have over them, because well your two different outlooks - those are the influence. The outlook is the influence I think.

Sagaramati: The thing with women that I've noticed is that I think that women like to keep things as they are. There's a sort of tendency to continuity of something whereas the men sort of like change.

S: I think there's broad truth in that. Clearly this is or would be regarded as a controversial area. But presuming for the sake of argument that women do like to keep things as they are and that they are therefore conservative and think perhaps more in terms of security, that means that through your sexual relationship with them you are brought under that sort of influence. So would that be desirable from the spiritual point of view?

Jinapriya: No.

S: So you see what I am getting at - that the experience of sex as such may, well let's say for sake of argument may, not be detrimental to your spiritual life but the fact that that experience brings you into contact with women with a particular attitude towards life, and brings you under their influence, that may be even more detrimental.

Kulamitra: But is it necessary for the one to lead to the other? It seems to me that you don't have to allow yourself to be influenced in that way.

[196]

S: Oh yes. Well can you pluck the rose without being scratched by the thorns? Some people are quite clever and can do that. Some get scratched by the thorns and don't get the rose! *[Laughter]*

Jinapriya: It's to know what you can do in that context isn't it. I think there's a great tendency to kid yourself that you can pluck the rose without getting scratched.

Kulamitra: But it does seem to fit with what you were saying in one of the earlier ones, about the position of man and woman, relatively speaking, in a general way in your hierarchy of mind, and I'd have thought that there is at least a case within that to be made that, yes, obviously if a woman is actually lower in that hierarchy of life than the man that she's having a relationship with, it would be very bad spiritually for him to be affected by that and effectively brought down. But the other possibility does seem to be there, that if you know the man actually had more of an influence in that situation it would have the effect of drawing the woman in that situation up, which would be a positive thing.

S: Yes oh yes I agree.

Kulamitra: And it seems to me what's really essential in that situation is that if that is the case that in that particular situation there is a sort of rough up and down relationship in that way, that it implies that the attitudes that you have are the more spiritual as it were, and that if they are you should not lose touch with those. You should remain **based** in those and have an influence and in a way that applies in your relationships with anybody; that you need when you do come into a relationship with some people who are more advanced and some who are less advanced than you....

S: For example let's leave aside the specifically sexual framework; I had the experience some time ago of observing somebody who did eventually become an order member and his relations with other people - not relationships just relations with other people - and I noticed, this is some years ago, that he didn't want to be under anybody's influence. He wanted to be quite independent. I'm not saying that was positive or negative but anyway that was his attitude, so he seemed to me to select for his friends people who were definitely in some way inferior or his junior that he could take under his wing and not be influenced by. They had no control over him. But I noticed an interesting thing. That as time went on he would tend to become dependent on that other weaker person and eventually come under their control *[Laughter]* at least to some extent under certain circumstances.

[197]

Do you see what I mean. So this is something that one needs to watch generally - that the stronger does not through some kind of weakness become dependent actually on the weaker partner. But to come back to the sort of original situation that we are discussing, it would seem therefore that if - granting all our various

assumptions - if there is this sort of danger in man associating, especially via sex, with woman what could one say of man associating with man? That is to say the individual man with other men, especially those with whom a spiritual ideal was shared; would that have so to speak a weakening or a strengthening effect?

Sagaramati: Well it depends what they did when they were together doesn't it.

S: No, don't forget the overall context is the heterosexual context. I'm leaving the other things out of the picture. All right supposing that an individual man associates with other individual men, especially on the basis of a common spiritual ideal - does that have a weakening or a strengthening effect?

Kulamitra: Comparatively strengthening.

S: Comparatively strengthening, so therefore it would seem - maybe this might seem paradoxical to some - the more you see of women the more you need to see of men. Do you see what I mean? Well you might say all right, if you are involved, say via sex, with a woman well all right maybe no harm but you need perhaps to be all the more careful that you are keeping up your friendships, your relationships, with other men, not just in a matey sort of masculine way but with those men with whom you share a common spiritual ideal; whereas we very often don't see, we very often see that a man's sexual relationship with a woman, say within the context of the Friends, very often takes him away from his men friends and more as it were under the influence of the woman. So that is the sort of thing that you need to guard against. Therefore one might say that from a spiritual point of view **perhaps**, and just being a bit provocative, one could probably only safely have a sexual relationship with a woman if one lives in a men's spiritual community *[Laughter]* because that as it were guarantees - well not guarantees but at least there is the possibility of - your being so to speak under an influence stronger than the influence that the woman may exert upon you.

Kulamitra: It also gives you, I mean just in an ordinary sense, it gives you a situation within which that influence doesn't have any... the influence doesn't go into your community. When you go into your community that influence ceases.

[198]

S: Yes I think that is why it is important not to have women entering men's communities. I think - I don't know whether this is controversial at present - that the situation should be kept undiluted. I don't think it works quite the same way around in the case of women's communities actually, because I have certainly seen that certain women have benefited from certain contact with men, even sexual contact, benefited even spiritually, at least to some extent. I don't think I can say that I have noticed it happening the other way around - no. I've certainly seen one or two - well two - women Mitras benefiting from their overall contact with men Order members even though that includes a sexual element. I mean I can't deny that yes they benefited from that contact but I haven't seen it happening the other way around, and I doubt it (unclear).

Tejamati: What do you mean, even those particular men in those particular relationships. You actually think that the women got more out of the relationship than the man?

S: Oh yes definitely yes.

Virananda: I think that a woman might object that there could well be a situation, a relationship, in which the woman was the stronger individual, quite appreciably.

S: Well theoretically yes, but certainly within the FWBO I haven't noticed that situation.

Virananda: Well could that arise say in a situation where you've got a senior woman order member and some new guy along to

S: I think it **could**, provided I think in such a ease the sexual element was kept out. If it was just sort of individuals, two individuals, that might happen, but I think that if any sort of sexual relationship developed it would negate the spiritual in this case. Well one might ask why that should be, because I mean it's as though normally the male takes the initiative in such matters as in a sense biologically he's the dominant partner. I know that doesn't always happen but then it seems that when that does not happen then it's just due to some sort of psychological weakness in the man in question. One of the things that led me into this train of thought - perhaps I should let you into that also - was studying recently quite a lot ...

