

General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

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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](#).

TUSCANY 1984. Questions and answers on the BODHISATTVA IDEAL.

Those present: Ven. Sangharakshita, Vessantara, Devamitra, Susiddhi, Prasanasiddhi, Sarvamitra, Kamalasila, Padmavajra, Lalitavajra, Dipankara, Abhaya, Dave Living, Phil Miller, Geoff McMahon, Phil Shann, Steve Webster, Pete Dobson, Will Spens, Ric Cooney, Greg Shanks, Jonathan Brazier, Mark McLelland, Wade McKee, Simon Turnbull, Antonio Perez, Mike Shaw.

SESSION I.

Vessantara: The first set of questions arise out of the fact that in that first lecture you tell the story of the Parinirvana. And firstly Abhaya has a question connected with the Parinirvana.

Abhaya: Yes. It seems from the way the Bodhisattva Ideal is expounded that one difference between a Buddha and a Bodhisattva is that the Bodhisattva, unlike the Buddha, deliberately does not attain Parinirvana until, so to speak, samsara is empty. I've often wondered how the Mahayana justifies, so to speak, the Buddha's Parinirvana. Do you understand what I mean?

S.: Well, in a way, the question is answered in the Saddharma Pundarika Sutra, where the Buddha - the Buddha of the Mahayana at least, says very clearly that his Parinirvana is only a skilful means, which suggest or would imply that the Mahayana at least doesn't understand the Parinirvana of what we would regard as the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, as being literally a Parinirvana in the sense that the Hinayana would understand it to be such.

Another point, of course, that arises is that it is very doubtful whether one really can distinguish say the 'Buddha' (single inverted commas) and the 'Bodhisattva' (single inverted commas) as two distinct personalities. There are some schools of thought that do maintain that what we think of as, say, a Bodhisattva is that aspect of a Buddha which, at the time of his 'Parinirvana' (single inverted commas) does not, in fact, enter into Parinirvana. This is why it is said, in a more exoteric way, that the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara functions in the interregnum between the disappearance of Shakyamuni and the appearance of Maitreya. But it is not that it is really the appearance on the scene of a separate or distinct personality. But it is rather that aspect, so to speak, of the personality, or being, to use an un-Buddhistic term, of Shakyamuni Buddha which does not, so to speak,

-1-

2

disappear into Parinirvana.

So these sort of considerations would suggest that one can't discuss the whole subject in too literal a manner.

Vessantara: Will had a couple of questions relating to the Maha Parinibbana Sutta.

Will Spens: In the Maha Parinibbana Sutta The first question, well first part of the question is - what is the significance of Ananda's request? Ananda has a chance to request that the Buddha should stay up to the end of the Kalpa, but he doesn't do so. And the second part of the question is - why should it be necessary for Ananda to make such a request?

S.: Tradition is a bit divided on this question. According to some accounts, or according to some interpretations, the expression 'the end of the kalpa', or 'end of the kalpa' in this context refers to the end of the normal span of human life - that span being taken to be a hundred years. But according to another school of thought 'kalpa' or 'kappa' here means an aeon in the cosmic sense. But, in principle, the question is the same. It has often been asked, first of all, why did Ananda fail to ask the Buddha to stay on for whatever length of time and, secondly, why the Buddha needed to be asked.

But to deal with the second question first. It seems to me that the only way in which one can make sense of the passage - and many people have tried to make sense of it - is by assuming that in the Buddha the will to live was so completely extinct that the Buddha couldn't even think in terms of continuing to live himself except at the definite, specific prompting of some other human being, some other living being. As if to suggest that there had to be a real objective need for him to stay on to which he could respond. But that so far as he personally, so to speak, was concerned there was absolutely no question of his having any reason or any motive to continue.

As for why Ananda didn't see what was needed and ask, well, the sutta, you may remember, does say that he was misled by Mara. One can understand that in several ways. But it is clear from the Pali text generally that Ananda was not an arahant, he was only a Stream-entrant, and one can only assume that there was some lacking, some deficiency of wisdom or understanding or insight in Ananda which caused him not to be able to see what was wanted, not to be able to take the very broad hint which, according to the text, the Buddha did give on that occasion.

-2-

3

I think one finds, or at least, sometimes finds in the Pali texts, incidents for which, reading them as they are recounted in the texts themselves, there is no completely satisfactory explanation at which we can arrive. And this is perhaps one of them - We have to make the best we can of the text. Make as much sense of it as we can and leave it as that - at that, awaiting perhaps, you know, further light on the subject from sources which at present are not at our disposal. Say, some alternative version of that episode in some other version of the text which has not yet come to light. Maybe there is such a version in Sogdian or some other such language into which Buddhist texts were translated in ancient time and which are being discovered in the sands of Central Asia. That is always possible.

But I think the main point that emerges here is the Buddha's absolute, (well) inability one might say, to think in terms of personal survival.

