

## 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*

## DISCLAIMER

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](#).

Aveston, Greek Latin, Sanskrit. You can trace the whole thing, you can see this whole family of words. And all the meanings expressed but all those different words belonging to that particular family, are (sort of) implicit in your one word in your language. It's a (sort of) leaf on that same tree. Do you see what I mean? And that can give you sometimes a much deeper insight into things, into the meaning of that word. Of course you mustn't apply in an unscientific sort of way, because sometimes the meanings of words change radically. But sometimes it's very interesting to see how they change. And even the fact that they changed in a particular way has a significance - for instance the way that the meaning of the word ahura changed as it moved away west into Persia and east into India. In India, in Avestan and (you know) related languages, ahura means a good spirit, but asura, as it became when it came to India, is a bad spirit. In the same way deva, diva, in Avestan, is also a good spirit, just as deva in Sanskrit, but devil in modern European languages... this is something bad, something evil. So that also gives us matter for thought. So this is a fairly interesting study. And I think as you (sort of) narrow the field, as you (sort of) go back in time and get back to fewer and fewer words, or reduce (you know) the later richness to a more primitive (as it were) simplicity, as you narrow it down more and more, you get down to certain basic concepts, which are absolutely essential to (sort of) human thinking, which means human perception. And if you can identify those you can understand quite a lot about yourself, and about all the universe, about religion, spiritual life, philosophy, (you know) almost everything, if we had this (sort of) critical awareness of words on that deeper level. Which means also a certain amount of intuition, a certain (sort of) almost poetic way of looking at them, and not doing it as a (sort of) scientific study, even though, yes, a certain amount of scientific information is also necessary and helpful. But you see the sort of thing I'm getting at. For instance just to give you a simple example, what's the basic sound, the basic sound in a way? It's MA. Because it's the simplest sound to make. Because theba~y goes AH, AH, WA.... then gets its MA, MA! So the first baby makes is MA. So therefore, in practically every language I think, you've got a word for mother which somehow is related to this basic syllable MA. And then of course a little bit more difficult is BA! BA! PA! So in that way you get another simple word. And of course a bit more difficult is DA! DA! DA! And then (sort of) DE! DE! DE! DA is to give. Give. I want. So you get back to (sort of) very basic needs and responses embodied in basic syllables. Anyway, no need to say anything more about that. It's a very interesting study. I wish I knew more about the subject.

Devamitra: Are these reasons you mentioned in one of lectures on the Vimalakirti Nirdeśa that Bodhisattva studies etymologies. Or was that for a different...

S: Well, yes, the Bodhisattva is represented as studying etymology, which is 'nirukti'. And nirukti is etymology in this sense that I've mentioned; that is to say the reduction of speech, the reduction of words, or tracing them back to these basic (sort of) speech units, these (what do they call them?) verbal forms, verbal roots, dhatus they're called in Sanskrit. That's another meaning of the word dhatu. It's a verbal root, in the linguistic sense. So that is nirukti, the tracing of words back to their linguistic roots. At least that's one of the principle elements of it. And there are a lot of writings on this particular topic in Sanskrit. It's a

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very richly cultivated field... in ancient times, traditional etymology.

Abhaya: I think you said earlier that language conditions, not only reflects the way you see things, conditions the way you see things. So that in a sense ultimately is (word unclear)

S: Well, yes and no. For instance what I was just thinking of was this: Because we're not really aware of the words that we use and their meaning and their origins, we often don't realise how intensely metaphorical our language is. I think one could say there is no language which is not metaphorical. Language is essentially metaphorical. Even our so-called abstract terms are basically metaphorical, which I think is something that scientists are only just beginning to come up against. You could of course take the view that if language is essentially metaphorical, how can language handle reality? But that assumes a certain kind of conception of reality. You're assuming that Reality is not metaphorical! You're assuming that reality is (sort of) abstract, as science thinks of it, or at least as science thinks it thinks of it. But if language is metaphorical, well, this to me suggests that reality is metaphorical. And perhaps one can get closer to reality by realising that one's language is, in fact, metaphorical. So, for instance, take a word like 'understand'. Well that's a good (sort of) intellectual word, but look at it more closely: under-stand, stand under. That's an intensely metaphorical expression. You're trans.. (~reak in recording)... essentially metaphorical, and that fact has all sorts of

interesting implications. ~Pc 1+) Abhaya: But you wouldn't as a ... I mean, does the Buddha's teaching (correlate?) with saying that reality is ultimately metaphorical? Absolute Reality? Is there any relative (reality?) or is that...