End of Tape Tape Eight

[199] **S:** in various ways. The Sufis, of course, are Muslims - at least, externally they're Muslims, and very often they actually **are** Muslims. And, of course, Islam is not a religion which has any sympathy for monasticism. I mean, there is saying of Muhammad himself : 'No monkery in Islam', he says. No monasticism in Islam. So Islam, unlike Buddhism, is not a religion with a strong monastic element. But nonetheless, so therefore one finds that Sufis - I mean, Muslims - are not obliged ... I mean the concept of 'celibacy' is almost sort of foreign to Islam one might say. It has got no sort of sanction in the Qu'ran any more than it has, say, in the Old Testament; And therefore one finds that Sufi masters are very often married and have children. You find some who are celibate, but they seem to become celibate not because, obviously, there was any requirement from Islam that they should be celibate - or any requirement of Sufism - that was just the way that they felt. You see what I mean? There's no **prestige** attached to celibacy under Islam, even for Sufis; but some Sufis just didn't feel like getting married. Other Sufis did get married, because it was the custom; but gradually withdrew from their wives because, again, that was the way they felt. But a lot of Sufis- if not probably the majority in the various schools and orders - were married men. There seems to have been no problem of sex and spiritual life with the Sufis at all. It is just not a problem. It's not..., I mean it's hardly discussed. I mean no Sufi seems to have felt or thought that the fact - the Sufi who was, say, a married man - seems to have felt or thought that the fact that he was married and enjoying sexual life with his wife and having children came in the way of his spiritual life. It seems not to have **occurred** to him. So why do you think that was? This is what I was sort of wondering. Well, to do your thinking for you [*Laughter*] it's simply that it was because of the position of women in Islam. They could quite easily and straightforwardly be married and have sex, have children - but there was no question of any female influence in their lives. Now, you may agree or disagree with the Islamic social system as far as women are concerned, but this is how it worked out for the Sufis. They just didn't have to bother about female influence. But if they felt like having sex, well they had it. It simply didn't [201] seem as far as I can judge to get in the way of even the most prominent of them. Though one might say that there's a tendency, though only a tendency, among leading Sufis to move somewhere in the direction of celibacy, especially as they grow older. No more than that. No one seemed to think celibacy a duty or something that you had to be in order to develop spiritually. There was no such idea at all. I think what made that possible was the fact that, or was the kind of position that women had in Islamic society. And of course they didn't enter - there were no mixed Sufi groups. There were certainly Sufi masters - one can only use that term - who were women, there were a few who were very highly esteemed and given the same respect as the men Sufi masters, but they had very little contact with the opposite sex and then only on a sort of master and disciple basis, and usually when they were very old. But the Sufi activities as such were all well 'single-sex' as we would say. Even in the case - or **in** the case - also of those who were married. And it's also interesting to see that the son of a Sufi was very often a Sufi, and his father's disciple. Now it's under his father's influence, his father's spiritual influence, not under mother's influence.

In the case of many Sufi masters we know that they were married; we don't know to whom, we don't know the names of the wives, we just know that they were married. We know the names of the sons. You might even occasionally know the name of the daughters, usually not. But that is sort of so much in the background, and they're not under the influence of that and all that that represents. So I thought this was quite striking. It goes against a lot of our modern progressive ideas, but one can't help noticing these things.

Virananda: Were women much more in the foreground, say in India of the Buddha's time?

S: As far as we can tell from the Pali scriptures women had somewhat more freedom - certainly in some social groups - than they had at some later period. I don't think we can put it more strongly than that. They weren't, say, confined to the house and so on. But probably one can say that men and masculine and spiritual values were predominant.

[201]

Virananda: Yes, but at the same time, given that predominance, you still have an emphasis on celibacy.

S: Yes, you certainly have in - well, ah, yes and no; one mustn't overgeneralize - perhaps I shouldn't use the word 'Hinduism' - Brahmanism certainly did not have a strong emphasis on celibacy in the way that, say, Buddhism and Jainism did have. And one might even sort of - I won't say re-question them - but sort of rework even Buddhism's teaching about this. Or at least revalue. Because it's quite clear that the Buddha recognized some lay people as, say, Stream Entrants and even more than Stream Entrants; and that suggests that it was possible to attain, say Stream Entry without giving up sex, or without being celibate at least in the sense that the monk, the bhikkhu, was celibate. Of course then that raises the question well, why do bhikkhus have to be celibate? That raises further questions - well, there was in those days at least a connection between say non-celibacy and having children. In the case of the person wholly dedicated to spiritual life - well, freedom from such responsibilities was perhaps important and that necessarily involves celibacy because there was no such thing as contraceptives and so on. So one **could** look at it in that way. On the other hand one could say well perhaps the Indians had a sort of warmer temperament, and perhaps celibacy was more necessary for them.

Virananda: Compared to the Sufis? Warmer temperament than the Sufis?

S: I think the Indian temperament - well, maybe 'temperament' is the wrong word - but the Indians do seem more sensuous than, as far as one gathers, the Islamic peoples; though, well no doubt among the Islamic peoples themselves there are variations. But Islamic culture is not sensuous in the way that Hindu culture is. One can see this going round that 'The Image of Man' exhibition. Hindu..., I mean Indian culture seems much more sensuous, much more kamaloka oriented, and therefore there needed to be perhaps - and here I'm really only speculating - there needed to be a more explicit emphasis on celibacy as a discipline. Perhaps that wasn't necessary [202] within the context of Islam for one reason or another. So what I'm actually getting at in the course of this whole discussion of it is that I think it could be a mistake to centre discussion too much just on the question of sex, leaving aside the question of woman - inasmuch as most men, being heterosexual, through sex or connected with it, will have contact with women.

Kulamitra: It would also by extension inasmuch as even in society at large most men - whether or not they're having a sexual relationship with a woman - are much more under the influence of women than would be the case in a traditional society like the Islamic society which you described; or I think in any other traditional society that I can....

S: Well, this is certainly say the case with Indian society, because in Indian society there is this sort of separation of the sexes. So even if you're a married man - I mean quite obviously having an intimate relationship with your wife and a very close and often very friendly relationship - you don't have much mixed social life outside the family; which means a lot of your time is spent with other men, which means that masculine, and by implication, maybe spiritual values, are re-enforced in that way. You may even be under the influence of your wife individually, but you'll not be under the influence of female values; or much less so than would be the case in the West. There are hen-pecked Hindu husbands, yes. There are hen-pecked **Buddhist** husbands even - we have a few tucked around the FWBO in Poona. But it in a way doesn't matter so much. There is more to sort of counterbalance it.

Kulamitra: I mean there does seem to be more and more of a female influence in our culture.

S: Well, the poet Iqbal - Muhammad Iqbal, the greatest modern Urdu poet, who is regarded as ideologically the founder of Pakistan and was a very severe critic of modern Western culture - wrote in one of his poems referring to the West, he said, "The Female...." with a capital 'F' "...sits astride their quivering nerves." And there's some truth in that. This is how a modern Muslim sees it. And a lot of Muslims have only [203] contempt for the West, culture in the modern West, from this sort of point of view.

Kulamitra: How would you sort of harmonize the two elements? I mean, on the one hand I see a very positive side of traditional culture in that it does seem to recognize that essential difference between the men and the women in that culture, but on the other hand that does often spill over into, I think, harsh treatment and sort of.... .. well, not a very kind consideration of the women by the men. I mean, you know, you get quite a lot of.., say in Africa, you get quite a lot of wife beating and so on. I mean, the kind of division of

S: (interrupting) : I would put it this way - a strong man does not beat his wife. It's the weak man that beats his wife. Are any wife beaters present? *[pause]*

Kulamitra: What influences produce the strong men?

