

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 [Mitrans](#). These seminars were highly formative for the FWBO/Tiratna as Sangharakshita opened up for the still very young community what it might mean to live a life in the Dharma.

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

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This transcript has not been checked by Sangharakshita, and may contain mistakes and mishearings. Checked and reprinted copies of all seminars will be available as part of the [Complete Works Project](#).

that, there's one little point I want to make, - in fact I wanted to make it the other evening, but it somehow slipped away: We were talking about mindfulness, and Kamalsila happened just to mention that we were discussing possible methods of ensuring greater mindfulness and Kamala-sila happened to remark that one had to want to be mindful. I intended to take that up, but I didn't, but that was quite an important point - that one has to want to be mindful, and if one wants to be mindful, when you are mindful, well, you'll be just as mindful as you possibly can, so as to maintain the mindfulness for as long as possible. So the more mindful you are, the more, as it were vigorously mindful you are, the more deliberately mindful you are, the more likely it will be that even if you lose that mindfulness, it will come back more quickly. So wanting to be mindful is very very important here. And I think also, wanting to develop any particular quality or aspect of the spiritual life, is very difficult, is very necessary, yes? And I think a lot of the difficulties that people experience in developing this quality or that quality, is that they don't want to develop. So they ask how to develop it without actually wanting to develop it. So they say we don't want to develop but we realize it's a good thing, so how should we develop it? Well, the answer is that you can't develop it unless you really want to. That's the first and most necessary thing. You've got to really want to grow; you've got to really want to develop; you've got to really want to develop mindfulness; you've got to really want to develop emotional positivity in the same way. If it's a question of celibacy, you've got to really want to be celibate, otherwise, of course, you're not going to succeed! Especially, you know, in a relatively difficult thing like that. But anyway, that isn't exactly the question. The question was - can we have it again?

Wade: Well, I was wondering whether a lot of the problem was really an inability or lack of desire to really make a decision about not having families? Not having children, Behind the desire to have sex is the fact that you want the consequences; you want the children and it's not just a matter of pleasure alone?

S.: Well, clearly your comments were only to do with one particular type of sexual relationship.

I think some people are clear, others are not. Some people are, or seem to be quite clear. They don't want children; they don't want to have a family; they don't want a family life. But nonetheless they do engage in sexual activities which are likely to lead to children. I think in those cases, they haven't always faced the issues squarely. And it may be sometimes that there is some residual doubt in their minds and that in fact they have not taken a definite decision not to have children. Otherwise, if they had taken a really definite decision, not to have children, well, then they would take steps to ensure that they didn't - and they do not always do that. Of course, sometimes it is just due to human error. They genuinely don't want children, but at the same time they don't always find it possible to practise mindfulness and so on and so forth. But I do think that in this area, as in so many others, one really needs to think things through clearly and come to a definite conclusion, know one's own mind - what one really wants to do; what one doesn't want to do; what one wants to have; doesn't want to have and act accordingly in a mature and systematic manner. For instance, I'm rather surprised, perhaps very easily surprised, because I hear for instance, of people engaging in regular sexual activities - you know, they've got a regular sexual relationship going - one year, two years, three years, and then one day the woman gets pregnant and they're both very surprised. But I'm naive enough to think that it's really strange that they should be surprised,

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because, could they not have foreseen? I mean, they've got pocket calculators - can't they work out the statistical possibilities? And so on. It would seem to me that you don't even need a pocket calculator. It's a matter of simple arithmetic which you can do in your head. You would have thought they would have anticipated that if they had a relationship going for all that time, even though they were taking, in a sense, precautions, at least in a rough and ready fashion, at least sometimes - well, you know that was going to happen eventually - that the woman was going to get pregnant. But they seem in some cases completely taken by surprise, like a thunderbolt from a blue sky. "Who would have thought!" (Laughter) "Who would have thought that actions have consequences!" "How incredible!" And this seems to be the attitude! So you know, therefore, this sort of principle that I've just mentioned, that actions have consequences - is really something that we need to ponder and have that really in our blood and in our bones and in all walks of life and in all areas of life and all aspects of life. Actions do have consequences!! I mean, in this particular area of life no less than in others; perhaps more than in others. Was that really the sort of thing that you were getting at?

Wade: It also occurred to me that in the Buddha's day, it would have been quite a clear choice: that if you wanted to lead a spiritual life you had to give up any kind of relationship with women, because

that meant

S.: Yes, you'd be tied to a family...

Wade:... And I mean it's only in the past twenty years or so that I think really contraception has sort of fudged the issue.

S.: Yes, I think you're right there. It has 'fudged the issue' to some extent. And I think people haven't psychologically adjusted to these various sort of technical changes. Just as they haven't adjusted to them in other cases as well. I mean, Einstein is supposed to have said: "Well, we've got an atom bomb but we haven't got an atomic mentality". In the same way, yes, we've got a contraceptive, but we haven't got a contraceptive type of mentality. We've just got the old fashioned sort of biological sort of cave-man mentality still. So, one needs perhaps to think very seriously about these things and be clearer in one's own mind. Because it does seem the contraceptives do sort of fudge the issue because sometimes people tend to think that they're sort of infallible, when they're not. You lose sight of that margin of error which is very definitely there all the time. But I think that the main point here is that, one must know one's own mind, be very clear oneself; be honest with oneself; be honest with other people; be honest with the people with whom you do have a relationship, of one kind or another. Especially, you know, in the case of this particular kind of relationship where consequences, in the form of children are always possible; at least have contingency Plans for it. Otherwise, sometimes one sees some quite unfortunate situations. There's an unforeseen pregnancy. Maybe the woman has got no decent place to stay; maybe there are financial difficulties etc. etc. I mean, that is not the way, to bring children into the world.

Devamitra: Would you say that the better contraceptive methods that are currently in use have brought about or are one of those factors that have strong influence upon ethical attitudes in the way that the nuclear bomb has?