S: Well, even relative is a metaphorical expression. Put it this way: You cannot say anything about reality that is not metaphorical. Yes? of course Buddhism does at the same time say that (you know) reality is beyond words. And that's a metaphorical expression: beyond. That's blatantly spatial. (laughter) How can reality be beyond anything? You're suggesting that reality is (you know) way out there is space. That's no more sophisticated, and no closer to the truth, than saying that God is in heaven ~u there. The concept of God being in heaven up there in fact probably has a certain advantage over saying that reality is beyond the world, because at least it's quite obviously mythological language. Whereas you say, well, reality is beyond the conditioned, you think that you're speaking a very abstract spiritual language which is much closer to reality. But you're still speaking quite metaphorically. So you can not in fact speak non-metaphorically about reality at all. So if there is any sort of congruence between your statements about reality and reality itself, it can only be because reality is, as it were, metaphorical, or of such a nature as to susceptible to metaphorical statements. Which really means that you get away from the correspondence theory of truth, this is what it really boils down to.

Padmavajra: What's the correspondence theory of truth?

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S: Well, the correspondence theory of truth is that, well, there's an object out there. And an adequate description of it, that is to say a description that (sort of) fits the object out there, is an instance of the correspondence theory. The description corresponds to the reality. Suggesting two different things, one of which corresponds to the other. We usually think of a full correspondence of the description to the object described as constituting truth. But one need not think of truth in those sort of terms. And in the case of metaphor you haven't really got that sort of relation. Because it's as though in the case of metaphor the so-called object is implicated in the so-called subject. It's as though in the metaphor you've already begun to transcend that duality, so you don't really need a correspondence theory of truth. In other words the correspondence theory of truth is probably off the track anyway.

padmavajra: So could you describe metaphor as evocative?

S: You could say that. You could even describe (and this is a word I nearly always avoid, for obvious reasons) you could describe it as sacramental. In other words it is not that the metaphor (sort of) describes reality, or enables you to describe reality; a metaphor is a (sort of) specific form of the actual presence of reality. Do you see what I mean? Or that reality is, in a sense, (sort of) present in the metaphor itself. Not present in it as an object is present in a box, or anything like that; again, that's metaphorical thinking in a different sort of way. But a metaphor represents the fact of the actual presence of reality at a particular point, with a particular cross-section of events, or experiences.

Padmavajra: Could you give an example?

S: Well, all metaphorical expressions about reality are examples. Or you could say all metaphorical statements about anything are examples. But do see the main point, which is that speaking metaphorically doesn't mean that you hit upon a metaphor which corresponds to the truth, a metaphor embodies the truth; in a sense, in a very (sort of) highly specialised form, or a very limited form, that is to say a form under certain conditions or within a certain context, is reality.

Padmavajra: Is that why poetry can come closer to truth than...

S: Well, you mustn't say closer to truth, at least, not taking it too literally. Because that suggests a correspondence theory of truth. But you could say perhaps that it why poetry discloses truth more effectively. Because you know that it sometimes happens that an expression, say a poetic expression, communicates, even though if you take it literally it's nonsense. Or at least you cannot explain what is communicated, or the fact the something is communicated, in terms of the literal meaning of the language in which that communication is expressed. But something is communicated, something passes across, even though, in a sense, looking at it logically, it ought not to be able to. But it does. And poetry, or poetic language, or metaphor, has that (sort of) capacity. It seems to transcend the distinction

between the description and the object described.

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Vessantara: You say under certain special a metaphor can be reality?

S: No, I didn't say that under certain special conditions a metaphor can be reality. But a metaphor is a case of reality being under certain special conditions.

Abhaya: Perhaps it would help if you defined what you mean by metaphor. It's usually understood in poetic terms: describing one thing in terms of something else.

S: Mmm. Well, if you say the Buddha was a lion among men, that is a metaphor. What it means is immediately understandable. Linguistically you're not saying that the Buddha is like a lion, that's another figure of speech. But you're saying that the Buddha is a lion among men. That is to say you fuse these two ideas or concepts of man and lion. It is not that you are (as it were) comparing one separate thing and another separate thing. You're identifying the Buddha and the lion in a certain respect. And the metaphor enables you to see the common element in them - to see where man and lion (as it were) or Buddha and lion overlap.

Abhaya: But not correspond - overlap.

S: But not correspond... yes, yes. Overlap rather than correspond. Because they overlap to some extent because they do not entirely coincide, obviously. Because a lion is not a man and a man is not a lion. But you can nevertheless speak of a lion among men. You can sort of (you know) analyse it intellectually and say, well, the Buddha is among human beings (you know) just as the lion is among the beasts. But if you break it down in that way, if you take it apart in that way, it loses its unity and its immediacy and its impact, and it doesn't mean the same thing.

Abhaya: So would you say that ... I came across a phrase about the Avatamsaka Sutra, the Avatamsaka teaching is a vast system of correspondences.

S: Yes, yes.

~haya: ... You would say therefore that's rather misleading, it would be a vast system of metaphors.