Will Spens: Do you think there might be ... is there a parallel between that and Brahma Sahampatti's request?

S.: One could very well say that. The Buddha had no, as it were, egoistic desire to preach. Though again, of course, one could say that in the case of Brahma Sahampatti this interpretation has been put forward - that Brahma Sahampatti here represents a sort of movement, you know, within the Buddha's own mind, on a certain level. One could look at it in that way.

But looking at Brahma Sahampatti as a separate and distinct person- ality, very much like Ananda but on another level, one could there very well interpret the incident as signifying that the Buddha had no self- interest, so to speak, no egoistic desire to preach, and had, so to speak, to be prompted from outside and know that there was a real objective need for him to preach, because he had no subjective need to preach, and that objective need was manifest in the person of Brahma Sahampatti.

Kamalasila: It seems strange~ though that somebody like the Buddha should not see the objective need. (Two unclear comments.)

S.: But here again, you see, we come to this question, which I touched on before, of separate and distinct personalities. Well, perhaps~one could regard Brahma Sahampatti as being that aspect of the Buddha's own personality.

-3-

But again, as I've said on other occasions, one shouldn't perhaps think of the Enlightenment as occurring at some particular point instant in time. Perhaps one should think of it more in terms of a process which covered several days or even, perhaps, several weeks, and which took time to unfold itself.

To begin with the Buddha was, so to speak, completely immersed in the experience of Enlightenment and that relative existence was, so to speak, completely blotted out and it was only gradually as he, as it were, from one point of view, emerged from that experience, and, from another point of view, as that experience itself broadened out, he became aware, in a manner of speaking, of that so-called objective need, which wouldn't have been objective in our sense, to preach the Dharma.

Kamalasila: But that later episode, that later incident was at the end of the Buddha's life (unclear) actually gone through that process.

S.: Well, he had done his work, so to speak. There was no need for him to do anything more, one might say. And that is perhaps why the Mahayana regards the Parinirvana itself as a skilful means. What he had to do then was to die. That was the most skilful thing he could do.

Vessantara: Abhaya~wanted to know more about the split.

Abhaya: Yes. The split which you talk about which occurred between the two parties of disciples. One of whom concentrated on the teaching and the other on the life and experience (unclear) I was just wondering how soon this split comes into evidence and what evidence there is for it and whether you could recommend any sources.

S.: Oh yes, I mean, here I've deliberately not gone into the historical background in any detail. But the split did take place about a hundred years after the Parinirvana, in connection with, or perhaps, in a sense, even at the Council of Vaisali. It was there that the Theravadins succeeded from the

Mahasanghikas, or vice versa. The Mahasangikas, as the name suggests, being the majority party, and the Theravadins, or Sthaviravadins, being the minority party. There are a number of different accounts in Pali and in Saṃskṛit sources which have been translated into Chinese and Tibetan. They differ to some extent, in fact, sometimes they differ considerably.

But, that is, broadly, the picture that emerges of a minority party that attached more importance to the letter of the teaching, and a

-4-

majority party that attached more importance to the spirit of the teaching. A party that concentrated on what the Buddha had said, and a party that concentrated on what the Buddha was and what the Buddha had actually been.

So I think the explanation that I have given is, on the whole, a sort of, quite fair interpretation of the real point at issue. And it is perhaps significant that it was mainly from among the Mahasangikas that the Mahayana eventually arose. Though, I mean, information about this split is available in quite a number of modern works. I think one of the latest, perhaps, the latest and probably the most, well perhaps I should not say reliable but certainly the most exhaustive generally available Warder's 'Indian Buddhism'. That gives quite a good account of this whole business.

But, I think, Also one needs to understand that it's not a question of there having been in Buddhism this kind of split at one particular point, and that thereafter all Mahasangikas and all Mahayanists invariably adhered to the spirit rather than the letter and all Theravadins or Sthaviravadins invariably adhered to the letter rather than the spirit. It is not quite as straightforward as that. Because, I mean, there have been Mahayanists who have adhered to the letter of the Mahayana, you know, very much against the spirit of the Mahayana and you can find Theravadins who adhere to the spirit rather than the letter of the Theravada. So, when one has any sort of formulated teaching, whether a Buddhist teaching or any other, there is always the possibility of taking that towards either of these two attitudes. And the fact that, so to speak, historically you belong to the school of the spirit as opposed to the school of the letter does not necessarily mean that you yourself, personally or individually are more observant of the spirit than the letter or vice versa. So you mustn't say 'Ah well, I'm a Mahayanist, I'm broadminded automatically. I only consider the spirit, not like those wretched Theravadins.' One is not really justified in thinking in that sort of way, or assuming necessarily that, because someone is a Theravadin, he necessarily, on all occasions, adheres to the letter rather than the spirit. It is very much a question of your personal attitude or personal response to the teaching which can be taken in either of these two ways, however formulated and whether within this Yana or that Yana.