S: Well, other men to begin with; and, of course, the underlying scheme of spiritual values. It's only those that can produce genuinely strong men as distinct from 'beefy brutes' let us say. I think a genuinely strong man would not mistreat women, was genuinely considerate, and helpful and kind. Of course a feminist would say that's well patronizing, but one just doesn't accept the assumptions on which that objection is based.

[pause] Anyway, has it given you a little food for thought?

Virananda: I'm trying to think up the ideal marriage arrangement.

S: Hm?

Virananda: What would be the ideal marital system? *[Laughter & Interjections]*

S: Usually, from the masculine point of view, unlimited polygamy.
[204]

Virananda: I was thinking the other way round.

S: No, don't take that seriously! *[Laughter]*

Virananda: No, I was thinking the other way round. It would be one wife and many husbands would be the best arrangement. It just struck me (unclear)

S: Well, you know someone was asked about this once and he said 'Well, look. You've no doubt seen a teapot surrounded by many little cups. But have you ever seen one cup surrounded by half a dozen teapots?' *[Laughter]*

But I think these are serious matters because I mean practically everybody is involved in sexual experiences, if not sexual relations, in one way or another, to some extent or other. So one can't just sort of leave that to look after itself, or deal with it on an ad hoc basis; and sort of try and well just try leading a spiritual life but from time to time just allow yourself to forget all about spiritual life. and sort of get into sex and all that sort of thing. One has got to sort of think it out a bit and take a rational attitude. And consider various models of sexual behaviour and organization and so on.

I think in a traditional society where men and women are normally separated, marriage - say as with the Sufis and maybe as with Indians still - gets in the way of spiritual life much less than it gets in the way of people in the West. Because very often it's the case in the West that husband and wife expect to spend much of their spare time together, if not all of it; and when a man gets married well very often his ties with his men friends are very seriously weakened - at least his relationship with his wife becomes a sort of central thing in his life. So therefore I think probably in the West where anyone wanted to live a spiritual life, even if they are married it's probably - I won't say necessary, but certainly very helpful - if they live in a spiritual community, a men's community. Or if they at least from time to time live in a men's community, or at least go away [205] on men's retreats from time to time. *[pause]*

Because it's not just a question of sort of sex as a rather awkward phenomenon, but the question of well, what I call female influence and female values. Which I won't say they're **anti**-spiritual - they certainly don't conduce to anything spiritual, inasmuch as they are more, so to speak, conservative and home-oriented, family-oriented, child-oriented, security-oriented more often than not, or characteristically or typically so. So therefore it makes sense to have men's spiritual communities. Without requiring celibacy - maybe this is also what I'm saying - that you might think that being celibate or rather, having sexual relations with women and living in a men's spiritual community don't go together. But I'm almost saying that, well, they do go together. You see what I mean? Or they are not necessarily exclusive, or not necessarily mutually exclusive. So far from having a rather bizarre set-up, we actually have a quite sensible set-up.

Virananda: Does it follow from that, that those men who are naturally by inclination celibate would flourish in more solitary conditions?

S: Well, even those men who are naturally celibate still need spiritual friendship, they still need Kalyana-Mitrata, surely? I think there are **some** men - very much a minority - who are naturally celibate. If such a man comes along, especially if he's very young, I think one must be very careful that one doesn't sort of encourage him to get into sex, 'it's all part of growing up and broaden his experience'. I think it's really quite bad to do that sort of thing. But even such a person will certainly need Kalyana-Mitrata; for such a person, yes, it would be good to live in a spiritual community. Though, again, it's good for everybody to be on his own from time to time - on a solitary retreat or solitary holiday.

Sagaramati: I noticed listening to the radio about the Falklands conflict - they were interviewing people in the street. All the women who were interviewed had one intention, it was like... to get it stopped because people were getting [206] killed. Which, in a sense, is good. I noticed that the men - there was something more than just sort of saving a life, even though it was a misguided thing. That wasn't the main concern.

S: Right, yes, yes. The principle of sacrifice was accepted.

Sagaramati: Was accepted, yeah. But the women just couldn't accept the sacrifice of life.

S: Well, from the woman's point of view it's 'I lose my protector. I lose the man who looks after me. I lose my companion', even.

Anyway, perhaps we can get off that topic and maybe on to something else. Or perhaps shall we pause and have a cup of tea? Perhaps some people **need** a cup of tea after all that. *[Laughter]* It's strangely silent sitting there - I hope I haven't shocked you all, or..

Tejamati: Too busy reflecting.

Virananda: It's very warm too.

S: Ah, right. Let's have the fire off.

Tejamati: I'm actually going to have to go Bhante. I've got to finish some

S: Are you?

[Tea Break]

S: So far we've been thinking within the FWBO, as regards our sort of public work, so to speak, we've been thinking more in terms of starting up Centres, haven't we? I think we ought to perhaps think a bit more in terms of setting up men's communities. Do you see what I mean, or **do** you see what I mean? Don't you see what I mean?

Voice: Vaguely.

S: Or, what do you think I mean?

[207]

Sagaramati: Well, what people need is men's communities, not so much the sort of activities that are provided by a Centre.

Virananda: Well you need to

S: It's as though a Centre is almost a sort of clearing house. It's almost as though the real thing is the men's communities.

Several Voices: Yes.

S: Do you see what I mean? One needs these points of contact with the general public and activities for the general public, but the men's communities especially - the women's communities too, but the women seem less inclined to this sort of way of life; well, perhaps in view of what I've said this is natural, yeah? - it's as though the men's communities are what it's **really** about. You won't re-structure society by having Centres. In a way there's not much difference between our Centre and the Buddhist Society as a Centre - not all that much in principle. Where the difference comes in is with the men's communities. So perhaps we should think much more in terms of founding men's communities.

Sagaramati: But you can see founding men's communities without having a Centre? Or will the men go into the communities they would come through a Centre?

S: Well I think initially, yes. But I think we've reached a point where that is no longer perhaps necessarily the case. That perhaps it would be possible to set up men's communities, especially [205] say in the country, which attracted men directly to them, I mean they'd not gone through a Centre. Well this has already happened in one case, as regards Padmaloka, because Matthew came straight from home into the community didn't he? He'd never been to a Centre - well except maybe when he was very small child. So perhaps we should think more in terms of not that communities are sort of appendages to Centres, or the communities are just the places where men who are attached to Centres happen to live; I think we should think of the men's communities as being much more sort of bodies in their own right, like Padmaloka is. Not that Padmaloka is.... well, just Padmaloka because Bhante happens to stay there and we've got the Order Office there etc.,etc. That maybe obscures the fact of what it really is.

Vajradipa: And a public Centre just might arrive out of it.

S: Well, I don't see a men's community - or a women's community for that matter - as functioning as a public Centre in the same way. I don't think a spiritual community **need** develop into a Centre, though a Centre certainly needs to develop into or to produce spiritual communities. I mean supposing a Spiritual community became too big, well then half a dozen of you would go off and start another community elsewhere. So perhaps we should think more in those terms than we have done.