S: Ah, yes. A vast system of overlappings, with one thing being present, to some extent, in every other thing. There is of course a teaching or doctrine of correspondences, but I think that can be misunderstood. It's usually based on the Hermetic saying of (you know) "As above so below" and yes, there is some truth in that. But one mustn't think of (sort of) one thing as corresponding to another in the sense that, say, a reflection in the mirror corresponds to the object; the two stand apart. There is a correspondence in the sense that where (say) the levels are different, one higher and one lower, there is a correspondence in the sense that the higher is (as it were) in a sense actually present in the lower, and the lower actually represents on a lower level, the higher itself. Do you see what I mean? Their being is interconnected in that sort of way. Not that one is a copy of the other in a different medium (as it were), while remaining quite distinct. So this is why I use the word sacramental, though, I also mentioned for obvious reasons, I nearly always avoid using

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this term. In some respects it's got entirely the wrong (sort of) associations. But I think what it boils down to to some extent, coming back to a different language, is we have to try to realise that language, even quite ordinary language, has a depth and a resonance that we don't usually appreciate. Even some metaphors have become hackneyed and stale. And I think this is one of the secrets of good writing, that you look at your metaphors all the time. For instance we've got this expression: He's as good as gold. Now that expression must have been very fresh and original and striking at one time, but we don't experience it as fresh and original and striking. It's just a (sort of, well a) dead (sort of) coinage. But if you think about it just a bit more, well, "As good as gold". Well, what a (sort of) wonderful, precious,

beautiful thing gold must have seemed to primitive man. Gold was the chief ornament, the chief adornment. Kings and queens and heroes and such people, they wore golden ornaments, gold had all sorts of wonderful associations. In Indian mythology there's the concept of a golden egg from which the whole universe originated, even in folklore there's the goose that lays the golden egg, and so on. So gold has got all sorts of archetypal connotations and so on. So if you say of someone "He's as good as gold" well, it's a very (sort of) powerful expression. Well, we've lost the sense of that. So I think when we're writing, and when we use, say, a metaphorical expression, or a (sort of) disguised or submerged metaphor, we ought to (sort of) ponder it a bit, and say, well, is this really fresh enough to use, or, can I use it in such a way as to communicate its freshness, to re-fresh it, to freshen it up, or at least to show the reader that I'm not just using it in the ordinary hackneyed (sort of) way. All these things, once upon a time, were real discoveries. But we've lost the sense of that. I think this is one of the things that one realises, that one recognises, when one reads, for instance, Milton ... carefully. Milton is very very much aware of the meaning of the words, and even the origins of the words, that he uses. And of course he was a very good linguist, knowing a large number of languages. At least eight or nine languages quite well. So again this comes back to something we were talking about, without going too much off the track: I was talking about vagueness and wooliness of thought, and one of the reasons for vagueness and wooliness of thought is that people have not scrutinised the language that they use nearly carefully enough. They do not ask themselves What do I mean by this? by this word or this expression? (You know) they just (sort of, you know) vaguely utter (you know) certain vocabularies to which they attach a minimum of associated (sort of) meaning. They're not able really to express themselves. When two or more such people get involved in an argument - oh, that really is hilarious! Well, you can see, if you listen carefully, how utterly, utterly, at cross purposes they usually are. They're not even clear enough really (word unclear) to disagree. But very often they think that they're disagreeing. And again this is really quite hilarious, because they can get very very involved in their argument, and very heated, and become very convinced that they're right and that the other person is wrong. But actually there's really not enough meaning in what they say for one to be able to speak of what they're saying as being either right or wrong. Because really, much of what they say is no more than noises. Almost animal-like noises, with a certain amount of meaning attached, but not very much meaning very often.

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Sometimes I've tried, as a sort of little exercise, listening to people talking and ignoring the meanings. Sometimes this is quite easy to do because there's very little meaning. And you can actually hear people say "Qua qua qua qua qua qui quo quo quack!!" (laughter) And really it's that. You see what I mean? (laughter continues) They don't speak, they just vocalise, if you see what I mean. So no wonder there's no clear thinking, and no wonder there's muddles, and no wonder there's confusion, and no wonder there's misunderstanding between people.

Greg Shanks: Is there a simple relationship between language and thought? What's the relationship, say, between the development of language and the development of thought?

S: Well, I think there's a clue to this in what was said a little earlier on, about language going back to certain basic forms. This means that language goes back to certain basic ways of looking at the world. And surely that is connected with certain basic ways of (as it were) thinking. Though probably if one goes back as far as that, one will not find that thinking is a (sort of) separate function from emotion, in the way that it seems to be nowadays. One would probably find that the further one goes back, the more these things fuse, and you've got certain basic ways of experiencing the universe, so to speak. Though you don't actually think in terms of a universe out there which you experience, but you've got certain basic ways of experiencing the universe which can't be described as exclusively (sort of) intellectual or emotional or volitional and so on. It's just the (sort of) total you experiencing the universe, though without there being that dichotomy between you and the universe which we at present find.

Padmavajra: Is this (unclear) in ancient times (unclear) words that could actually be thought to have manipulated reality?