This is why I'm inclined to say nowadays not so much that there is a Hinayana or a Mahayana as a spiritual phenomenon, or even that there are individual Mahayanists and individual Hinayanists as though they're always either one or the other; but rather that on any particular oc

-5-

casation, within any particular context of spiritual life, you may adopt either a Hinayana attitude or a Mahayana attitude. It seems very much more like that. It is not that, well, this is the Mahayana, that is the Hinayana, except in a purely historical and, as it were, technical sense. Or that here is a Mahayanist and there is a Hinayanist. It is more that well at this particular moment is my attitude towards, say, meditation a Hinayana attitude or a Mahayana attitude? Is my attitude towards work a Hinayana attitude or a Mahayana attitude? Is it self-regarding or is it other-regarding? Or is it self-regarding, or is it self and other-regarding. It is not just a question of slapping on the labels Hinayana and Mahayana, or Hinayanist and Mahayanist more or less indiscriminately.

I've met many a Tibetan Buddhist who was technically a follower of the Bodhisattva Ideal but whose attitude, one might say, was thoroughly Hinayanistic, and I've also met Theravada bhikkhus whose attitude was cheerfully Mahayanistic, one might say. Anyway

Vessantara: In the 'Survey' you give an account of the charges which the Mahayana made against the Theravada, How did the Theravada defend itself against the various criticisms?

S.: Broadly speaking the Hinayana, certainly in the person of the Theravada or Sarvastivada, simply ignored the Mahayana. In fact as it continued to do, you know, broadly speaking. In one of the works which we find in the Abhidharma Pitika of the Theravada, that is to say the Kathavanthu, usually translated as 'Points of Controversy' - there are a number of discussions between different schools with the Theravada on the one hand and various, sort of, Mahasangika offshoots or proto-Mahayana schools on the other.

But apart from that there is very little indeed--in the way of controversy between the Hinayana on the one hand and the Mahayana on the other. The Hinayana ignored the Mahayana except somewhat later on when it came to various quite technical philosophical discussions, as between, say, the Sarvastivadins and some of the other schools.

The two also tended to be geographically isolated. especially, say, in the case of the Theravada. The Theravada survived in Ceylon. Of course in Ceylon the Theravadins were very much opposed to certain Mahayanistic or quasi-Mahayanistic schools which did gain some foothold in Ceylon. There were the two great Viharas - The Abhayagiri Vih~ra and the ... what was the other one?

-6-

Vessantara: The Maha Vihara?

S.: The Maha Vihara, that's right. And the Abhayagiri Vih~ra was, as it were, Mahayanistically inclined. But we don't know of any actual polemics in the philosophical sense we only know that, with the help of the king, the Abhayagiri-vadins were eventually suppressed, and that was that! We know very little indeed about what they actually taught. The impression we get from Theravada sources, whenever they are men- tioned is that tYey were... their teaching was so dreadful that a dec- ent Theravadin couldn't even go into any details. They were usually referred to as Vetulyavadins wh~ch for some modern Theravadins is a term of abuse. Some scholars maintain that Vetulyavada or Vaitulyavada is synonymous with Vaipulyavada. Mahayana sdtras are called Vaipulya sutras or extended or expanded sutras. But this is a matter of controversy.

But, broadly speaking, there was very little in the way of con- troversy between the Theravadins on the one hand , or Hinayanists on the one hand, and Mahayanists on the other. They seem to have agreed to differ.

Very often of course, in the later periods of Indian Buddhist history one does find followers of the Hinayana and followers of the Mahayana living virtually side by side in the same monastery. The dif- ference between the two being simply that the Mahayana monks, it is said 'worshipped the Bodhisattvas and studied the Mahayana sutras' whereas the Hinayana monks didn't, I mean, the Mahayana monks studied whatever the Hinayana monks studied but with the addition of the Mahayana Sutas. Besides which they also worshipped the Mahayana Bodhisattvas which the Theravadins or the Hinayanists would not have done. But they seem to have lived together in the same monastic com- plex at least quite amicably.

Vessantara: There are various questions arising out of some of the incidents of the life of the Buddha which you talk about. Lalitavajra had one about Kisagotami.

Lalitavaira: Firstly, I was struck by the difference in teaching between the incident in the Buddha's life concerning Kisagotami and the incident in the life of Christ and the raising of Lazarus. The later incident is usually taken in a literal manner. If both are indeed true there appears to be a big chasm as to what is regarded as spiritual teaching. The Buddha's pointing directly to the nature of existence

-7-

and Christ again abnegating.