Jinapriya: I think in that context that's where one's really going to develop Kalyana Mitrata....

S: Yes.

Jinapriya: Much more than as it were once a week contact.

S: Right. Yeah. *[pause]*

Anyway, any more questions from the text?

Jinapriya: Ah...'...yes Page 178 in the old edition. It's under the secondary list of the classifications of *rupa*.

S: 178?

[209]

Jinapriya: Yes. And I've just made a quick note here it comes you mention 'the physical base of mind'. Could you elucidate, please.

S: Ah, this is quite an interesting point, in a way. It has been pointed out that in the Pali Canon, and also in the earlier Abhidharma works, mind is not regarded as being based upon any particular physical organ. It's not regarded as being based, for instance, on the brain. In later Abhidharma works, as far as I remember, there is the expression 'hrdaya-bhaktu', which means 'the heart base'. In **later** Abhidharma it would seem that the mind is regarded as being based upon the heart, the physical organ, but this is not the case with the early, as it were 'classic' Abhidharma; and certainly not the case with the Suttas. So that is interesting inasmuch as though early Buddhism regards the mind as being in some way physically based - after all there is an obvious interdependence of what we call 'body' and what we call 'mind', *nama-rupa* - it does not specify any particular individual **organ** as the basis of mind. Not the brain, not the heart, not the pineal gland. And that is perhaps significant. It doesn't commit itself in this sort of way. It just refers in very general terms to that which is the base of mind.

Jinapriya: So you see it as quite significant the fact that we in the West tend to count the brain as the physical aspect of mind?

S: Well Doctor Suzuki clearly regards it as significant; and he points out that in ancient or even classical Chinese thought that the belly is regarded as the seat of mind or consciousness, even the liver, the stomach anyway. Not the brain, not the head.

Jinapriya: Cos I was wondering there has been perhaps quite a different quality in how they subjectively experience themselves then because I would have thought... it makes me wonder if well you know the feeling of centrality we all feel that 'I just exist just behind my eyes, and this somehow seems to sort of connect up with the seat of consciousness being in the brain.

[210]

S: Well, they might think 'I exist just behind my navel', huh?

Jinapriya: Well I mean yeah! I wondered you know if that would put a totally different quality on the way they experienced life. Because I must admit a quality which I don't normally take into consideration when sort of thinking of perhaps the cultural gap between us and them.

S: Well, this is very evident - this way of looking at things - in certain of the martial arts.

Jinapriya: Um. Yeah!

Sagaramati: Wouldn't that looking for a basis of the mind, a physical basis - isn't it just so that it fits in the threefold division between sense-organ, sense-consciousness and - what's the other one? - the object of sense. When the mind's fitted into that it's got to have a dhatu.

S: Yes. Yes.

Sagaramati: It makes it neat and tidy.

S: [Chuckles]

Jinapriya: Could you say that again Sagaramati? I wasn't quite with you.

Sagaramati: Well, I mean say with the eye. You'd have eye-consciousness, then you'd have the eye-organ, and then you'd have the object which would be looked at. So, with the mind you've got object of mind, mind and then you'd have the organ of mind.

S: The organ of mind is mind, so to speak.

Jinapriya: But it means presumably mind in a quite limited sense, that is as the sixth sense organ, this physical base of mind.

S: But then it seems that Buddhist tradition does accept that there **is** a physical base of mind, but it does not identify that with any specific organ, much less still with the brain. When it does in the form of the Abhidharma get around to identifying it with a particular organ, it's with the heart, not the brain. To that [211] extent it departs from the sort of 'agnosticism' ,as it were, of the original tradition.

Sagaramati: They say that modern neurology - there do seem to be definite associations between the areas of the brain and what we would call functions of the mind - in terms of memory, or sensation. So there does seem to be a relationship between the brain and what we call consciousness.

S: That may well be right scientifically, but is one obliged to accept a scientific perspective? I mean one could look at it in Blakean terms, or even in D.H.Lawrence terms - just dismiss the findings of science as quite irrelevant and misleading from a spiritual point of view. Just not accept that frame of reference at all.

Sagaramati: But say like someone who gets a heart transplant, if the mind's associated with a particular heart then it would get a different mind.

S: Not necessarily, no.

Sagaramati: Well, where does the mind go when there's not only one heart in and the other....

S: Well it's just a sort of basis for manifestation one could say, simply that.

Vairocana: I've heard the story of how (2 or 3 words unclear) the thing about people getting parts of their brain cut out, I suppose that means the consciousness wouldn't be able to manifest itself.

Jinapriya: I wonder if people don't believe they do experience a qualitative change in their consciousness when they have brain operations.

Sagaramati: Have they actually taken brains out?

Jinapriya: No, they haven't.

S: I don't think they have.
[212]

Sagaramati: Just the brain. Maybe I'm thinking of films, sort of science fiction.

Voice: No. *[Laughter]*

Jinapriya: There's a famous Roald Dahl story about someone whose brain is disembodied quite literally.

Sagaramati: And there is some communication presumably?

Jinapriya: I don't think that's actually....

S: There are sort of science fiction fantasies of brains in jars of spirit and just connected by telephones or something like that.

Jinapriya: Yes, that's the sort of thing I'm thinking about.

Vajradipa: And that's the basis for a lot of sects like, I think, Jehovah's Witnesses....

S: Oh sects!

Vajradipa: Sects.

S: I thought you said 'sex'. [*Loud Laughter*]

Vajradipa: I think it's on the brain! not wanting to have operations. I think that has a lot to do with it - just a fear that's something's going to be taken away.

S: As though your soul is going to be tampered with. Well, perhaps there's something in it. I mean, if there's a strong, instinctive sort of reaction against having bits and pieces of yourself replaced, well perhaps one **needs** to take that into account, being significant or meaningful - and not just dismiss it as irrational and prejudiced and all the rest of it.

[213]

Vairocana: This whole concept of sort of 'Hara', does that come from sort of Buddhist tradition?

S: I think it's Far Eastern rather than specifically Buddhist.

Jinapriya: What word was that?

Vairocana: 'Hara' I mean there is a book around called 'Hara, the Vital Centre of Man' and when I read it had quite an effect on me - just a sort of change of energy, just to sort of focus one's attention on below the navel. And it did do quite a lot of things to me that weren't just my perception of things. I'm just wondering why it isn't really sort of emphasized very much in Buddhism.

S: It's certainly not emphasized in Indian Buddhism. I doubt if it's mentioned.

Vairocana: Yeah. It seems to me a very important way to actually operate, to actually work.

S: Well, perhaps the Indians weren't so 'brainy' , so to speak, as to need that sort of emphasis.

Sagaramati: But isn't there in 'jhana for Beginners', there's a practice where if you feel you're too much up in your head, you actually try to take the mind down to....

S: (interrupting) Right. Yes. I don't know that that has any Indian original, but certainly it's useful for us. Perhaps there were 'brainy' people in ancient China.

Sagaramati: But going back to the mind, I mean that's really trying to see the mind in terms that it doesn't exist in, in terms of.... if it's got a physical basis then there must be a physical relation, and the mind..