S: Very likely, this is a big and rich and complicated field, I wouldn't like to rush in, because as I said a little while ago, I don't really know very much about this field. But certainly it would seem that there is some connection of that sort. And one knows that primitive man, who wasn't so primitive after all, attached extraordinary importance and significance to speech, to the spoken word. A speech was

regarded as having a (sort of) magical potency. And this is why even as late as the gospels, even as late as the gospel according to St. John you've got "In the beginning was the Word", you know, the logos, which isn't just word in the ordinary sense. In Egyptian mythology you have the idea (so to speak) of creation by means of the word, the powerful magical word. You find traces of that (sort of) way of thinking everywhere. And it's bound up with keeping your name, your real name, secret, because if someone knows your name, or can speak or pronounce your name, he has a sort of power over you. So language is an extraordinarily important instrument. It has been described as the most important invention of the human race. I mean language constitutes our world. Ken Wilbur's got some interesting things to say about this in some of his books, though he puts it in a rather roundabout sort of way.

Language does (one might say) our world almost literally, because language (sort of) mediates the world for us. In a way it filters (you know) reality for us. So we live not in reality, but we live in, so to speak, (I'm not subscribing here to the

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correspondence theory of truth)... we live, so to speak, in the world according to language. Language lays down, as it were, the lines along which we run, the lines along which our experience runs. I think we find it very difficult to experience something for which we don't have a word.

Vessantara: This is part of the reason why dhyana experiences are an important prerequisite for us. That you step outside that sort of...

S: Mmm. You step outside it, or perhaps to begin with you expand it, you refine it, (but eventually?) yes, you step outside it - which can be a quite terrifying experience because (you know) you lose all your landmarks. You can't find your bearings, you're quite disoriented. So therefore one might even say paradoxically, if you say to them "Ha ha, here I am meditating. Ah yes, here we are, here's the third dhyana! you're probably not there, because you're still within that framework or network of thought. If you actually were within the third dhyana you wouldn't be thinking of it as the third dhyana, because you would be referring to that particular (sort of) framework of reference. You might find the third dhyana is quite different from what you had thought, the way that it was described in the Pali texts. It may not (as it were) correspond at all, but nonetheless you'll see that, well, why in the Pali texts it is described in the way it is.

Greg Shanks: My question about the relation of language and thought wasn't quite to do with the origin of language and thought. It was more in that area that you just mentioned of... it's difficult to describe an experience, or difficult to relate to an experience of which you don't have the right word for it. It's more in that area of language and ...

S: Of course, if one (you know) thinks too much or too rigidly in terms of this correspondence theory of truth, nothing can be described. There's a sort of hiatus between the object and your description of the object. And the only way in which you can actually describe the object is to lessen or diminish that hiatus, and get to a more (as it were) unified, more integrated way of experiencing the world. And you will then resort to a more and more metaphorical mode of expression. It's interesting (well, this is a bit related) that poetry seems to come before prose. You have poets in all literatures long before you have prose writers.

Pranasiddhi: Isn't that partly to do with memorising texts?

S: It's partly to do with it. But suppose you go back to the ancient Sanskrit literature you get, say, poetry - to begin with you get, say, the hymns of the Rigveda(?) - and these are in a way quite sophisticated. They show an extraordinary command of language. But then you come on much later to prose, and the prose is quite poor, the prose is quite, well, it's not sophisticated at all, it's quite clumsy. And this is what one usually finds. So it would seem that (you know) people didn't just (you know) have recourse to poetry, that is to say to meter - meter and rhyme one is thinking of in this connection - because it was more convenient and because it helped their memory, but mainly because it was more natural to them. One gets the impression when one moves from the ancient poetry to the ancient prose that prose was not a natural medium at that time, people handled it very awkwardly. And you find this even in comparatively late periods: that prose is still

quite undeveloped and quite clumsy when poetry is already highly developed. And that would seem to suggest that it is more natural to man to express himself in a poetic way. Which doesn't (sort of) mean poetic in the modern (sort of) high flown sense, it doesn't necessarily mean in rhyme and meter, though meter is almost always there, not so much rhyme. But poetry means a (sort of) tendency to express oneself in this rhythmical, imaginative, mythical, metaphorical sort of way, because that is the way - basically, or originally perhaps - that one apprehends the world, the universe.

Padmavajra: Is it because of the greater degree of sympathy, in the sense of a higher degree of identification with ones environment.