S.: I think the difference goes even more deep than that. Because one might say that in the case of Christ as, you know, represented in the Gospels, he wasn't concerned so much to give a teaching - though he did give some teaching - as to demonstrate, so to speak, that he was the Son of God. Because, after all, God was regarded as the Creator. God had created man. God was master, so to speak, of life and of death. So, if you could bring a dead man back to life, well, what did that show, what did that prove? - That you had some tremendous power, that you were, so to speak, God. This is why down the ages Christians have usually regarded Christ's miracles as proof of his claim that he was, in fact, the Son of God. So, the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead must be seen within that particular context. Whereas, in the case of the Buddha, he was not concerned with establishing any such claim. That would, in fact, have been impossible within the context of the Dharma as taught by him. One might even say that he wasn't concerned to establish the fact that he was Enlightened. He was only concerned to point out the way to someone who needed a way to follow.

So when Kisagotami came before him there was no question of his bringing her son back to life to demonstrate that he was the Son of God or even that he was Enlightened, or even that he did have super-normal powers. It was a question of leading Kisagotami to Enlightenment. So the two different attitudes or responses do illustrate this very great difference between Christianity on the one hand and Buddhism on the other.

It is perhaps significant that in Christianity, as I mentioned, I mean, historically, so much importance has been attached to the miracles of Christ, and that when these were attacked or questioned as they have been, you know, quite a lot since the eighteenth century or even earlier, I mean, Christians have felt that one of the foundations of their faith was being removed. Whereas Buddhists certainly don't have that sort of feeling about the miracles, so to speak, of the Buddha. There are plenty of miracles, that is to say supernormal phenomena - pratihara siddhis, you know, recorded in the Pali scriptures. But you can doubt those and question those - doubt whether they really occurred. It leaves the Buddha's central teaching quite intact.

Miracles are regarded, or were regarded, as proving that Christ was the Son of God but the Buddha's miracles, to use that term, were never considered as demonstrating that he was Enlightened - because people like Devadatta, who weren't Enlightened and also some other

-8-

-9-

people could perform those sort of miracles without being Enlightened in the least.

Any more from your group?

Dipankara: Can I ask a question? It is relating to the miraculous events in the Buddha's life. In the lecture, I think you mention that at times he was visited by devas and this is spoken of as a miraculous

event.

S.: No, I would not speak of that as a miraculous event. It is not spoken of as a miraculous event in the Pali scriptures. It is not regarded as a pratiharya. A pratiharya would be, for instance, the Buddha walking up and down in the air and emitting fire and water simultaneously. I mean devas are, of course, supernormal beings, and they are represented as appearing before the Buddha and even holding conversations with him. So, one could regard that as a supernormal happening but it wasn't anything which was due to the Buddha himself, so to speak. It wasn't anything that he did. I mean, the devas according to the texts, according to tradition, appeared before him. He was able to perceive them. He was able to converse with them. I mean, clearly it is something which is not taking place on the ordinary material plane but it isn't classified as a miracle of the Buddha in the strict sense.

Dipankara: So it wasn't caused by the Buddha.

S.: No, it was a supernormal happening. That is not to say that the Buddha did not have the supernormal power of creating and causing to appear what people might take to be a deva. If you see what I mean?

Lalitavaira: Well, Devadatta seems to bear a resemblance to Mara. However he is a human figure. He apparently, according to the text, has the ability to enter - and has the experience of - the dhyanas. As I understand, to enter the dhyanas one must put aside the grosser states of negativity. What I am surprised about is that his being or character is strengthened, or seemingly strengthened in its negativity. Does this mean that, outside the dhyanas, one is continually at the mercy of lower forces within oneself if one does not have an overall direction in one's life?

S.: I think this is true. I think often people are quite surprised by the ease, so to speak, with which one can effect a transition from

-9-

almost a dhyana experience - or even a dhyana experience - to an experience of a very different character.

Because there is lacking a stable base and that stable base is partly ethical but it's partly provided by an overall perspective of the spiritual life.

One knows that people on retreat can have very good meditations and, yes, in some cases enter in, say, the second dhyana but a few days later, you know, back wherever they came from, they can be in a very, very, different state of mind indeed. In fact it can happen even more quickly than that. Within half an hour. Within ... almost ... I've actually seen it - within minutes of leaving the shrine room, where apparently someone had been quite deeply absorbed in meditation they can become annoyed and angry and irritable or lustful or afraid or whatever it may be.

So there is very great need just to stabilize one's dhyana experience or one's experience of higher states of consciousness generally, and one does that mainly, as I said, by stabilizing the ethical base, making that more solid and also having a sort of overall framework, in the sense of a more or less systematic conception of the spiritual life within which the dhyana experience takes place. It would seem that Devadatta did not have that. (Long pause.)

One can meet people with a very powerful sort of quasi-spiritual charisma, if you know what I mean, but which they are using, which they are operating, for quite unspiritual ends without really

realising that.

There's intensity rather than concentration, if you see what I mean? And intensity can very often be sort of neurotically motivated.

I think it is possible by, sort of, force of will almost to force yourself into a dhyana state but you can't sustain it - because it doesn't have the support of the whole being. So you can fall away from it very quickly.