S (interrupting) : Well, it's the old Cartesian problem. How does the physical relate to the mental and vice-versa? I mean you can't even posit a third connecting principle, because what connects that connecting principle on the one hand with mind [214] and on the one hand with body?

Sagaramati: Well, in modern physics they do - well, this is my understanding of it - they've reached a point where there are some sub-atomic particles that seem to as it were 'think'. They don't just obey physical laws. It's as if they could actually make a decision. I don't mean they've got consciousness and they decide - but it's like they're not quite matter and they're not quite mind. It's like there's a crossover point.

S: Yes. Yes.

Sagaramati: I mean it's like the wave and the particle - you can imagine one turning into the other but there's no actual in-between state.

S: Yes. Right. Well this just goes to illustrate the fact that one cannot think in terms of absolute dualities of any kind, because once you've got a duality you're faced by the problem of reconciling the duality, which would seem to be an impossible task by the very **nature** of the problem. One should not divide things which when divided you cannot reconcile, you cannot recombine. If you cannot recombine things, or cannot relate them, you have to question whether you should have separated them in the first place; or whether, that is to say, they really are separated or whether that you've merely separated them in thought. I mean, one could say that this is significant in view of the fact that the Buddha does say that one of the *Avyakrtavastus*, one of the 'undeclared points', is whether the *rupa* and *jiva* are identical or not. It's as though he's refusing to accept the assumption that there are two things. Or perhaps even more fundamentally, he's refusing to accept the assumption that the relation between say body and life can be discussed in terms of there being either one thing or two things. Do you see what I'm getting at?

Sagaramati: Just because we can think of them as two things doesn't mean to say that there are two things...

S: Yes. It's not a question of reducing what we think of as body to what we think of as life; or reducing what we think of as life to what we think of as body. Perhaps the Buddha is suggesting we shouldn't think in those sort of terms at all. We have to think in some other way. I mean, [215] Blake is on much the same sort of track when he says, I think, that 'The body is that portion of the soul which is perceptible by the senses in this age' - something like that. *[pause]*

Sagaramati: Yeah, even I mean Schopenhauer sees the body as being something perceived. He sees it as a perceived object, rather than the way it's normally commonly understood.

S: Well, as *rupa* in a sense, he's right.

Vajradipa: I was thinking the other day about that - it's almost as if it's like it's the most familiar. *[pause]*

Sagaramati: Also seeing the mind as having a basis like that indicates that the mind is dependent on a physical body, but from what other people say I mean you can exist as it were as a mind embodied without a physical contact with your physical body. So, the mind doesn't seem to be dependent upon the physical body at all, except to perceive itself through the physical senses.

S: Well some discoveries do suggest that the physical body is dependent, if not on the mind, but something which is more subtle than the physical body itself - a sort of blueprint, a psychic blueprint of the physical body. *[pause]*

Anyway, that's all arisen out of this point, yeah?

Sagaramati: Could I go back to the previous section? It's when you're referring to self-effort and other-effort; and you were talking about other-effort. And you say that 'there is no a priori reason why the factor termed the original vow or grace of Amitabha should not be as much a condition for the cessation of suffering as the extinction of desire' - being the extinction of desire being your own effort. And I don't see I don't see how the grace of Amitabha can actually help you gain Enlightenment, I mean without you actually making an effort.

S: I said 'a condition' I said 'a condition'.
[216]

Sagaramati: Ah, yeah, yeah - as much a condition.

S: Which It does not say **the** cause.

Sagaramati: 'The cause', yeah

S: 'A condition'

Sagaramati: But what would that condition be in terms of one's experience? I mean, how would it operate as a condition in someone's..

S: I think what I'm basically saying is that the conditions for the attainment or experience of Enlightenment do not necessarily have to be expressed in negative conceptual terms. They can also be expressed in positive emotional terms. I think this is..... or, no, maybe even more than that - they can be expressed not only in abstract conceptual terms but in positive mythic and symbolic terms. I think this is what I'm really getting at here. I'm being slightly provocative at the same time. Do you see what I mean?

Tape Side One Ends, Side Two

S:and therefore one's own efforts - if you mean just the effort of the conscious mind - well, that perhaps will not amount to very much, or at least not to begin with.

Sagaramati: So in your dreams is it possible for there to be some continuity of your development? - continuing outside your waking consciousness?

S: I think in a very broad sense, yes. It's as though you're working on another part of a very broad and perhaps irregular front. I mean people do often have the experience of performing pujas in their sleep, Going for Refuge in their sleep, listening to the Dharma in their sleep. I think this is quite important.

[217]

Sagaramati: Yeah, I was thinking that that's putting the things going on in your dreams in terms of what you do in your conscious waking state; and I was thinking of something more mythological.

S: Ah. Yeah. I certainly think a lot goes on, on ,for want of a better term, the 'dream level', that doesn't proceed parallel with one's waking experience. It might touch it at certain points; but which, in a sense, has a life of its own. It's as though the life dominated by our waking consciousness is only a very narrow segment of our total life, but a lot is happening on other levels, other planes, if you like, other dimensions of our being, beyond, perhaps, even what we normally think of, or usually think of, as our own individuality.

Sagaramati: Will these things actually have effect on our waking consciousness?

S: Oh, yes, yes. They may even burst through into them at times; though for long periods they may go on just well, not even parallel. They take a direction of their own. I think I have formerly put forward the idea that perhaps one is even living a quite different kind of life on some other level, in a sense in some other world; of which, with your conscious mind, you're not at all aware. But that is, just as much, you. 'It', so to speak, is no more aware of 'you' so to speak, than 'you' are of 'it'. But somehow they're both aspects, both dimensions, of 'you' in the broader sense. You may be leading a very different kind of life on that other level. And they may, very occasionally, connect - it may be very rarely that any lines of communication are open between them.

Sagaramati: Could you put that in terms of the Yogachara, and say that those other levels would be in the alaya-vijnana?

S: Well, that seems too neat and tidy. It's as though there are all sorts of intersecting planes, - as though there were lots of alayas, eh? Not just one sort of basic or fundamental one.

[218]

Sagaramati: I mean but seeing the alaya seems.. it seems to be quite removed from the conscious mind. It isn't something you experience with your conscious mind.

S: Um. Yeah. Yeah. *[pause]* I think the more one looks at the stable ego, that the more it is seen to disintegrate. It's as though it's a very sort of weak thread sort of tying together a quite large bundle of all sorts of materials, which don't really cohere properly and which are just kept together quite artificially with the help of this little piece of string of waking consciousness. It has been said of course that the real - I mean, in the case of the ordinary person - the real sort of unifying factor is just your physical body. I mean, because mind is changing so much all the time and you go through so many different mental states; sometimes in Heaven, sometimes in Hell. But it's the physical body, so to speak, which remains comparatively stable. So in as far as all practical purposes your physical body is your ego. Your body is you. You say, 'I went there, I went here' - well, you mean your physical body. Or 'I look after myself' - I look after my physical body. 'I feed myself' - I put food into my physical body. That is the centre of reference, as it were.