S: Hmmm. That no doubt is a very big part of it, the so-called participational mystique of some anthropologists. I think there is some truth in that. I think we can experience that even today sometimes. There are days, I think, on which you do feel in harmony (as it were) with your natural environment, and other days when you don't. And I think when you feel more in harmony with your natural environment are days when you're more in touch, so to speak, with your own emotions. And perhaps on those occasions you feel (as it were) in a more poetic mood, you're more able to write, say, poetry, if you ever do write it, and it flows more naturally. I know that I myself have had the experience sometimes of being in that sort of mood. Not that it necessarily makes one a great poet or even a good one. But being in that sort of mood to such an extent that it seemed that everything that you experienced, everything that you were in contact with, was material for poetry. And that you were able to turn into poetry instantly (you know) whatever it was. It just (sort of) flowed into poetry. So sometimes one does have that sort of experience. And I think that was very likely the experience of (so to speak) primitive man to a very much greater degree. And this is why the poets, especially the romantic poets, are not just people who are cleverer with language than we are. They are people who experience the world in a different sort of way because they're a different sort of person, a different kind of person. It's not that they've just got a knack of rhyme. It is much much more than that. And that is why (you know) people like Shelley made claims about the poet being a sort of prophet and all that kind of thing - well that can be overdone, some of the romantics did overdo it - but yes, the poet does have that sort of nature. He's the vates, the prophet, not just the poet in the very limited modern sense.

Padmavajra: Hence the connection with the imagination being a faculty for perceiving reality.

S: Ah, that's too abstract. I thought you were going to say "faculty for perceiving images". That word would have been better. Not images in the (you know) "Thou shalt not worship images" sense, but images in the sense of - well, what would one say? - objects of the imagination simply.

Will Spens: Did you not say in one of lectures on the (unclear) of the Buddha's enlightenment He actually spoke in verse.

S: That's true, yes, yes. That is perhaps not without significance. And I've mentioned this too, you know, the Udana. And the Udana consists of verses spoken by the Buddha under intense emotional

pressure, as when he breathed them forth, which is what Udana means. And each little chapter consists of one of these verses followed by a sort of prose circumstances under which the Udana was in fact breathed forth. So one can think of the Buddha in a sense as being a sort of- inspired prophet or a poet. That isn't the usual way of thinking about the Buddha but perhaps that will help (sort of) restore the balance (as it were). Otherwise, I mean, often the way people write about the Buddha you get the impression that the Buddha was a rather schoolmasterly sort of person, sort of going around taking people to task and all that sort of thing. Anyway how is the time going?

Vessantara: Twenty five past nine.

S: Then I -think we've begun to come to the end haven't we? We've got a few more questions left but...



Vessantara: We've got another five left.

S: I think we'd better leave them. We've gone - I won't say thoroughly - well, we just touched on this question of language. I think it's very important, or some of its implications are very important. And I think it is a field that we do need to investigate much more. I can't say I've investigated it very much myself, but I really do hope some people will take it up, just as perhaps a special field of study. And then whatever interesting things they discover they can bring to our notice from time to time by (you know) writing an article for Shabdha or the Newsletter or (you know) giving a lecture or something of that sort. And perhaps get together books dealing with this subject which are of, perhaps, special interest. I've been a bit interested in some of the work that Heidegger has done in this connection. He's very keen on etymology and going back to primitive roots of words and archaic meanings. He's interested in doing this from the philosophical point of view. He points out for instance that the literal meaning of the Greek word for truth is an uncovering or unveiling. Which is very different, actually entirely different in connotation, from the English word truth, which you arrive at in an entirely different sort of way. Can you see that? Why should we have the word truth for truth? What is truth?

Padmavajra: Well it's a terribly abstract idea isn't it?

S: Not originally. It was troth. Say you plight your troth. So what does that mean?

Abhaya: You'll keep your word.

S: You'll keep your word. So your action is in accordance with your word, your word is in accordance with your action. So you see the notion of truth? Truth is a word which is in accordance with something. An idea which is in accordance with something. Corresponds. But the Greek word means to uncover, to reveal. It developed. Anyway perhaps we'd better leave it there.

(Bhante leaves, sounds of chairs scraping and people stretching) Will Spens: Basic puja in ten minutes. (cheers)

Simon Turnbull: With long readings.

Will: With no readings.

TRANSCRIPTION OF Q&A SESSION ON ASPECTS OF THE BODHISATVA IDEAL. Session No. 10 3rd Cot. 84. QUESTIONS ON LECTURE SIX. Dipankara. - I've actually got two questions Bhante. The first one is

to do with anxiety, the hindrance of anxiety. I couldn't recall you talking about states of anxiety as a hindrance. How would you define anxiety and what is its specific treatment in terms of practice?

S. - I think quite a lot has been written about anxiety in recent times. I think psychologists of one kind and another have made quite a study of it, because it does seem quite a pervasive feature of modern life. In fact this age has been called 'The Age of Anxiety'. Perhaps for obvious reasons. So no doubt there's quite a lot that could be said on the subject of anxiety, but there's just one point that I want to make, one point that emerges from the studies that psychologists have so far done.

That is with regard to the basic nature of anxiety. It seems that anxiety arises when there is a strong emotion of one kind or another which one doesn't want to experience, but which keeps trying to come to the surface. You're sort of half-conscious or it lurking there, you know, somewhere below the surface, and you're doing your best - though of course it may be a predominately or even entirely unconscious process just to keep it down where it is, not allow it to come up to the surface into consciousness. If it does start doing that, or if you sort of feel it coming up, you sense it coming up, then you experience that uneasy sensation which you call anxiety, because you're not ready and not willing to face it.