Lalitavajra: This is why I was wondering, as regards Devadatta, be- cause he seemed to have had those supernormal powers which I took to mean that (he had attained?) (Unclear.) the fourth dhyana.

S.: One can, sort of, give an illustration - of a triangle with a very narrow base - it's very unstable. But you can have a triangle of the same height but with a very much broader base. It is a very much more stable figure. It's rather like that.

There may be someone who has, so to speak, very good meditations but who, ~n the whole is not making good progress. Because he has a

- 10 -

-II -

good meditation while in meditation ~ut, you know, when he is out of meditation it is another story. And there could be somebody else who doesn't have particularly good meditations but there is a, sort of, progress along a much broader front.

So it isn't easy to judge people, so to speak, to ascertain exactly how people are getting on or exactly where they are. One mustn't jump to conclusions. This is why it's very important to look for regularity and consistency. Not the odd brilliant achievement.

Susiddhi: It also seems to widen how we need to interpret sila - not ju~t as ethical life but something like immersed in Dharma life - some- body who is living a healthy lifestyle.

S.: Well, as I have pointed out, s'lla means, or ~lla suggests, habitual skilful~activity. It is not the performance of the odd skil- ful action. It is the regular and the consistent performance of skil- ful actions.

Vessantara: Also rel~ted to Devadatta - Phil Shann, who is not with us. He wanted to know what the significance was of the fact a Buddha could be wounded but not killed.

S.: The traditional explanation is that it is simply against the nature of things that a Buddha should be killed - because it would so deeply disrupt the economy of the whole universe, the whole cosmos. It is in the very nature of things that a Buddha is n6t and can not be killed. This is how Buddhism traditionally looks at it. It would, for instance say - I don't know whether it does actually say this, but I

imagine that traditional Buddhism could well put forward the view that a Buddha, by virtue of the fact that he is a Buddha, in the traditional sense, would in any case have accumulated such an extraordinary stock of merit that he could not be killed. Some Mahayanists, of course, even maintain that the Buddha was not actually wounded, but that he allowed himself to be wounded as a skilful means. I think one is treading on rather dangerous ground there. But, certainly, Buddhists have traditionally regarded it as unthinkable that the Buddha could be killed. And this is why they are quite shocked in a way at the idea of Christ, who is the founder of Christianity, being crucified. - That he could suffer that sort of fate and at the same time be, in a manner of speaking, an Enlightened being is something that a Buddhist finds it quite impossible to understand. It is just, one might say, a different way of looking at things.

- 11 -

It is not so much 'why is it that a Buddha cannot be killed' - it is more that, I mean, part of the definition even of a Buddha is that he is of such a nature, you know, that he cannot be put to death by any other being.

Lalitavaira: Bhante, what did you mean by the Buddha's relationship to the universe? I did not quite catch the (unclear word) economy.

S.: Well, Buddhists regard dharma as connoting not only a sort of moral law as we would say but what we would regard as a sort of cosmic law. In fact they perhaps traditionally don't really distinguish between the two. The whole universe is governed by what we would regard as a moral law, or even a spiritual law, if you like. And it would be a breach of that spiritual law if an Enlightened being, a Buddha, could be put to death by anybody. In other words, Buddhism conceives of the nature of existence itself, the nature of the universe being such that, within that universe, it is not possible for such a thing to happen to a Buddha, to such a being. One might argue that that represents a limited conception of the universe but this is traditionally how Buddhists have seen it. A Buddhist might even say 'well, show me the example of a Buddha who has been put to death.' Well, you might say 'Well, Jesus.' Well, the Buddhist will say 'Well, he wasn't a Buddha.'

Abhaya: So is that your own personal opinion? You said 'traditionally the Buddhist view is ...'

S.: I think that the whole conception of what is meant by the universe being governed by what we would describe or translate as a moral law requires very careful examination.

I think one can think of the universe as being, in a sense, alive. In that it isn't, even on the so-called material level, just a piece of dead mechanism. And one can think in terms of a sort of living - even an ethical and spiritual - equilibrium which could not in fact be disturbed to that extent. In other words, one can think of that equilibrium - we really want a word corresponding to mechanism but which is not mechanistic - we can think of that non-mechanical sort of mechanism as functioning in such a way as, sort of, automatically to correct any such imbalance as would be represented by the killing of a Buddha. I think one has to look at it along those sort of lines.

- 12 -

I mean, for instance, you can ... take this question of the atom bomb. You could think in terms of it being impossible that humanity could be killed in that way because, on a certain level, as it were, there is a sort of self-regulating mechanism which will either, sort of switch something on or switch something off, on that level, to prevent any such occurrence taking place. Do you see what I am

getting at? So it's rather like that in the case of the killing of a Buddha. The whole universe, as it were, conspires to prevent it - to render it impossible. Because, the universe being, as it were, essentially moral and ethical could not permit such a negation of its existence. All sorts of forces would swing into operation to prevent it. Of course, one can question that sort of conception of the universe but one could present, perhaps, the traditional Buddhist conception in those sort of terms - in an arguable way. But, I must say, I have not gone into this myself very deeply. I have only seen that there are those sort of possibilities of argument. I have not really explored them at all deeply. But perhaps one day that will have to be done.