S.: That's true. I think one can draw that sort of parallel because contraceptives have liberated women, especially, to a great extent, from the fear of pregnancy. You've only got to read, say, old novels,

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read, you know, what happens when respectable women, unfortunately, do become pregnant without being married - well just what that means to her and to her social... so, well, how unthinkable it is so that very often she commits suicide. Well, that has all changed, you know, at least changed to some extent. Or one might say to a~eat extent, due to contraceptives. But perhaps, you know, the corresponding emotional adjustments haven't been made. I do sometimes think that in the case of women, especially that they're not basically very happy with some of the things they do. This has all sorts of psych- ological consequences. Perhaps men too, aren't always very happy, with certain things that they do.

Devamitra: One observes, or at least it would seem that these contraceptive methods are a blessing, but perhaps they're not really?

S.: I think one can't consider them by themselves. One can't even consider sexuality or sexual relations by themselves, because they do take place between people who are embedded in a particular social and cultural context or milieu with its different attitudes and so on. I think that very often people do consider sexual relations 'in vacuo' as it were, almost as if they took place in a sort of vacuum, and were not related to other factors and, you know, considerations.

Devamitra: I suppose what's on my mind is that it seems that they allow for a possibility of evading responsibility, which previously perhaps wasn't there, - responsibility for one's actions.

S. Well, if contraceptives are successful you don't evade a respon- sibility because there is no responsibility. You can only take the opposite view if you believe, as the Catholics believe, that the purpose of sexuality is solely and exclusively for reproduction.

Simon Turnbull: There's the responsibility of the relationship with the other person, which perhaps you wouldn't have taken on so lightly if there wasn't such a direct possibility of the

S.: This is true. It's not only that you wouldn't have taken it on, you wouldn't have been allowed to take it on. Because in the days when a woman became pregnant, as soon as she started having sexual relations with a man, she made quite sure in advance, well, that he married her and that they set up a home so that there would be a suitable environment for any children that were born. But, you know, there has been a change and this is not the case. So therefore, those sort of relationships are entered into very lightly. One might therefore, say, in so light a manner as to be psychologically damaging. Because actually people do not know what they're doing and what they're getting involved in. There's all sorts of unconscious factors at work. Very powerful unconscious factors. So it does perhaps - perhaps one can come to this point that - it's not just that contraceptives enable one to avoid the natural consequences of sex, but that it encourages one, to enter upon, let's say, intimate relationships with members of the opposite sex, especially in a very light and irresponsible way. Disregarding the very sort of heavy emotional overtones and undertones of relationships of that sort, you're in some ways playing with dynamite. For instance, I'll conclude with this - just to give you a sort of example: two people, say, a man and a woman, they enter into a relationship and they both agree, it's going to be open-ended - no ties. "Yes, we have a relationship, sure! but you're free to go your way, and I'm free to go mine, probably at the same time." O.K. After a few weeks or a few months one of them acts upon that, and you know, starts up a relationship with some third person. But when the other person in the original relationship comes to hear about that,

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well, there's just murder, sometimes literally so. The relationship wasn't as open-ended as they thought. They didn't know, they didn't realize what they were getting involved in and one has seen this sort of thing happen time and time again. They've entered upon it all much too lightly. I'm not saying that one shouldn't be able to enter into relationships in that, as it were, 'light', sort of way, - perhaps one should, but the fact that for the majority of people it isn't possible, and they only deceive themselves if they think they're entering on such relationships, or into such relationships in that 'light' sort of way. No, much heavier factors are involved than they realize, or than they recognize, so they shouldn't play about with these things.

Parasanasiddhi: So in a sense, it's almost like the psychological factors in this are the real....

S.: Yes, you can't ignore the psychological factors, which sometimes go very deep. You can't take a common sense rational view of human relations because human beings are not just rational or logical beings. It might seem very sensible, yes, as open-ended relationship: how civilized! How enlightened! But is it possible? Are you civilized? Are you enlightened? Even in the 18th century sense, not to speak of the Buddhist sense! Anyway, perhaps we'd better leave it there and deal with the rest of the questions when do we? Tomorrow.

(End of Tape and session)

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Vessantara: So this evening Bhante, we have got a few pretty miscellaneous questions left over from the fifth lecture and about eight questions from the sixth lecture on samadhi and prajna. So if we take the miscellaneous ones first. Mike had a question about the terms 'masculinity' and 'femininity'.

Mike: Using the terms 'masculinity' and 'femininity' to describe spiritual qualities seems to result in misunderstandings for some people and I was wondering if you'd still apply those terms to describe ksanti and virya if you were to give a similar lecture nowadays~

S: It's certainly true that those terms, or the use of those terms even within single inverted commas has been the cause of some; I won't perhaps say so much misunderstanding as confusion. But I think I

can also say that people have allowed themselves to be confused, and they've allowed themselves to be confused usually because they haven't really listened to what I was saying in the lecture. They have had all sorts of other ideas or other associations with those terms buzzing around inside their heads.

I am not so sure that I would, if I gave a series of lectures of this type now avoid using those terms. Perhaps it would be difficult to avoid using them, but I think I would probably make the sense in which I used them even clearer and even less liable to confusion and misunderstanding than I thought I had made them there. I certainly wouldn't just leave it to a pair of innocent, single inverted commas. (laughter) I thought at that time that they would surf ice, but apparently not. Was that the whole of the question or is there something else? (Mike: yes) Maybe there's something else I could add there with regard to.., I think I spoke of ksanti as.., yes I spoke of it as a 'feminine' quality, didn't I - single inverted commas please remember. And also, I believe I spoke of it in terms of a receptive quality, thereby implying, by femininity, a receptiveness. And perhaps one of the things that I would clarify, if I was talking about these things again now would be that. While I certainly regard 'femininity' in single inverted commas as representing receptivity, I don't regard femininity without the single inverted commas as necessarily receptive or as representing receptivity. I have mentioned this more than once. In that if one speaks, say, of femininity without the single inverted commas, one is speaking in the literal sense, that is as associated specifically with women rather than with men. And I do not think, contrary to popular belief, that is to say popular belief on the subject not popular belief about what I think, I do not think that women, to put it briefly, are more receptive than men. I think this is a popular delusion or a popular fallacy. I am inclined to think that women are less receptive than men and that what men sometimes think of as feminine receptivity, or receptivity on the part of women, especially as regards ideas and things of that sort, is really in fact more or less indifference.