So if that is the basic situation in the case of anxiety, clearly one has got, sooner or later, to acknowledge that particular emotion and confront it, whatever it may be. So if one asks, well, how

one is to do that, clearly there's a lot that could be said - depending on the nature of the emotion, the nature of the individual person concerned, his or her particular situation, the sort of people they're in contact with, their particular beliefs, their way of life, and so on and so forth.

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but from the Buddhist point of view, anxiety, which is I suppose a form of fear, is a quite unskillful, quite unbuddhistic emotion & in one way or another we have to deal with it and resolve it. I think here one's spiritual friends- can be particularly helpful, they can as it were assure you when emotions which you are unwilling to recognise, acknowledge, begin to emerge into consciousness or threaten to emerge into consciousness, they can assure you that it's alright

,in a sense there's nothing to be afraid of. It would be better for you to have those emotions out in the open, it would be better for you to confront them and eventually, to the extent that they are positive, integrate them into your conscious attitude or in any case, whether they're positive or negative, integrate the energy which is invested in them into your conscious attitude, conscious personality.

So perhaps one can't fully, in a general way, say very much more than that. Incidentally you speak of anxiety, but that's probably only one particular aspect of that particular hindrance. Dipankara. - The other part being restlessness ?

S.- No, I think it's more complex than that, because anxiety can make you restless, that's one of the symptoms. but I don't know that anxiety in the modern sense was part of the original connotation of that particular Pali & Sanskrit term. but certainly anxiety is a member of that whole family, one might say, of unskillful mental states.

And there's a second question ?

Dipankara. - It's about the difficulty of getting into the 3rd Dhyana.

(Laughter)

Vessantara. - Did you say third ?

Dipankara. - Third. (Laughter) briefly, is this because physical sensation has to disappear and it is this that we tend to relate to

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our experience, we tend to relate to our experience on the basis of physical sensation ? Or is it more the sheer mental stretch in conceiving of the term permeation ?

S. - Well it's all of these. As regards disappearance of perception of the external world, that is to say the kama-loka, this is usually associated with the 4th dhyana, but certainly that kind of perception does become attenuated in the 3rd dhyana. But I suppose what is involved in a way is anxiety again, though in

a somewhat different form, because

all the familiar - signposts disappear.

We probably don't realise the extent to which we are at home in, the extent to which we make ourselves at home in, - the material world. Again the kama-loka as this is called in ~uddhist tradition,

though kama-loka - covers a rather

wider band of existence than the modern term 'The Material World' or

'Material Universe'.

When we find ourselves in a state, or begin to find ourselves in a state, where we're not actually feeling anything, in the sense of experiencing any tangible, where we don't hear anything, we don't see anything, don't smell anything, don't taste anything, when those familiar signposts, as I've called them, start disappearing, then we can become quite uneasy, and it is partly or to a great extent that uneasiness, that feeling of uneasiness, which prevents us from going any further. We want to hang on to what is familiar, because our security is there. After all, what would life be like, you might think if you didn't see anything, didn't hear anything, didn't touch anything, didn't taste anything, didn't smell anything, what sort of life would that be? You'd feel yourself sort of disintegrating.

So in a sense, entry into the 3rd and still more the 4th dhyana represents entry into a state of, in a way, sensory deprivation. Of course there are compensations, of course the rupa-loka is incomparably preferable to the kama-loka, but until you've actually experienced



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◆ something of the rupa-loka, the rupa-loka is only a word. You are

just familiar with that safe, warm, cosy kama-loka, if you get very

far beyond that you begin to enter unfamiliar territory. Hence again that the uneasiness. So I think it is only when one has had a certain amount

of experience of the rupalokas and especially when you've started

going beyond ordinary sense experience that you begin to find that for quite

less and less anxiety inducing. Of course at a while you'll have

a foot, so to speak, in both worlds. - Sense impressions will not have died out completely by any means, but - at the same time, you've some experience of the rupa-loka. Some experience of the abhyana, especially the 3rd and 4th abhyana, will begin to sort of filter through. It's like when you're under water, the rays of the sun penetrate to some extent - so you perceive them even though you yourself are in the

midst of the water. just But this is one specific instance of a very general

rule. We tend to fear the unfamiliar, the unfamiliar tends to make us afraid. We very often experience this when we go to an unfamiliar

place, especially an unfamiliar country. Or we meet a new person, or even we embark on some new enterprise, anything of that sort, anything that is new, anything that represents an extension or expansion into an unfamiliar field is very often accompanied by anxiety or even by fear. In some ways you could say that to experience anxiety or fear in that way is a not unhealthy thing. Inasmuch as it does suggest, well, you are moving into new territories, or at least thinking that you are.