And that's why the Buddha said on one occasion that to identify the self with the body was a less serious error than to identify it with the mind. Because he said the body at least remains relatively stable, whereas the mind is changing all the time. I mean, the assumption being that a self would be unchanging. To think of the mind as one's unchanging self is obviously absurd but you might be forgiven for thinking that your body was your self.

A Voice: Interesting point.

Virananda: Could one not go astray by attaching overmuch importance to your dream-life?

S: Astray from the point of view of what? Because 'astray' means that there's a sort of norm, a sort of path, which is [219] accepted as the norm. You might become mad, but you'd be mad from the point of view of the sane - only from the point of view of them.

Virananda: Well, I mean astray from the process of growth, growth of awareness, self-awareness.

S: But supposing one's awareness was centred on one's, as it were, waking experience; and suppose that was, or represented, a sort of restriction of it. Then it might be a positive thing to get away from that into, say, dreams. I mean I'm being a little hypothetical here just to as it were open up the discussion a bit.

Jinapriya: Well it's just that generally we tend to think of dreams are unreal, what's happening now is real.

S: Well, if you get too much immersed in dreams, you'll lose touch with real life - you might not go to the launderette for a few days, or you might miss a few meals. Do you see what I mean, huh?

Jinapriya: It's quite interesting. You know there's that famous Chinese thing about... was it a monk who dreams he's a butterfly and not sure whether he's awake or in a dream. I mean I've found depending on my mood I mean that really sort of like irritates me if I feel sort of very rational and things like that. But if I feel in a more - I not quite sure what the word would be - sort of mood it's just got a magic about it and it sort of loosens everything up, sort of thing.

Sagaramati: I remember I had the experience when I was on solitary at Tyddern Rydderch and I woke up - and I was just aware of coming out of a dream and it felt like the dream I was in was more real than the world I inhabit. It was nothing, I mean it was just buildings - but it just seemed so alive and pleasant.

S: So, is **this** the dream? And is **that** the reality?

Sagaramati: It did give me some food for thought.
[220]

S: I mean, there is this famous play of the Spanish dramatist Calderon, called 'Life is a Dream', which raises all these sort of questions in a quite literary and dramatic way. *[pause]*

Virananda: It seems that.... why I'm suspicious of a person who is very much involved in their dream-life, is the fact that so much of their conscious waking life is spent analysing their dream-life; and, in a way, I can't but help think that this distances them from actual experience.

S: Oh yes, I think this very true.

Virananda: It hardens it, it crystallizes it.

S: You're trying, as it were, not to surrender to your dream, you're trying not to live on that level or in that dimension. You want to analyse it, explain it, understand it, translate it into completely rational terms - so that it's under control, so that, in a way, you don't have to experience it. Well, people do this with myth and symbol. 'What does the myth **mean**?' 'What does the symbol **mean**?' The question is really beside the point.
[pause]

Sagaramati: I can remember when the - when was it? I can't remember when it was - there was a bit of a little scare that Devamitra brought up at an Order day, that there could be a Third World War. 'It's imminent, this Third World War'. I remember thinking at the time, well does it really matter? It's as if like..., I mean there could be other areas of your mind where things are going on and one of the aspects would 'pop off'.

[Sounds of amusement] It was just like one door would shut and there'd be a definite continuity and then because of other factors, a door would open up again.

Vajradipa: But going into what Bhante said originally, which was quite interesting, like whole dimensions of us are operating on a level of consciousness - if something actually happens to them, do we really have the effect? Do we feel an effect?

[221]

Sagaramati: What do you mean?

Vajradipa: Well, I mean, we die, as you were saying, because of a war - I wonder what sort of effect that would have you dying in a special way?

Sagaramati: Well, people have said that if a man had been in prison being tortured, then his dreams can be going on as if there's nothing going on like that, as if he's free.

S: Well it involves the question of well how important is one's, say, sense consciousness? one's sense life? How big a place does it occupy within one's sort of overall experience of different dimensions?

Dharmananda: Of course, that obviously depends on the extent to which you are actually limited to only experiencing through...

S: (interrupting) : It's a bit like a man who's involved in different kinds of businesses and one little business fails. Well on the level of that little business it's total failure, but within the totality of all his business interests and operations, well it's not really very important. So, if one's physical life was to come to an end - well, from the point of view of that sort of total multi-dimensional consciousness, to call it that, it might not be very important.

Sagaramati: Would you say then that a lot of the feelings you have they don't seem to be related all that much to physical objects.

S: Yes, right.

Sagaramati: So you can only imagine that those feelings would continue.

S: Well, what about the sort of feelings and inspirations and images that poets experience? Not to speak of mystics and so on. They don't just come from the sense-world. They're not just generalizations from... not just extensions or refinements of sense experience. They're something completely different. I mean, they come from what Blake calls 'the Imagination'; or the Imaginal [222] world.

Jinapriya: Perhaps even I mean on a mundane level a lot of what we call sort of so-called experience of the physical world often is.... we're pushed with laying so much on that. The significance particularly that we see in certain objects is all sort of coming from the inside.

S: Right, yeah, right. *[pause]*

Virananda: I'm wondering about the connection with Kalyana Mitrata, yeah? - because the way that the discussion is going we're lessening the significance of the sense consciousness, sense consciousnesses. It seems that on this level of waking sense consciousness that this is the way that we relate with one another - so how is Kalyana Mitrata possible on this... if we are adopting this broader view of the mind?

S: Well this relates to something that I was thinking about in connection with the Convention. Some people didn't find the second half of the Convention as successful or as enjoyable as the first. The point was made, by some people at least, that they enjoyed the study and discussion and all that, but couldn't get into the meditation. Well, looking at that from the point of view of, or within the context of, the Convention and coming together, it was as though they weren't able to relate through the meditation. So, even assuming that, yes, you come to the Convention in order to come together, 'convenio' or whatever it is, yes? - but can you not come together through meditation? I mean can you not as it were put out **psychic** feelers? Do you necessarily have to be clutching somebody's hot sticky hand in order to feel their presence, as it were? Do you see what I mean? I'm quite sure that that sort of psychic sensitivity and contact is possible. I think perhaps - I mean especially in connection with the metta bhavana - I mean we ought to think a bit more in those terms. Not that when for instance you do the Order Metta it's just you sending out good thoughts towards Order members - but that's just sort of just for your benefit. You think of them, and direct metta towards them, so that you can develop. I mean that's a quite one-sided way of [223] looking at it, though that is true. But you could also think of the metta, and the Order Metta in particular, as a form of actual communication with those other Order members. That when you are thinking of them with metta, and they are thinking of you with metta, you're not just performing identical exercises within the limits of your separate individualities. You are actually in contact. You are actually communicating. You are actually having an effect, a direct as it were psychic effect on each other, on one another.

Sagaramati: But would you feel that as an effect? I mean, like when you communicate with someone on this level then....