So I would probably, if I was to talk about these things now, make that particular point clear as well perhaps as some others. Anyway, pass on.

Vessantara: Padmavajra had a question about humour.

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S: Hmm, we haven't had a question about humour for ages.

Padmavajra: In the course of your discussion of virya you refer to the- Rodh.isattva '-s ila. I was wonderin in this connection about humour. Hflmour seems to occupy an important place in eo le's lives, is there a Buddhist attitude to or definition of humour, either traditional or modern which we could refer to? Does humour have a place in our spiritual lives? Are there any guidelines for the skilful enjoyment of humour?

S: Perhaps we could have that question clause by clause.

Padmavajra: In the course of your discussion of virya you refer to the Bodhisattva's lila.

S: Yes, I take it that everybody is clear from the lecture itself what exactly is meant by lila. Lila is a Sanskrit word, it means literally sport, or play. It is used, I think, much more commonly in Hinduism than in Buddhism, but it is used in Buddhism sometimes and in some contexts. For instance one has a Buddhist canonical text called the Lalitavistara. Lalita is a form of lila, lila means play, lalita menas something like playful. So the lalita- vistara, which is a Vipuria sutra, is an account, or an extended account of the lila, or play, of the Buddha. You notice it is not a question of the text being a life, as we would say, of the Buddha, it is a lila, an account of his lila, or his sport, or his play. Now why do you think that is?

Padmavajra: Because he enjoys what he does.

S: One could put it in that way, but that is not really, strictly speaking the answer. Can anybody else have a go?

Will Spens: Is it because he doesn't see any beings to be saved so he's not actually engaging in saving lives?

S: That is much nearer. Because one mustn't forget that the Mahayana, broadly speaking had what we might describe in Western terminology, though it doesn't quite fit the case, as a docetic or docetic Buddhism. That is to say, the Mahayana had, and here I'm speaking in very traditional terms, the Mahayana of course it's teaching or its doctrine of the Bodhisattva. The teaching or the doctrine of the Bodhisattva career. That Bodhisattva career, as I mentioned some evenings ago is represented as extending over three asankheyyas of kalpas, so that by the time the Bodhisattva on the threshold of his last life and on the threshold of his attainment of supreme enlightenment arrives at the Tushita devaloka and is waiting there to be, as we would say, reborn, as the son Suddhodhana and Mayadeva, he is a very, very, very advanced being. And in fact from our point of view he is probably indistinguishable from a Buddha. And he is not, of course, at that time under the power of karma or anything of that sort. It is as though he (what shall I say) almost emanates from himself a sort of ray that descends, and don't forget that the symbolism of the white elephant in this connection, descends into the womb of Mayadeva and is eventually, at least to all appearances, reborn. But he has not lost his, not to speak of mindfulness in the process, he has not his virtually enlightened consciousness. It requires just a little bit more effort for him to attain supreme, perfect enlightenment and all the events of his life are gone through not in reality, one might

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say, but as a sort of play just to conform to ordinary worldly usage. For instance, again we are looking at it from a very traditional Mahayana point of view, he doesn't really need to learn the alphabet, he knows it already, but he just goes through the motions of learning it, just to conform to worldly usage. In other words that's a play, he just plays at learning. In the same way he doesn't really want to get married, he just plays at getting married, he doesn't really have a son, according to the Mahayana. According to the Mahayana, at least some sutras, Rahula was himself an emanation from a higher world, not born in the usual way, so the production of Rahula was a play. So in the same way his leaving home was a play, his studying with the non-Buddhist teachers, that was a play. Even according to some Mahayana sutras, the gaining of Enlightenment itself was a play, in a sense he had already gained it. So you see the idea, what play in this context signifies. It is a sort of superogatory activity. So this is more or less what play means in the Buddhological context. And even the Bodhisattva on his level, which is still very, very high indeed sort of plays. One can regard his play or his leader as a spontaneous overflow of his inner realisation which transcends the immediate situation. He participates in the immediate situation but his motive for doing so is not the ordinary one, though it may appear to be such. So that in the real sense he doesn't actually participate in that activity, it is all a lila, it is all a play. Does that answer the first part of the question or have we not quite come to that.

Padmavajra: It wasn't the question, quite, but (?)

S: So just read that first clause again, just to refresh people's memory.

Padmavajra: In the course of your discussion of virya you refer to the Bodhisattva's lila.

S: Yes, so this is the sort of thing it means. It represents the participation of any, say, more highly developed being, his apparent participation in a lower level: or lower order, of activity, of functioning. Without being bound by it or limited by it or restricted by it in the way that an ordinary person would.

But this doctrine or this teaching is quite prominent in some aspects of the Mahayana but of course it doesn't feature at all in the Hinayana. Alright, let's go on.

Padmavajra: I was wondering in this connection about humour? I think that's because you said that the Bodhisattva doesn't... he enjoys it... he doesn't get...