Vessantara: (Unclear.)

Lalltavajra: It is a question related to the subject we have been often in Mahayana literature, for example in the Mahavastu (unclear) that at the time of the Buddha's Enlightenment one reads of all conditioned existence turning and facing the Buddha, unwittingly or wittingly or, for example, all the beings in hell become cool. Is there actually an effect in terms of being or consciousness on the whole of conditioned existence when the Buddha becomes enlightened? Is there actually a rising of the level of consciousness in some way ... in an imperceptible way which affected every one of us?

S.: Yes, I think one has to regard this as an illustration of something that became fully explicit only in the Avatamsaka School of Buddhist philosophy in the Far East - in China and Japan. That is to say the doctrine on the teaching that absolutely everything in the universe was interconnected and that everything in the universe acted upon everything else in the universe, directly or indirectly, and was acted upon by it. So when one gets texts like the Mahavastu describing how every living being in the universe turned towards the Buddha at that particular moment, well, this just seems to illustrate that particular fact, that particular truth or that particular teaching - that the Buddha's gaining of Enlightenment, or the Buddha's doing of anything

- 13 -

'4-

was of universal ... was of cosmic significance and that the reverberations of that incident were felt throughout the universe in one way or another. Similarly, whatever you do in some other way is felt throughout the whole of existence.

I did read somewhere, I think in an English author, that you can't even sneeze on earth without it affecting the stars. I mean, that's another way of putting it. But, perhaps you could say that the question that we were just discussing before about why the Buddha could not be killed is connected with this. Because everything in the universe is interconnected and there is, so to speak, an ethical element or spiritual element in the universe so that there are certain things which are just by the nature of the universe itself ethically impossible or spiritually impossible.

I think in modern times we have got far too much into the way of thinking of, say, our bodies and the material universe in general in mechanistic terms. I think we're probably not aware of the extent to which we do this and also of how out of date we are in thinking in this sort of way, how thoroughly Victorian in fact. Do you see what I mean? Because more modern research or more modern thought does, very often, suggest that the whole universe is very much alive. In fact the universe is, as it were, conscious, in a, well I was going to say, in a manner of speaking but perhaps one should not say that. But, on a certain level at least, actually conscious and that where there is consciousness there is also, in a sense, what we can only describe as ethical and spiritual life. And therefore those sort of considerations can not be excluded from and consideration of a question

affecting the nature of the universe. Like that question of why the Buddha could not be killed.

Mike Shaw: What you mean really is the universe is conscious?

S.: Well, to put it in a thoroughly un-Buddhistic way, which perhaps we should not be afraid to do, from time to time, one might almost think in terms of the universe having a soul. If you see what I mean? Because if the universe is not just matter - if it isn't just a mechanism, what is it? I mean, what does the universe have, so to speak, that makes it to be not just a mechanism. Well, you can only say 'mind' or 'consciousness'. And it's because it has, so to speak, a soul or a mind or a consciousness that it is, in a way, sort of, self-regulating and that existence as a whole ensures that certain things happen or don't happen.

- 14 -

There is a passage in, I think, one of the suttas in the Mahābhikkhū Nikāya where Brahma is represented as pervading the whole of the universe with his mettā. That is a quite remarkable passage which no scholar, so far as I know, either ancient or modern, has ever drawn attention to or ever asked himself what the significance of it is. But there it is in the Pāli Canon. Does anybody ... some of you have the Mahābhikkhū Nikāya, I am sure. But ... it's there. I forget which one it is.

Susiddhi: Is the consciousness in the universe connected solely with what we would call conscious beings?

S.: Well, in Buddhist tradition, different kinds of conscious beings are enumerated. It is said that in some worlds there are beings with, so to speak, one consciousness to one body. But there are other spheres or worlds in which there is a single consciousness shared among a number of bodies and, similarly that there are some single bodies which are, so to speak, attached to a number of different consciousnesses. Traditional Buddhism envisages all those sort of possibilities. So we end up by concluding that we usually look at things in a very narrow - a very rigid - sort of fashion.