When of course you are anxious and afraid even in familiar situations, that is definitely neurotic. (Laughter). That requires further and deeper investigation. But I think we probably don't realise the extent to which we do experience anxiety - I think we probably don't realise the extent to which we experience anxiety in all sorts of situations - in which perhaps we shouldn't experience it at all. It's quite a pervasive feature of our mental

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life - our emotional life. It would manifest itself in the case of a lot of people as hesitancy\* nervousness, diffidence\* reluctance, lack of initiative and so on. People who have this, especially young people who have this, are very noticeable - they stand out from the others, that is, who have confidence, who don't have anxiety and who are not fear-ridden.

You can tell sometimes very easily with people. You can ask someone to go and get you something, go and buy you something in a shop, you just give him the money and off he goes. Someone else will say, 'How will I find the shop?' and 'What will I ask for, when I get there?', 'Suppose they don't have it, or 'How do you know they stock it?' and they'll ask you a dozen questions like that - instead of just going off and just trying to buy that particular item for you. And this is quite often an expression of anxiety. Especially if you haven't asked them to purchase a very rare sort of item for you, something quite ordinary - at least so far as you're concerned.

Anyway perhaps that's enough about anxiety.

Vessantara. - So say we've been moving into deeper states of meditation, is there anything beyond simply constantly just trying to slow yourself to go deeper that one can usefully do ?

~.- Well I think there are several things ~nce we're on the subject. As with regard to mindfulness, and a number of other things, one must want to go deeper, one really must. Otherwise one won't. One must want to go deeper, one must take all the necessary steps to go deeper.

One must avoid the hindrance, distractions, to go in deeper. And you must devote a sufficient amount of time to it, so that you can develop a kind of momentum. And you must remain watchful and aware and realise and recognise that once you reach a certain point, or

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begin to reach a certain point, there's going to be a lot of resistance - you're going to come from deep down in you. ~oeo parts of you, so to speak,

which don't want to change, which want to remain as they are, which don't want to come up into the open, don't want to be exposed - they

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will start resisting. Sometimes very strongly. And they will provide you with all sorts of excuses for not continuing. So one must be on the alert and be able to recognise those sorts of factors within oneself at such times.

Pruanasiddhi.- it sounds if we're getting very sort of complicated.

You wouldn't sort of know whether... like you might get to a certain point and you might think 'Well there's no point in going any further'~'

maybe I'll go back, and do something else'. You could be rationalising, on the other hand you could be actually right, you might as well go

back and do something else or approach things from another angle completely.

S.- Well it isn't easy to approach, say, a deeper meditative experience from 'another angle' as it were. I think the best way of getting deeper is just to stick at what you're actually doing at that particular time - not for instance switch activities, or not go and have a cup of tea or allow yourself to be distracted in that sort of way. Of course one must be, at the same time, sensible. And for instance, if your knees are aching so badly that you can't concentrate, well don't insist on sort of sticking it out and just sitting there. Relax your limbs mindfully, perhaps even go and have a cup of tea, but be quite aware what you're doing, you're only (as it were) maneuvering. You're only (sort of) playing for time. You're keeping your meditative objective firmly in mind. You're not forgetting it, maybe the repetition of your mantra, and your aim is to get back to your practice and get back to the cross-legged position as soon as possible. And you don't lose sight of that objective. (p.uso)

it does seem to go back to something I've mentioned already, it

does seem in any sphere of life - to succeed at something you must perhaps isn't want, I won't say to succeed because in this context it's quite the

right term, but you must want to be involved, want to be engaged in that particular activity. If you don't really want to - then you won't get very far, in any field whatsoever. I mean, some people

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might like to make a lot of money, but they don't want to. They're not prepared to go all out to make a million dollars, let's say, or a million pounds by the time they're 30. Some people are, some people actually do that, and sometimes, perhaps even quite often they succeed because they sacrifice absolutely everything else to that. They think of nothing else, day and night almost, except making that money. All their energies are bent in that particular direction. The same with someone who wants to be a great writer, want to be great musician, they throw themselves into it - they really want to be that so they do get somewhere. They do produce something. Whether when they've produced it it's worth anything, that's entirely a different matter.

Of course in the case of meditation it doesn't work out like that. You know, when you actually get into the dhyana - it may be a good

kind or is dhyana, or it may not be - no! Success is guaranteed in this sort of field. (Laughter) That's one of its advantages. You can spend 10 years producing your epic - it may be a success - it may be a second Paradise Lost, or it may just be a complete failure, a complete waste of time, so far as its aesthetic value is concerned. But if you spend 10 years meditating, and actually do get into dhyana states, there, no question of those dhyana states not being the ones that were wanted. (Laughter) The real dhyana states - no question of that. So you can't fail. This is why it's sometimes said in India - this is a sort of popular religious saying - That if people devoted the same energy and interest to the spiritual life, that they devote to ordinary things or material things, success would be assured. You've got the energy. You really notice with people sometimes - how they sort of 'buck up', how their energy seems to start flowing again, if you suggest to them to do something that they're really interested in.