S: Yes because clearly he wouldn't be worried. He would take everything very lightly in a sense. This is why it has been said, I forget by whom, it may not have been within a specifically Buddhist context, that to the worldly person the spiritual person appears frivolous. Because he does not take seriously the things that worldly people take seriously. For instance, the failure of a bank is regarded (laughter) -oh you must all be very spiritual- is regarded by spiritual

people as a quite hilarious sort of thing (laughter). Or if you lose something, or you don't get something, -or you are not given something that perhaps you were expecting, the spiritually minded person takes this all quite, takes this all quite lightly. Whereas the more worldly minded person would take it very seriously indeed. So you could say, in the say way, the more spiritual the more spiritually minded person regards as a joke things that worldly people don't regard as a joke at all. That is because he has got perhaps more of a sense of proportion and it has been said that one of the elements of humour is a sense of proportion, a sense of relative fitness, as it were. That you just see things in proper proportion. For instance you see, perhaps, a politician delivering a speech and he is so pompous and so self important that you can't help laughing. That is because you have got a sense of proportion, you can see that he is not as important~as he thinks he is. He is not as important as he tries to appear. So your perception of that fact is experienced by you as something funny, it tickles your sense of humour. So looking at it, or approaching it in this way one can begin to see that the fact that the Bodhisattva's life represents a sort of lila could perhaps be not unconnected with a sense of humour on the Bodhisattva's part. He wouldn't be taking seriously things that non-Bodhisattva's might be taking very seriously. Then?

Padmavajra: Humour seems to occupy an important place in people's lives.

S: Is that agreed, does humour occupy an important place in people's lives?

A: Some people.

S: Some people.

Padmavajra: I was thinking the amount of, for example which are, apparently humorous, and people find funny; and people seem to watch them (avidly ?) they have jokes in and. ...

S: Alright, let's just take it that a sense of humour does occupy an important place in most people's lives.

Padmavajra: Is there a Buddhist attitude to, or definition of humour, either traditional or modern, which we may refer to?

S: There is, of course, a well known reference to what is called the smile of the Arahant. It's well known that the image of the Buddha usually wears a faint smile or a gentle smile. The Buddha, incidentally, did say that laughter that shows the teeth is madness, according to the Pali canon. But the Buddha himself is represented with a gentle smile and the smile of Arahant is said in the Abhidharma to be an activity, as it were, which is karmically neutral. So there, even within the context of the Abhidharma you do approach, without actually using the word, something like the concept of lila. Something which is spontaneous, just as it were for its own sake, without karmic connections or consequences or significance. So it would seem that the smile is the Buddhist equivalent, at least at the level of Enlightenment of a sense of humour. One might say, why does the Buddha smile, why does the Arahant smile?

Well perhaps it is because he does perceive the disproportion, as it were, the incongruity between the the Conditioned and the Unconditioned. Or perhaps he even smiles a little bit at human beings, that is to say at unenlightened human beings, even though he may feel at the same time deep compassion for them. But sometimes, perhaps, he can't help smiling at the really ridiculous sort of way that they get

themselves into such messes, all completely unnecessarily. So perhaps that also contributes to his smile.

I don't think there is really much more in traditional Buddhist literature on the subject of smile or of humour, really, than that. But taking it, yes, that humour does occupy an important place in people's lives, what was the last part of the question?

Padmavajra: Does it have a place in spiritual life? Can you give any guidelines for the skilful enjoyment of humour?

S: I think one has to be very careful. I think, because humour -is quite often of a negative kind. I think a prominent example is for instance sadistic humour, and perhaps even more common than that but perhaps not quite so bad is cynical humour. Some times I have been a bit surprised and even somewhat concerned about the amount of cynicism-cum-cynical humour that there is even within the FWBO. Even within the Order sometimes. And people often are quite unaware of it or they have got into such a habit of it that they don't know that they are doing it, they don't know that they are indulging in it. Just as they very often don't know when they are indulging in what I describe as English humour. That is to say, a style of humour in which English people often indulge, thought is usually English people of a certain social and cultural background, without being aware of what they are doing and without being aware that it is unintel- ligible to other people who are not English. It's not fully humour in the strict sense, I'll give you an example, a rather mild example. I sometimes cull examples from the Newsletter. For instance, a couple of years ago, reading through the Newsletter I came across something like this. There was a report, I think it was about a retreat, might have been at Padmaloka, it might have been at some other place, but whoever was writing this little report about it referred to the people on the retreat: 'and after they had finished '~~wolfing' their food'. This was intended as a joke, that they had 'wolfed' their food but I pointed out to the person who wrote it that supposing someone in India read this and he would perhaps wonder, what does it mean, 'wolfin~g~their food' and would perhaps ask or look it up in the dictionary and would find out that it meant eating very greedily, like a wolf. So he wouldn't realise, he wouldn't take this as someone's cynical humour, and that it was not to be taken seriously at all, it was just a sort of joke. He would take it as actually, seriously meaning that the people on that retreat really did eat very greedily, just like wolves in fact. (laughter) But there are some people, I am afraid, even within the FWBO who habitually speak in that sort of way. There is that sort of tinge of cynicism-cum-cynical humour, running through almost everything they say and often they are completely unaware of this. And have difficult in seeing that that is the case even when you actually point it out. Even when they are admitting that yes it is so, and recognising that this is how

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they do it, even in that very.ifl the way that they reply they will at that moment indulge in cynical humour. They will say it, or acknowledge it in this same cynically humorous way. It's as if they can't get out of it, they are stuck in it. And I think, though this is not the most negative form of cynicism it is still rather negative, so I think one must try to avoid this cynical humour or this, as it happens in the case of some people, this constantly taking the mickey out of things, as you would say. Some people are doing this all the time and it gets into a dreadful bad~habit and it cannOt have a positive effect either on the person indulging in this or on the people who are listening to him. Do people understand what I am talking about? So I think, yes, humour is a good thing. People like Freud, I think, have spoken of humour and of the joke, of wit, in terms of energy release. And sometimes if you have a really good laugh, not withstanding what the Buddha said~about laughter which shows the teeth, it can have a quite energising effect on you. You really do express energy and the system, if you laugh heartily, seems to undergo a sort of physical paroxysm which does give you a certain sort of realise. Do you know what I mean? Even almost a sort of exercise. But I think you have to make a very strong, a very definite effort to make sure that your humour is completely positive and healthy. Not at anybody's expense, not cruel, not negative, not sadistic and certainly not cynical. I think cynicism is something that just has to be scotched, I see no benefits in it at all, no advantage in it at all, to anybody.