S: (interrupting) Well it's obviously much more subtle, yeah? I mean you may experience an effect without being conscious of the cause. I mean you might conceivably, supposing you happen to miss the Order Metta or have forgotten it, well suddenly you might just feel a bit better, as if something had sort of hit you. I think that is possible.

So I was a bit disappointed that some people at least on the Convention weren't able to get into the meditation very easily. That suggested that they didn't see that as a means of communicating with one another. It's as though they felt - I think some did, quite explicitly - that if they all meditated together, well that would put a stop to communication. I mean, maybe that's putting it a bit extremely, but it was as if that was a sort of quasi assumption. Would you say that was so? I mean, were you there?

Sagaramati: I was there, yes. Well I enjoyed the second half. But, I mean, I would never have thought of looking at the second half in terms of communication. I'm just saying I actually enjoyed it more than the first half. But maybe on a subtler level I did feel maybe more in contact, I don't know.

S: I certainly noticed this, I think I've always noticed this while I'm taking meditation classes, even when I took the meditation the other evening here, when people are meditating there's a definite sort of influence coming from them - which you can actually perceive, even feel.

Virananda: I hope it was positive.
[224]

S: Oh yes, it was positive, yes.

Sagaramati: But when you talk about the influence you can feel, how do you sort of experience that?

S: Well you experience this as something coming from an object out there, not as an extension of your own subjective state. It's not that just you are in a good mental state, that you're experiencing metta, but, if that is the meditation, but that actually you feel something coming from other people. You can sort of feel the kind of state that they are in. So supposing they were able to feel the state that you were in, well there would be a sort of communication, or at least an interaction let us say. I mean, it is known that some people do sometimes have identical dreams, don't they?

Dharmananda: There used to be someone in Arunachala who used to have dreams about books that I had read about, and sometimes vice-versa. *[long pause]*

S: I think the trend of this part of the discussion would seem to be to suggest that we shouldn't identify ourselves so much or so exclusively with our sense consciousness and our sense experience; which, of course, is what the poets and mystics and other such people have been telling us all the time. But when we listen to them, or we hear them, we tend to identify what they're talking about with something abstract and mental as it were.

Sagaramati: But in terms of my personal experience I find I can only maintain that on a solitary retreat. Being back here three weeks it's.. I feel totally identified with waking consciousness or practical things. I feel I've just lost complete... well, there's just a feeling that just is not there. And the only way I could feel getting it back is to go on a retreat, or a solitary, I mean preferably. Does that mean one should do more solitaires?

S: Perhaps it does. But one has one's own little room, to oneself presumably; and maybe one should spend some part of the day, each day, alone in that - I mean apart from sleeping.
[225]

Sagaramati: Even then, you need quiet. I mean I find that makes a difference. I can quite definitely say this.

S: Yes, because noise comes from other sources, elsewhere, other people. So if there's noise it means you're, to some extent, distracted from your experience of yourself. *[pause]*

Virananda: What is meant by the 'Bardo of Waking Consciousness'?

S: Well, 'bardo' means 'in between' and waking consciousness is 'in between' two states of non-waking consciousness, i.e. sleep. So waking consciousness itself as a bardo - as such a means of access to Reality. I thought I'd explained that in the lecture. Yes, I had.

Virananda: I wondered whether it tied in with... you discuss. . er well is there a comment? is the Pali Canon, trying to get at Bardos... at this Bardo state with its emphasis on Mindfulness - how do you express it here? 'we introduce as it were an interval of inactivity between thought and deed, between intention and execution.' Is that....?

S: Ah no, that's a bit different

Virananda: Is it? Ah?

S: That's a bit different. This is my own sort of suggestion, Whereas the Bardo of Waking is one of the six kinds of Bardo as far as we've been referring to the Tibetan tradition, as I've explained in one of my lectures on Tibetan Buddhism. Not one in the series, it was one of two I gave separately. I forget the titles now. But, yes, one can look at the Bardo also in that way. It's the interval of thoughtlessness between two thoughts. It's as though momentarily you experience a *jhana* state, at least second *jhana* state, if there's no thought. In between two thoughts. So I think I've explained this that in the case of mindfulness, when one is, say, mindful of the thinking process, mindful of thoughts, well, it slows down the thinking process. I mean, whatever you're mindful of in any case, seems to [226] be slowed down. So if you're mindful of your thinking process, your thought process, it tends to slow it down. And eventually a time comes when you can actually distinguish the separate thoughts from one another. So you may have a sort of stream - you're just aware of one thought after another, but then as you become more aware and the process slows down still more, thoughts tend to get separated from one another. So that in between the thoughts there are gaps. So there's thought, no-thought, thought, no-thought. And the gaps may widen. So you experience several instants, perhaps, of thoughtlessness. And that's a Bardo state, to that extent.

Virananda: You use the phrase, '...the tempo of existence slackens'

S: Tempo. Well, that refers to this slowing down of thoughts and even activities, reactions - by virtue of the fact that you are more aware of them than you were. Perhaps I should qualify that a little and say that is the sort of initial effect. It is certainly possible to be really aware and at the same time functioning quite quickly. But when one practises awareness as a discipline, and is aware say of one's bodily movements, emotional reactions, thoughts, the initial tendency at least, is for the awareness to slow down the whole process. You have more time to, I won't say think, but if you are more aware, if everything is going on more slowly, a reaction is less likely to follow upon the stimulus just because there's a gap between the two. You've time to **see** what is happening, and that very seeing inhibits the reaction at least to some extent.

Virananda: When you use that phrase, I couldn't help reflecting the tempo of our lives seems to be so quick, the tempo of life.

S: (interrupting) : Well it's sometimes quick; but it's sometimes also very slow.

Virananda: I think predominantly most people's experience of it is quite quick.

[227]

S: You mean things actually happening around you?

Virananda: Yes! So fast! Things happen so fast! Everything's changing so fast.

S: It seems like that more and more as one gets older of course.

Virananda: Unless you're getting into Bardo states I suppose. *[pause]*

Sagaramati: One thing I thought, reading through the ethical section and reflecting upon it - it's like, there seems to be too much emphasis on the rules.

S: Mmm. Yes.

Sagaramati: And not enough emphasis on the principle behind the expressions. It's as if, say, with beginners, they shouldn't be introduced to the five precepts - they should be introduced to a principle.

S: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Sagaramati: And then they would understand that the precepts are not inhibitory things; they're an expression of something which is.., as a human being you should feel drawn to.

S: Yes.

Sagaramati: I know that in India, because I mean nearly every talk I gave it was on the Five Precepts; and you do it so often. And in the end, you feel you really get at what the Precepts are, and therefore you don't need notes or anything.