I've actually overheard conversations like this in some communities. Somebody says 'Coming to the study group tonight?' and the other person says 'Oh I just couldn't, I'm so tired\* I just can't do a

thing. I've really been working hard all day, I just want to rest, I just want to lie down. I just can't come to the study group. Five minutes later someone else comes along and says 'Do you know that film? such and such film? Its on this evening'.

And you jump up and say ' Well where ?', (Laughter)

Here you've perked up, our energy has flowed back, and off you ly go and see it~ and your tiredness has comPlet~gone, disappeared,

vanished. So, almost always we've got energy. And if we reffial~y ~r9 interested in something and really want to follow that paiticular

interest or activity, we do and we make a success of tt. Unless we

really want to do something we might as well just not bother. kind Padmavaira.- Is it worthwhile asking how you of inculcate that

attitude of really wanting to e.t somewhere~?

S.- Well in a sense you can't, because except in 50 far as one is

you asking well 'H0~ doAtransform a purdy inteleotual recognition of

the rightness of something into an ardent desire actually to ach~ve that particular thing ~' And that isn't easy, you've got to find some emmottonal connection, you've got to want to want. So in a sense you're back at the same problem.

Sc I h~~s~~ss~d this on some other occasion, at sons lsn~h I think. I think I made the point that you've got to inentify your actual wants. You've got to find out Where your amotions actually are at this moment, you've got to find out what you really want, what you truely want. And then you've got to try to link up what you really want, your desire for this or ;~our desirofor that, with some other activity or interest or goal which you~ as y~t only intellectuall~, recognise as bning of higher signficance and value.

Do you see what I mian~ or shall I try and give a ooncrets example? I don't know that I celd think of a very goo& one~ but the b:e~ett ~ can do at the moment is this. Supposing you're passionat~y

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interested in the arts, say the visual arts - supposing you're passionately interested in sculpture. But suppose inteleotually you wabt to get involved with Budcihism, with the Dharma, so what should you do? Well, you could make a special study of Buddhist soulpture. You could make a study of Oandhavian sculpture, of the far-eastern Chinese and Japapese wooden soulpture and so on. Because that would tend to bring the two ti~ings together. That particular interest would tend to act as sort of half-way house, as a bridge almost, between what you really have a strong feeling for and what you feel you ought, on pur~ly intellectual or abstract or general grounds, be involved in. But if you were to put aside your very strong interest in sculpture and try to study, say Buddhist Philosophy or Buddhism itself, just on purely general ab~act grounds, you would probably find '-tt very, very difficult.

Some people of course can force themselves, they can force themselves to study for instance

things that they're not interested in, to do things they don't want to do, but you can't do it for too long. After a while you'll arrive at a certain point and there will be a very strong reaction, a real sort of kick back from the rest of you, that other part, that bigger part of you that has not been involved and doesn't want to be involved.

But I think the basic question is first of all to ask yourself, 'What do I really want to do?' and sometimes one even has to say 'Well do I really want to meditate? Do I really want to study the Dharma? If not, what do I really want to do? & if I have a completely free choice - what would I do?' Some people don't know, because our way of life has very often thoroughly confused us - we don't even know sometimes what we really want to do. And sometimes we just have to wait, we just have to stop, not do anything - and allow, so to speak, our real wants, our real desires - skillful or unskillful, or unhealthy, to come to the surface so that we can identify them.

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Perhaps we've been so busy, with this that and the other, so much sort of 'wapt along' by the whirlwind of ordinary life that we

even asked ourselves, 'What do I really want to do?'

of course I'm not suggesting a purely subjective, self-indulgent approach, this

is only a primary step, as it were, so that you can establish some

emotional connection with what you recognise you ~ to be doing. -Jonathan Brazier. - If they're unskillful, if you find your real wants are unskillful, then presumably you couldn't connect that up with Buddhism, you'd have to somehow change your attitude.

S. - Well, ye. and no, because the question arises, 'Well what does one mean by real wants?' Presumably one means by 'real wants', wants that are not actually neurotic, which are more of the nature of genuine human needs. But even if they are unskillful, perhaps even then you can establish some connection with Buddhism, with the Dharma, at least in a slightly roundabout way. Supposing you discover that actually you really dislike people - you really want to annihilate people. (Laughter) So alright, that's what you really want, that's what you really feel

- like doing. So what are you going to do then? Well clearly it's unskillful and negative. but you could perhaps transfer it to ideas. Think in terms of annihilating error - annihilating miccha ditthi, go looking around, fishing around for miccha ditthi that you could direct all your anger and hatred onto. Perhaps one could make the connection in that sort of way.

It's probably very difficult to find any want or anything that you want which is so irredeemably and exclusively and entirely negative that you couldn't possibly make any sort of connection between that and some aspect or another of the Dharma or the spiritual life. I think that would be quite difficult. (~ss)

Also of course it's interesting there is, as it were, the underlying suspicion that if you slow your wants to come to the surface, well something pretty dreadful - is sure (laughter) to come up. But why