Padmavajra: Do you think a sense of humour is, bearing in mind your points that you made about the negative aspects of humour, that we should cultivate it in the sense of giving us a sense of proportion

about our efforts in the spiritual life?

S: Yes. I mean one aspect of humour, as regards oneself, is not taking oneself too seriously. Sometimes one's attitude is almost regarding some quite trivial aspect of your own life or your own work or your own activity as being of world shaking importance. When actually it isn't~ So, yes, one can have a greater sense of proportion with regard to oneself and one's own achievements and one's own affairs. That's not to say that one won't be no less serious and no less hardworking from the stand point, say, of the person observing you. But you won't have that same sort of egoistic self absorption. You won't be taking yourself seriously in that self absorbed, egoistic kind of way. So, humour, yes. Maybe humour does play a quite important part in our lives, but it can play a positive part in our lives only if the humour itself is positive and free from traces of sadism and cynicism and so on. But, have people noticed this sort of affliction of cynicism, as it is in fact? And how some people are affected by it or seem to suffer from it, almost like an incurable disease. Sometimes it takes a very subtle form and it would sometimes appear pedantic to object to it. But I think probably it isn't pedantic to object to it, because that very, very subtle cynicism can quite easily become comparatively gross, comparatively coarse and really quite unpleasant.

Phill Shann: Why do you think that it is that people are

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cynical? Do you think it's a sort of protection against gullibility?

S: I think that is one aspect of it. I think to some extent TE represents a fear of positive emotion, including one's positive emotion. Yes it does perhaps represent, on some occasions at least, a sort of fear of being taken in. And I think sometimes it can be a more or less, ostensibly refined expression of in fact a quite basic negativity, and anger. Anyway, it's an unpleasant subject so having sounded that note of warning perhaps we should just leave it.

Devamitra: Could I just ask you about the question of the Buddha having said that laughter that shows the teeth is madness? Is that attitude found also in Mahayana and the Vajrayana? Or would a different sort of attitude be found in those traditions towards laughter?

S: I rather doubt whether there is any difference of attitude within the Mahayana, but it does seem that there is some difference of attitude within the Vajrayana. Because the Vajrayana does speak of the adamant laughter. Even in the Vajrasattva mantra you have got the 'Ha Ha Ha Ha Ho', which is clearly laughter. So I think the Vajrayana's attitude is somewhat different. Perhaps one shouldn't take what the Buddha said too literally in the sense that it is not literally any laughter which shows the teeth is madness, perhaps he was thinking of a sort of uncontrollable laughter, even if you like giggling, which is a form of complete unmindfulness. Just abandon yourself to it, throw yourself around and open your mouth and laugh very loudly, raucous, coarse, crude, unmindful sort of way. Maybe it is that which he had in mind, not literally laughter which happens to show the teeth.

Pranasiddhi: There's a tradition that there's several levels, there is a sutra in the Pali Canon where the Buddha smiles; and you show your teeth; and there's a ha ha ha and then there is the sort where you're rolling around on the floor.

S: Rolling around in the aisles, as they say. Yes, I think possibly that the Buddha is objecting to that form of laughter which involves loss of control, loss of self control and therewith loss of awareness, loss of mindfulness.

Phil Miller: Like what happens in the shrine room from time to time, do you mean? This giggling?

S: I think giggling is a bit different. I think that is that a sort of bubbling up and spilling over of superfluous energy. It's as though anything will spark it off once you get into that state. I know when I was in Kalimpong, when I had a number of young Tibetans staying with me, sometimes they would

just be seized by this and I used to have to just send them out of the shrine room. They just couldn't stop, they just couldn't control themselves. It used to happen in this sort of way, they would be sitting quietly, it was usually doing the meditation after the puja and they found the meditation quite difficult. And what would happen is that one would just open his eyes and look like that (laughter)

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and then another would do the same thing and they'd both start giggling. It wasn't that anybody had made a joke or anything of that sort, and after a while they used to go almost into hysterics. And I'd open my eyes and they would be quite ashamed and I'd just go... (Bhante-gestures to leave the room with his finger) (laughter) and out they would go. They'd be quite sort of ashamed of themselves and crest-fallen afterwards. They wouldn't be able to understand how it had happened, not being given to self-analysis or anything of that sort. This was quite common, with some of them anyway. Anyway, that's quite a big subject and maybe we should pass on otherwise we will be with this topic the whole evening.

Vessantara: Padmavajra had another question,

S: But before we go on to that next question, I'll add something, something that has just come into my mind about laughter in Buddhism. Especially laughter in Western Buddhism, and that relates to my experience after I came back to England in 1964. I was giving lectures at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara. Most of the two years I was there I gave a lecture every week, every Sunday afternoon. But I remember in the course of my very early lectures whenever I happened to make a little joke, which I was in the habit of doing in India, and in fact it is quite customary, it is quite accepted in spiritual circles that in the course of your lecture you just help things along with a little joke or two. A meaningful little joke, of course, which illustrates a point. This is quite acceptable to Buddhists as well as to Hindus. But I noticed that when I made my little jokes in those early lectures at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara there was no response. In fact people seemed a little puzzled. And I came to understand that some people were even a little shocked and felt that jokes, or humour, or anything of that sort in a Buddhist lecture were quite out of place. Some of them even thought I hadn't in fact made a joke, that it wasn't intended as a joke and therefore it wasn't at all proper to laugh or even to smile in any case. But this said something to me about the state of Buddhism in Britain at that time. It may not be a very big point but clearly it indicated that humour had been banished from British Buddhism. I don't know how that came about, but that did perhaps suggest that they were taking themselves rather too seriously in the wrong sort of way. And certainly the approach of many people in those days to Buddhism, more especially perhaps those who were going to the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, who were predominantly inclined to the Theravada, was a rather heavy sort of approach. A quite unrelieved sort of approach. And I found much the same thing subsequently with people who were involved with Zen. In their case, too, there seemed to be no room for humour, despite the quite rich tradition of Ch'an or Zen in this respect. Alright, that was just my little comment before your next question. (end side 1) Padmavajra: One aspect of ksanti I would like to know more more about is the anutpattika-dharma-ksanti, or as you have translated it in The Survey, 'Aguiescence in the truth that all phenomena are in reality illusory, non-existent, unproduced and undifferentiated'. Then