I mean, we do know now ... I believe there is such a thing as sort of multiple personality, isn't there. And in quite a number of cultures man is conceived of as having a number of souls - I mean, the Egyptians, I believe, thought of man as possessing three or four different souls (inverted commas) and some other primitive peoples, so I have read, think of man as possessing seven or eight different souls. Under the influence of Christianity we tend to think of man as possessing one soul. But some modern psychologists speak in terms of 'psychological polycentrism', if you see what I mean. You know from your own experience of yourselves as unintegrated beings that it is as though there are a number of different personalities sort of tied together, tied to the ego, so to speak, of the physical body. Just like, I mean, a number of animals. Say a goat, and a sheep, and a duck, you know, a hen, (laughter), a tiger, all tethered to the same post. So, in the same way, there are these different complexes, amounting to almost distinct personalities, tethered to the same post of your physical body. Your aim is, of course, to unify them and to integrate them - which doesn't mean to abolish them or to annihilate them because you may need, so to speak, this particular personality for a particular purpose. You know, you function through that particular personality in order to achieve a particular end. You very

- 15 -

rarely can function in a particular situation through your total personality. Very few situations, I would

say, even permit that.

I think we really need to revise our, sort of, conceptions of ourselves and of the universe~because, I think, we have just inherited them in the usual, sort of, out of date fashion, from trends of thought which were modern towards the end of the last century, that is to say, about a hundred years ago. It seems to take about a hundred years, you know, for ideas to become out of date or for new ideas to filter through.

Lalitavaira: It is often quoted that artists are about , well painters are about fifty years ahead of mathematicians.

S.: I think sometimes the mathematicians are fifty years ahead of the artists! It depends on the artist and depends on the mathematicians perhaps. But ahead in what respect? I mean, it is sometimes suggested that artists - great artists presumably - have sort of antennae with which they can sense what is coming and it's reflected in their work. I think Jung said this about certain artists that he knew that the coming second world war was, sort of, reflected - sort of anticipated in their work as well as in the dreams of some of his patients.

If, in fact, what I have suggested is true that the universe is an organism rather than a mechanism - with one part affecting every other part, this is only what one would expect.

Years and years ago when I was in Kalimpong I planned - and, I think, even wrote - a little paper which I think I called 'In Defense of Animism.' I made the point in connection with animism that it was much better to think that the universe was alive, you know, than that the universe was dead. Because the view that we have inherited from late nineteenth century science is that the universe is dead - it's more like a motor-car than a human body, say. But what I am -saying is that at least metaphorically, the universe is much more like a living body, a living being which, of course, is the old-fashioned view, which was certainly the Platonic view for instance.

Anyway, we are getting, perhaps, rather far away from the Bodhi- sattva Ideal. Perhaps we should come back to it. There probably are some more questions.

Vessantara: Yes. Dipankara had a question about the use of the word 'religion'.

- 16 -

Dipankara: The question is - You refer to the FWBO as a religious movement, qualifying your use of the term religious, though liable to mis-understanding, is at least adequate in that it conveys a sense of the higher evolution. It is a term that always prompts reaction, especially from those who have been subject to any sort of religious conditioning. Many of us come from Christian conditioning, which we have rejected as not satisfying deep yearnings for something that makes sense and rings true and which gives us a purpose. This sense of depth is something which we can associate with religion. So, the question is - why is religion such a taboo subject? Why does it always prompt such savage reactions?

S.: Well, it doesn't always. It prompts them on the part of some people. For instance, I get every month a little paper to which I subscribe, which is quite a lively little paper called 'The Free-thinker' and that is published by the Secular Society. And the word religion to the people that write for this magazine is just like a red rag to a bull. They just can't stand it.

In the early days of the FWBO there were a number of our Friends who were not at all happy with the word religion or the word religious. I was not too happy with the word myself. But it does seem that there's really no substitute for it. You could try to use the word spiritual, but that has got

wrong associations too. If you speak of spiritual a lot of people think you mean spirit- ualistic. You can speak in terms of philosophy rather than religion and certainly, the way in which the word philosophy was used in the ancient classical world was quite close to the way in which Buddhists use the word dharma, but philosophy in modern times sug- gests a purely academic, a sort of airy, intellectual kind of sub- ject. You know, especially when one thinks of philosophy in the terms of logical positivism or linguistic analysis or something of that sort.

So what term is one going to use? There is the word ethical - but that seems much too limited, much too restricted. So, one is left with the term religion or religious. I mean, I tried at one stage of my career very hard to avoid using these terms but I found I couldn't do that.

In India, by the way, a lot of our Friends, that is to say among the ex-untouchable~ Buddhists, including some of our own Order Members and Nitras do not like the word dharma, because for them the word dharma has got all the wrong sort of associations. Because, to

- 17 -

an orthodox Hindu, dharma means, among other things, observing the caste system. So they're as unhappy with dharma as we are with re- ligion. They prefer the English word religion because they associate that with Christianity and they think quite well of Christianity in comparison with Hinduism, because at least there is no caste system in Christianity, and that's very often the thing with which they are most concerned.

So, I suppose, in the long run words will take on the sort of meaning that you choose to give them and perhaps even the word re- ligion has had its meaning considerably modified in modern times, even among Christians who use the term. I mean, there are writers who speak, or who write about something they call 'religionless Christianity'.

