

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/Tiratna as Sangharakshita opened up for the still very young community what it might mean to live a life in the Dharma.

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

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

comes along and asks you 'Well, what is the goal of Buddhism?' and you say, quite glibly, 'Well, Enlightenment, of course, Supreme Enlightenment, you know, unification of wisdom and compassion on the highest level.' So, that's true. The words, in a sense, the words themselves are formally correct, but your being is not adequate to what you have said because you yourself don't embody that. So, in that case or to that extent, your words are not an expression of your being, because your words go far beyond your being. So, in a sense, they're only words. I mean, if you can think of there being two circles, a great big circle which is your words, but then a little, tiny circle which is your being, whereas actually, they should be much more nearly commensurate. And if your words are too much out of harmony with your being, people will pick up on that.

There is a saying - I think it's by Emerson - that 'What you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say.' (Laughter) So, you have to be very careful about what sort of message you're actually putting across. I mean, you can be talking about love and about metta, but you can be in a thoroughly irritable sort of frame of mind and that's what the other person will perhaps pick up on. So, it is important that when you talk about the dharma your being, should be, to some extent at least, in harmony with that, and that's why it is quite important that people who take, say, study, classes and who lead meditation and pujas should be in the corresponding frame of mind and take steps to prepare themselves, to get into the corresponding frame of mind before they take that class or lead that puja. They must give themselves that time. That is very important. Otherwise to dash in, snatch your kesa and sort of plonk yourself down on the seat and look about and say 'Good heavens, gosh meditation. Which meditation is it? O.K... Mindfulness.' Dong! (Laughter.) That's not good enough. I have almost, seen people doing that. You might have, yourself, as a humble Mitra, sometimes suspected or wondered whether an Order Member wasn't, perhaps, doing something of that kind, at least on occasions!

Vessantara: This whole lecture, in a way, is based on the idea that you go to the Buddha's life for examples for compassion. In a way, when we were talking about it in our group, it seemed extraordinary that in the texts there aren't more just unequivocal statements that the whole aim of the spiritual life is to gain Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, actually in the Buddha's life, say, and in the Pali Canon and in his teachings.

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S.: Well, there are such statements in the Pali Canon. I think one I quoted fairly recently, though I can not remember in which context. There is a passage in the Anguttara Nikaya - perhaps someone will remember where I have quoted it when I mention it - where the Buddha speaks in terms of there being four kinds of being. The first kind... or four kinds of person... the person who helps neither himself nor others, then the person who helps others but not himself, then the person who helps himself but not others and then the person who helps both himself and others - and he is the highest person. So that quite clearly embodies, one might say, the Bodhisattva Ideal within the context of the Pali Canon itself and there are, you know, other such passages. For instance, in the Maha vagga of the Vinaya Pitaka when the Buddha addresses the first sixty Arahants where he says 'saratha bhikkhave' - go forth O monks, 'bahujana hitaya' for the good of many people, the welfare of many people, 'Anukamiva out of compassion. So there that other-regarding emphasis is very clear indeed. But it isn't a predominant emphasis in the Pali Canon but, I think, if one looks at the total bulk of the Pali Canon, if you deduct all those suttas, that are spun out from very scanty materials and which seem to be later compilations, well, then these other elements would seem to bulk larger, as it were, in comparison.

I mean, there is also... I mean, the possibility of concluding that certain things did get, as it were* left out of the Pali Tipitaka. You know, things which were subsequently incorporated into the various Mahayana sutras in one form or another. Where, of course, compassion or the other-regarding emphasis is very strong indeed.

I don't personally like to cut the Gordian knot in that sort of way, but I think, if one looks carefully enough at the Pali Canon there are quite enough indications, in fact, to suggest really quite conclusively that the original Buddhist ideal was not one simply of liberation for oneself alone.

Vessantara: Sarvamitra had a couple of questions.

Sarvamitra: This arose from the incident with the Simbhapā leaves. I was wondering if the Buddha had effected merit, why could he only communicate a handful of truths that he had realised?