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I have got three clauses;

S: I won't go into that in detail, that would take too long, but the general sense of it is this. That there are certain very profound teachings or very profound realisations and very often when one comes into contact with these for the first time one finds them profoundly disturbing. They shake one's whole being to the very core, so much so that you find it very difficult to accept those teachings. You are reluctant to accept them. You feel quite a lot of resistance to accepting them. So the anutpattika-

dharmas-ksantih consists essentially in the attitude of not offering any resistance to these higher truths when you encounter them. Or when, in a sense, you experience them. The particular higher truth which is mentioned here is the truth that the dharmas, the basic phenomena of existence do not in reality even come into existence. Usually of course, Buddhist tradition speaks of dharmas as coming into existence, persisting momentarily and then ceasing. But the profounder Mahayana teaching-maintains that dharmas do not even come into existence and the Bodhisattva is able to accept this truth, accept this teaching without any resistance. So that sort of receptivity# or receptivity in that sense is referred to as a kind of ksanti. Is patient acceptance of these higher truths, especially the higher truths of the non-originating character of all phenomena. So therefore, broadly speaking this just suggests receptivity to higher truths, to higher spiritual truths, higher spiritual teachings, and not offering any resistance to them. Which is clearly very very difficult. And this the Bodhisattva does on a very high level indeed. And this is a characteristic of irreversibility.

Padmavajra: The first clause I have got is:- What relationship does this have with seeing the beautiful, if any?

S: I don't think that there is any direct connection or direct relationship, no. There might be but I don't see it at the moment.

padmavajra: The second one is:- What relationship does it have with humility?

S: Well clearly one could interpret this kind of ksanti in Terms of humility, because sometimes people tend to think that something that they don't understand or grasp must be nonsense. So they just reject it. So ksanti clearly involves a lack of that kind of pride, that sort of conceit. So one could, perhaps, think of ksanti in this sense as in terms of humility. Though humility is a term we don't tend to use very much because it has all sorts of slightly negative connotations. But there is no reason why perhaps we shouldn't use it on occasion when it is not likely to be misunderstood. One can speak, for instance, of intellectual humility, The realisation, the recognition that you don't know everything, you know very, very little. In fact you know hardly anything at all, or if it comes to that you probably don't really know anything at all. So if you have that sort of attitude you are much more likely to be open to the things that you do see, that you do experience, that you do come to

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know or come to learn or come to recognise. And all of that is implied in the term ksanti in this sense.

Padmavajra: The last one is:- Do you think Keats, with his thoughts on negative capability might have been groping in the direction of anutpattika- dharmas-ksantih?

S: Well this raises the question, to what extent any mundane experience is a groping in the direction of the transcendental experience. I suppose you could say yes, because there is this doctrine of the viparyayas, which comes up in this lecture six, in a way. Because let's say in the case of the second viparyaya, to make it easy. The second viparyaya is to mistake the transitory for the eternal. In technical language to see in the impermanent, the characteristics of the permanent, which of course are not really there. So when you go after the impermanent, thinking that you are going after the permanent, in a sense you are wrong, but in a sense also you are right. It is right for you to go after the permanent, but your mistake consists in seeing the characteristics of the permanent in the impermanent. So you could say that here you do have an instance in this sort of experience of a sort of mundane going in search of the transcendental. You are looking for the right thing, but you are looking for it in the wrong direction. There is nothing wrong in wanting what you are wanting, What is wrong is that your wanting it in respect of the wrong object. So it could be, in view of that consideration, you could speak; in that sense you could speak of Keat's negative capability as a sort of search, unbeknown to himself, for the anutpattika-dharma-ksantih. You could in that way make Keats an unconscious, or honorary Buddhist, if one so wished He certainly wasn't a Christian, at least, and from all that we know of his life and his writing, especially one particular sonnet, Christianity seems rather to have disgusted him, Anyway, let's go on.

Vessantara: A question from Mark.

Mark McLelland: In your lecture you talk of the helpful spiritual influences which emanate from Buddhas and Bodhisattvas as being 'grace waves', which can be felt by those who are receptive to them. Could you elaborate more fully upon this term 'grace waves' and point out any difference between this kind of influence and the influence which a Christian may feel when he believes himself to be influenced by what he would term 'the grace of God'?

S: I think it's important that one begins by, as it were, recognising, or trying to see that words for instance like Bodhisattva, don't refer to abstract concepts, but refer to spiritual realities. In other words Bodhisattvas do actually exist, though in some other world of a quite different nature from the world which we inhabit and which we experience. But the question arises, what is the connection between these two worlds? What is the connection between ourselves and the Bodhisattvas. If we both, in some manner or other, even if not quite in the same manner, do exist, there must be some sort of connection. And also a Bodhisattva, by very definition, so to speak, would want, so to speak, to have

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some sort of connection with us. So therefore, one arrives at the idea of the possibility of a sort of mutual tuning in. So that when you become aware of a Bodhisattva, or you think of a Bodhisattva not in an abstract conceptual sense, but as it were with your whole being, when you tune in to a Bodhisattva, you are in a way in contact with him. Even if it is in a very subtle, attenuated, distant sort of way. So something, as it were, passes from him to you by virtue of the fact that you are in contact. Just as something passes to you from anybody with whom you are in contact, physically, emotionally, on every level. So what it is that passes from a Bodhisattva to you, is what we call, translating the Tibetan expression, 'grace waves' Also sometimes translated as blessing. The original Sanskrit word, or the equivalent Sanskrit word is *adhyesana*. So perhaps one shouldn't think of the grace waves as anything very special, in a sense. They represent the possibility, one might say, of vertical communication. Just as one is familiar with horizontal communication, that is to say communication with you and another person on the same level. Communication not so much in the sense of overt communication, but communication in the sense that, in as much as you are in contact with them even in as much as you are aware of them, and they are aware of you, maybe no more than that. You do subtly affect each other, that person affects you, you affect that person. So in the same way, in as much as a Bodhisattva is a spiritual reality, that fact that you are aware of him and the fact that he is aware of you means that you are subtly influenced or affected by him, but not horizontally, but vertically. And that sort of influence is what we call the grace waves.