S: I think this is especially the case perhaps with the First Precept. I mean the thought has occurred to me from time to time over the last year, that perhaps I ought to give a new series of talks on the Ten Precepts, one lecture for each Precept. But going into these underlying principles. Because in the case of the First Precept, you've got this whole principle of non-violence [228] which also leads on to non-authority, non-power, huh? - which is so important, which is absolutely basic in spiritual life. It's not just a rule that you shouldn't injure, or that you shouldn't take life. We went, for instance, in the Windhorse Trading study group, into what was sort of beneath, the principle underlying the precept of kamesu michachara, didn't we? Do you remember that? Well, why should you not commit adultery? What happens when you commit adultery? What do you really do? So, we went into that quite deeply, didn't we?

Dharmananda: Yeah.

S: I mean, we took up this whole question of intervening or interfering in other people's relationships in a negative manner. You could see that also as a form of violence. It wasn't that we had this particular topic 'on the brain' as it were. It comes quite naturally because of studying the Pali text. But that was useful that we went into it in that way - not a moralistic way but a psychological-cum-spiritual. We were trying to get at the underlying principle. If you were really deeply imbued with this principle, you should not sort of roughly intervene in other people's relationships and complicate them, or do them any damage. Well, if you really felt this, well you wouldn't even **think** of committing adultery. You wouldn't need that precept. That would be the way you behaved in that particular type of situation, in that particular type of human relationship. And in the same way perhaps, though here the rule is a bit more positive, that maybe there shouldn't be this emphasis upon the rule of celibacy so to speak, but what is the principle of celibacy? A Brahma-carya, a Brahma-faring. If you're really sort of Brahma-faring in that sort of way, well celibacy is

in a way natural. Or, one might say, spontaneous. It's not a discipline. It doesn't mean that you're just not doing something. I mean, angels don't think about sex - it's not a problem for them to put it in mythological terms, which means more correctly or more truly. Maybe we should just think, instead of advising young men to give up sex, you should just exhort them to be angels.

[229]

Sagaramati: Somebody said - I think it was yesterday - some young man said to me, he said 'I don't want to be a bloody angel!'.

S: Ah well he probably has all sorts of wrong ideas about angels, yeah? He probably thought of them as bloodless, white-feathered, lily-livered, sort of pseudo-spiritual creatures. At least you were **talking** to him about angels, it seems....

Sagaramati: (Laughs) It came from Christianity.

S: Yes, one shouldn't introduce the notion or the image of the angel prematurely, not preparing the ground.

Dharmananda : They might well be spies.

Jinapriya: Ha ha. I don't know if I'm just projecting my own experience, but I mean I think there's quite a bit of difficulty with that word 'angel' actually. I do think it has got quite poor connotations generally in our culture.

Dharmananda: I think I find the idea of somebody living on a formless deva-like plane, sort of not specifically describing them in terms of angels but in terms of somebody with a very free sort of 'air realm' existence, a sort of very light state of mind, very positive and clear - as being without necessarily having that physical representation but just sort of talking in those terms.

Jinapriya: Yes, it's just it's that word.

Sagaramati: I mean, what are the qualities of an angel? i.e. what are angelic qualities?

S: Well, an angel is not, to begin with, sexually polarized. I mean, in a sense an angel is masculine, but in the angel the feminine is thoroughly integrated into the masculine. So, in a [230] sense, the angel is androgynous. And the angel is emotionally positive. The angel recognizes the hierarchical principle. The angel is aware of what is above and what is below. This is why the angel is the messenger traditionally - 'angel', 'angelos' means 'messenger'. It's something like, it's 'dhuta' in Pali and in Sanskrit. And then the word which we translate as 'missionary' from Pali is 'Dhammadhuta' - which means you could say 'the Dharma angel'.

Again, the angel is young. Not young in the sense that human beings are young, but young in the sense of not being subject to time at all. Therefore the angel is beautiful. Therefore the angel is attractive. Therefore the angel is inspiring. The angel is also very often depicted as radiant, therefore glorious, even awe-inspiring. An angel represents all **these** things. I mean, there are different kinds of angels. Some angels fight with the powers of evil - therefore they are heroic angel figures. They're powerful. Some are represented as fiery, on fire, incandescent. And, of course, iconographically some are represented winged, even multi-winged with two wings, four wings, six wings.

Virananda: Do you think Rilke gives a good impression of what an angel is?

S: Well, he has a very special interpretation, so to speak, of the angel. It's a very, I think, 'subjective symbol' ,if one can use that expression, for him. He gives his own rendition of it. I mean quite a valid one, no doubt.

Sagaramati: Yeah, I was reading the Maha Govinda Sutta and when the brahmin is meditating in the forest, and Brahma appears to him he

S: (interpolating) : Sanat Kumara.

Sagaramati: Yeah, I mean it says his hair stands on end. He sort of experiences fear and awe, just with this like well, almost angelic figure that appears to him. So, what sort of figure would cause you to experience that? It's not sort of something weak.

[231]

S: Yeah. Yeah. *[Long Pause]*

Sagaramati: Could I go back to one question on conditionality? Is it necessary for the effect to follow the conditions. I mean, say you have 'B' arises in dependence on 'A'. So, if the conditions are there, does the 'thing' ,to use a word, actually have to arise? Is it necessary?

S: Well, it depends upon the **nature** of the thing.

Sagaramati: Well, say, like a tree. You plant a seed and you fulfil the conditions, does the tree necessarily have to start to sprouting?

S: Well, I think the question answers itself, huh? Because if you have the seed, and you have soil, and you have water, and you have air, and you have sunshine, and the seed is healthy -that is assumed - well, yes it'll sprout. But I think that you superimpose upon that the concept of 'necessity' is, I think, quite superfluous. You see what I mean? It is quite enough to say, 'well that is what happens'. In dependence upon those conditions the seed develops from a seed into a plant. I think the question of whether that **had** to happen or whether it was necessitated is beside the point. It's neither free nor unfree. The concepts really don't apply. I've dealt with this in 'Peace Is A Fire' in a little aphorism about free will, haven't I? I personally think the whole controversy about so-called 'freedom' versus ...

Sagaramati: Determinism.

S: ... determinism, as we have it in Western theology and philosophy, is really a quite artificial difficulty, artificial difference.

Sagaramati: Schopenhauer, again, he was (unclear) brought about by the fact we are self-conscious. We can think of having a choice in the abstract, but in reality there is no choice.....

S: (interrupting) : It's not that there is no choice; but that the [232] very distinction of choice and non-choice is meaningless. Not that there is a thing called 'choice' and there is a thing called 'not-choice', and what we have is 'not-choice' as opposed to 'choice'; it is not that. It is neither of them; neither of those concepts is applicable to the situation. And by trying to make them applicable we land ourselves in quite artificial difficulties and problems. That is my own conclusion.

Schopenhauer must be right, mustn't he? *[Laughter]* I think it's implicit in the whole Buddhist teaching of conditionality.

Anyway, perhaps on that note we can conclude and I can go and see Durangama.

All right, you have the last word as usual - conditionality. One of your favourite topics. Well, if conditionality is not one of one's favourite topics, one is hardly a Buddhist!

Voices: Thank you very much. Thank you.

End of Tape

and

End of Seminar

2nd edition checked and revised by Dharmachari Silabhadra - April 2000