So, I think we should not be too bothered about words. I mean, use the traditional Buddhist term wherever we can, wherever it is appropriate, but if we have to use words like 'religion' and 'faith'

and 'spiritual' we shouldn't be afraid to do so, but just make it very clear exactly in what sense we are using those terms. Make it clear, for instance, when we use the word 'religion' that, for us, religion does not necessarily imply the existence of a personal God. Make it clear that, when we use the word worship, it doesn't imply an object of worship in the sense of a personal God. Otherwise we shall constantly have to pepper our speech with Pali and Sanskrit terms, which will tend to create a sort of formidably exotic bar- rier between us and the pulilic that we're trying to reach. They may be impressed by your command of Pali and Sanskrit but not exactly attracted by Buddhism. And I think very often talking things over with people you have to be prepared - you have to be ready to start off - by using words in a rather loose sort of fashion, but grad- ually refining your meaning as you go on.

Vessantara: Dipankara had another question.

Dipankara: Yes. This one is not quite .. hmmm ... I am not quite happy with it.

When you spoke of the Movement as representing the evolutionary process become self-conscious and that our activities should manifest this evolutionary trend in that they should assist in raising the consciousness of those people who attend. Now, the question is Was your idea that anyone who came along, who was interested would make the first move, would decide for themselves that they wanted to

come into contact with the Movement and that then the function of the FWBO would be to assist people?

Basically, is there a sort of base line? That people actually move over that line and that is the first move?

S.: I don't think I was thinking in that sort of way at all. I think what I was concerned with was that people in~the FWBO should be constantly asking themselves whether those means which purport to be means of personal development are actually functioning in that sort of way for the specific people who are involved with them. I think I was more concerned with that - you shouldn't just settle down into a programme of classes and meditation courses and pujas and lectures and take it for granted ... well, they must be helping people to evolve. You must actually look and see, in each individual case, whether the different things that you are doing are actually having this sort of effect. I think this is what I was getting at more, particularly with reference to the giving of lectures. Nothing should become, so to speak, a sort of ritual - to misuse that word.

What was that question about the base line?

Dipankara: Well, basically, it is a question of where to put your energies. Do you think it is when those people who show an interest, who have shown an interest in Buddhism, then that would be a sort of baseline? They are prepared to come and visit a particular Buddhist Centre. I mean you could go out to anyone on the street but, to a large extent, you would be wasting your time. But if someone was initially interested

S.: Well, yes and no, because when one says somebody is initially interested are they really interested in Buddhism? Are they really interested in the dharma? Are they really interested in spiritual development? I think ninety per cent of the people who come along, say, to Centres initially are not. They're looking for a solution to certain psychological problems or looking for companionship. They are looking for friendship. They are looking for somewhere to go. And you have to lead them on from there. On the other hand there might be somebody who is not interested in Buddhism but you take a look at him just in passing by and you can see he's the sort of person who could become interested in what Buddhism really is and so you go out of your way to spend time with him even though he says 'No, I am not interested in Buddhism.' And you may say 'Well, never mind. but (laughtey),~I'd just like to spend some time with you. Let

us just talk. Let'~ forget about Buddhism and let's just talk about life.'

But some people are quite good at that sort of approach. I do know that there are some Order Members who have spotted, say, a young man over there who was not ... who had not, perhaps heard of Buddhism ... or interested in it and thought 'Ah, he is a likely looking lad,' and, sort of, g~ne out of their way to, sort of, make friends with him and get him interested.

But I remember very well from my days at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, before the FWBO~was started, people used to come along who thou~ht they were interested in Buddhism but they certainly weren't interested in what I understood as Buddhism. They were interested in something quite different. So, one has to question what ~ne means even by this expression, well, 'interested in Buddhiwm.'

I mean, even in the Bible there is a saying 'Not everybody that says "Lord, Lord. ... etc. etc."' So, not everybody that says 'I want Buddhism', really wants it, and not everybody that says 'I'm not interested in Buddhism' is really not interested in it. I mean, that having been said, nonetheless ... I mean, Order Members being in short supply and Order Members not always having a lot of time and even energy ... one needs to put that energy ... one needs to devote one's time to those people who would seem, as far as one can tell, to be potentially the most responsive whether they profess initial interest in Buddhism or not, one needs to be able to tell such people and to pick them out whether they are people coming along to the Centre or people you just pass in the street or who live down the road.

Dipankara: I have another question. A bit further on in the text concerning the distinction between what a person is and what he says, between being and expression - if the words do not express being then what is it that the words are coming from? Is it just a measure of ..?

S.: Well, of course, words always express to some extent what you are, but they do not necessarily express what you think they express or what you would like, perhaps, others to think that they express. Your words may not be truthful so, in that case, they express your being, yes, but they express the untruthfulness of your being, or of a part of your being. I mean, you can repeat words which are not adequate to your being, or you can repeat words to which your being itself is not adequate. I mean, for instance, supposing somebody,