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How it differs from grace in the Christian sense, well, that's no doubt a theological question. I don't know whether we have any students of theology amongst us. 'Grace' has been the subject, of course, of a great deal of discussion, especially I believe between the Augustinians and the non-Augustinians, the Catholics and the Protestants, the Calvinists... There are all sorts of ideas, all sorts of views. But if one looks at the whole matter not as a theologian and not as one who knows an awful lot about it, it would seem that in Christianity, at least in some forms of Christianity, the idea of grace represents a very arbitrary notion indeed. Because for instance in Calvinism there is this concept of some people being predestined to eternal life. Not on account of anything they have done, because they're predestined before they are born, before they come into existence, but out of the Grace of God. So the Grace of God seems to take on some of the characteristics of the arbitrary will, the pure whim (if you like) of some absolute monarch. And clearly grace in that sense bears no resemblance whatever to the Buddhist conception of the 'Grace -waves' of the Bodhisattva. Christian theologians would probably say well, that's only one concept of grace, and they might say that I haven't even properly, or correctly, represented that. But nonetheless, leaving those sort of (you know) refinements aside, the impression (at least) that one gets, coming from Christianity, is of grace as something arbitrary. I know there are different kinds of grace. There is for instance prevenient grace, well there are all sorts of different kinds of grace. But nonetheless one does get the impression of something arbitrary (you know) something which is given you which you don't deserve. Because in a sense you don't deserve anything; one could say that there is maybe some element of truth even in the Christian concept of

grace, because actually you don't deserve anything! If you think of the matter in Buddhistic terms, well, can you do anything, in a mundane sense, to deserve the Transcendental? Because if you can it would suggest there is some kind of equivalence as between the mundane and the transcendental. So just as you can't, by accumulating any amount of merit, arrive at wisdom; in the same way, translating it into a different language, you can never deserve grace. There is a certain (sort of) hiatus, there is a certain incommensurability between them. So one mustn't lose sight of that. But nonetheless, at least as popularly presented, the Grace of God does appear very much like the whim of an absolute monarch (you know) bestowing some blessing on some grovelling specimen of humanity, grovelling at the foot of the throne. And again Bodhisattva's grace waves aren't like that.

Mark McClelland: Can I just ask point on that question? When you mention blessings. This has been in my mind for the last few days, which is: A couple of years ago when the pope visited Manchester I remember Suvajra expressing a great deal of interest in going to actua~y~ see the man. A when I (sort of) taxed him on this he said he'd~you remark somewhere that it was a good thing to receive a religious blessing off any religious teacher. And that actually stuck in my mind, because it sounded a bit strange.

S: I don't remember ever saying this. If I did I must have said it within a certain context, and I think I must have meant any genuine

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religious teacher, any genuinely spiritual teacher, and I probably had in mind Buddhist teachers only.

Mark McClelland: Yes (laughter)

S: Because ... I'm not saying that there might not be some genuinely spiritual person outside the ranks of Buddhism, but I wouldn't really expect to find them in the Vatican. (laughter). If you see what I mean. Anyway, let's carry on.

Vessantara: So we're now on questions relating to this lecture.

S: How are we as regards the time?

Vessantara: It's half past eight. Wade had a question.

Wade McKee: Yes. I believe the four formless dhyanas as described as refinements or aspects of the fourth dhyana...

S: Yes.

Wade McKee: Do any of them have a specific relationship with developing insight?

S: Hmm. This is quite a big question. To answer this question properly one would really have to call into question the whole of the later traditional interpretation of dhyanas, rupa-dhyanas and arupa-dhyanas. And perhaps it would be a bit premature to do that at the moment. I will just say this: I think what I've described as the later traditional view of the dhyanas, arupa-dhyanas and the rupa-dhyanas, is probably mistaken in thinking of the arupa-dhyanas in purely mundane terms. They could be looked at as being, I think, at least, to use what may seem a paradoxical expression, quasi-transcendental. I'll just touch upon that, because it's something I've given a lot of thought to recently, that is over the last two or three years. If one thinks, for instance, of infinite consciousness, because the second of the arupa-dhyanas is infinite consciousness. So what does one mean by infinite consciousness? Does not the Buddha himself in at least two or three passages of the Pali Canon seem to speak of ultimate Reality in terms of infinite consciousness? And of a completely pure radiant consciousness. Does not the Yogacara seem to speak of Reality in terms of absolute mind? So one could not take the view that that infinite consciousness could be regarded as a way of speaking about absolute Reality itself? Not as representing an entirely mundane higher spiritual attainment? So certainly I think the whole question of arupa and rupa-dhyanas, and their relationship as represented in Buddhist tradition, has to be radically re-thought. Which doesn't just mean re-thought in the ordinary

sense but also, in a sense, really experienced, because one is really dealing~with labels for experiences here. So it's a question of attaching the appropriate labels to the appropriate experiences. And I think, I suspect, that in the course of hundreds of years, especially in some forms of Buddhism, the labels have got a bit mixed up, in the sense that certain experiences have perhaps been slightly wrongly labelled, and there's something now to be sorted out. I won't say anything more than that at the moment. Really one needs to write quite a thick book about these and allied matters. Whether I'll be able to or not I don't know. But I hope to express some thoughts on the



the subject in at least a succinct and perhaps more or less systematic form before too long. Meanwhile I think when one reads the Buddhist scriptures one should read them very critically, though at the same time with faith, and try all the time to relate what one reads, and what one thinks about, to one's own spiritual experience. If one does that then the texts themselves may take on a rather different meaning than the one they seem to have at first. Even than the one in what I've termed later tradition.

Vessantara: Phil had a question.

phil Shann: You mentioned in the lecture that you were thinking you could represent the four dhyanas in diagrammatic form. I was wondering if you had given any further thought to this.

S: I don't think I have. I did just look through the lecture (you know) a little while ago. And I was trying to think whether I did have any (sort of) any actual diagrams in mind at that time, but I couldn't remember. But I do remember quite well these drawings, these coloured drawings. What do they call that particular medium? (mutterings) No, no, no. Not crayons... Pastels, yes these pastel drawings by Lama Govinda. I have seen the originals and they're really very beautiful indeed. Lama Govinda showed them to me when I visited him many many years ago. They've been reproduced in that last book of his, on meditation and multi-dimensional consciousness. But to the best of my recollection, my recollection of the colours of the originals, the reproductions don't really do them justice. But yes, perhaps we should try to represent things more in that sort of way. But that suggests of course, or that means, that you've got to have the experience first. It's not just a question of trying to illustrate (you know) things that you read about in books. It's a question of trying to illustrate, try to (unclear) forth in terms of form and colour, what are actually your own experiences.

Vessantara: Lalitavajra.

Lalitavajra: The root jna is a very primordial (sort of) sound. And it seems to evoke (in terms of sound) almost like a quality of realisation. The word Buddha also has a (sort of) similar (sort of) relationship with sound, or seems to evoke a similar (sort of) relationship. I was wondering whether there was some... whether we've actually explored sound sufficiently as a medium for the development of realisation, or the development of insight.

S: I'm sure we haven't. I mean this whole question is (sort of) related to the question of what is termed 'sacred language'. I think it's not easy for us to explore the significance of these sort of roots, like 'jna' and 'bujj'. Buddha is from bujj, which means 'to understand'. Because these are not roots of own language. But nonetheless our language belongs to the same family as the language to which these particular roots belong, that is to say the Sanskrit language. And English does belong to the Indo-aryan group of languages, which includes not only Sanskrit and all the modern north-Indian languages, and Pali and Avestan(?) and Pelavie(?) and Persian and Latin and Greek and German, and so on. So that what one could do is to try to trace back basic, almost primordial, common roots. You might find some very interesting connections. I have done this once or twice in a very (sort of) minor way. For instance in the Ten Pillars of Buddhism I've done it with regards to lobha. I mean there's a common root behind lobha and love and lieb, and so on. So I think it can be a quite interesting study to try to find ones way back to these common roots. I did read something about it a couple of years ago but I can't remember the



book. This has been the subject of a (sort of) study. Because some people believe, and this is certainly the traditional Indian view, that the basic verbal roots of language itself correspond to certain basic perceptions of existence or reality. Do you see what I mean? Traditional Indian authorities on linguistics, as far as I remember, reduce the words of the Sanskrit language to (I think it is) 160 basic roots, to which, according to them, all words can be traced back. In other words it's as though, at the very beginning of history (and again don't forget Indian tradition sees history in a different way from which we do, doesn't see it just in linear terms, doesn't only see it as going back, but as going up). So the closer you get, according to this tradition, to the sources of language, in a sense, the closer you get to reality. The more primitive the language, not the less developed it is, but in a sense the more developed, because it's more closely connected to certain basic or basal intuitions of the basic nature of existence.

So this sort of approach I think is quite interesting. And you can see its (sort of) relevance from the (sort of) mantric point of view, or its connections from the (sort of) mantric point of view. Because in the case of mantras you've got certain basic sounds. You know, you're going back behind ordinary conceptual speech or ordinary conceptual meaning. I must say this is something I've not gone into very much at all. But it's an area of which I'm aware as existing, and which I'm aware really needs to be explored. It's simply that I've not been able to give any time to it myself. But there is that book - I wish I could remember the title of it - which was published not so many years ago, in which an English author does approach language (you know) from this point of view: as reducible to (sort of) basic roots, basic meaning, reflecting (as far as I remember) certain basic perceptions of things. Language is very very important, language is not only an expression of the way we see things, language also conditions the way we see things. If you're brought up speaking a certain language, you're almost bound to see things in a certain way. And not in the same way that someone else brought up speaking a different language sees things. This is why it's sometimes said that when you learn (you know) a new language, you acquire a new soul. Another way of experiencing the universe, almost. I remember from my days in India, there were certain things I couldn't say in English, which I could say in Hindi, and they just wouldn't fit into English, because the Hindi mode of expression seems to represent sometimes just a quite different, a quite unique, way of looking at things or experiencing things, which is really untranslatable and unreproducible in English. And that's so with all the languages. But nonetheless there are these (sort of) basic common roots which underlie all these differentiations and more specialised developments.

For instance, you mentioned the root jna, well, it's the same as the English knowledge, know, and so on. I believe - I'm not sure - but I believe it's the same as can and ken and cunning and king. The king was originally the man who knew and the man who could do. So I'd be quite happy if someone (sort of) decided to explore this field a bit. But I think you need to do a bit of comparative grammar. One of the most interesting books you could possibly read, or look into, is the English dictionary. Get a good thick one, especially etymological dictionary. And every time you're not sure about the meaning of a word, or a certain concept, look it up in the dictionary and trace its origins. What are the cognate words in - you can usually find them - Middle English, Anglo-Saxon, Old High German, Old Dutch, Icelandic, and then