S.: It's not that he could not communicate more because that particular passage, that particular text, goes on to explain why the Buddha did not explain more. And that was that the truths which he did not communicate, or had not communicated, would not .. would

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not be beneficial to his disciples - would not, in fact, help them to transcend suffering and attain Enlightenment. So, it is not that he was unable to but that he did not, for pedagogical reasons, as it were, consider it appropriate to communicate those particular truths. But, nonetheless, there was a whole reservoir of truths that he had not communicated.

I mean, he instances that he had communicated the Four Noble Truths and the fact that he mentions that particular formulation suggests, again, that he had spoken about, I mean, spoken only about those things which he not only knew but which were actually helpful to the people to whom he was speaking.

Sarvamitra: And the other question arose from the Kisagotami incident. ~ Do you have any thoughts on how one can maintain and protect the impact of a deeper realisation caused by a bereavement or a threat to your life - some sort of shock - so that one doesn't lose the intensity of practice that is initiated by it?

S.: I think it is almost impossible not to lose something of the impact. I've seen this can happen in the case of two or three people, whom I know reasonably well, in recent years. People do possess the ability to forget. Perhaps, in some cases, mercifully. But unfortunately very often what is positive in the experience of bereavement is suffered to be lost.

There's no, sort of, hard and fast rule, as it were, by observing which one can guarantee that that insight (with a small i) isn't lost. One can only make a strong resolution to keep up, as it were, one's practice, or perhaps ask one's spiritual friends to remind one from time to time.

I think I mentioned, again I am not sure where, I think it was in a lecture or something ... or similar, which I was editing, perhaps for Mitrata ... I spoke about someone who came to see me because his girlfriend had committed suicide and he wanted to become a monk on the spot. Have you read this yet? Or has it not ... it has appeared. Do you remember this? Well, that is a ... yes, he did have some sort of experience of, you know, insight, with a small i, on that particular occasion. But it didn't last long. It doesn't seem to have lasted more than a few days, at the most, a few weeks. But at the time he was very, very much affected and wanted me to make him a monk literally on the spot and he even said 'I am not going to leave this room until you make me a monk.' Needless to say I didn't. I got rid of him somehow. (Laughter.)

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But this does happen and one becomes, I won't say cynical, but one becomes a little reserved

in one's response to people in this sort of situation because one ... one knows that it very often doesn't last. In India they call it (kachasanyas?) or 'unripe renunciation' - when you either actually renounce or want to renounce in this very, sort of, immature, reactive sort of way - not based on any real insight or understanding.

But the question isn't that, because, supposing you do have an element of insight well, how do you safeguard it? I think you have to be very careful that you don't sort of, allow yourself to go back to your previous, your old way of life - that you do not plunge into distractions and that you take the opportunity of, say, making certain changes in your whole way of life which will help you in preserving and strengthening that insight. Burn your boats, or, at least, burn a few of them behind you so that you can't go back. But there's no, sort of, technique of, you know, preserving that insight. It can only be your own sustained mindfulness in the long run. And, as I said, maybe your spiritual friends can help.

Devamitra: It does seem strange that sometimes you can have a more intense experience of vision and, you know, literally a few weeks later it can almost have frittered away.

S.: But that's why perhaps, as I have said, changing the expression, we have to strike while the iron is hot. Give up your job when you are in that sort of mood. I mean, no doubt after consulting your spiritual friends because you don't want to do anything rash or foolish, so consult your spiritual friends but take those steps which will, in a way, force you thereafter to continue in the same direction.

Vessantara: Kamalasila had some questions from his group.

Kamalasila: Well, I've got one from Phil and I've got one from Padmavajra.

Padmavajra's 5 question is about the Bodhisattva Principle. He says 'In your lecture 'The Bodhisattva Principle: Evolution and Self-Transcendence' you speak of the Bodhisattva Principle as being 'at work in every form of existence. from the lowest to the most lofty,' 'how far does this Bodhisattva Principle coincide with the concept of Tathagatagarbha? If it does so coincide, what are your

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theoretical and methodological reasons for preferring 'Bodhisattva Principle' to the 'Tathagarbha'?

S.: We are going a bit beyond this particular lecture, aren't we? (Laughter.) Maybe we could leave that question to a later lecture and maybe consider it in connection with that. I have an idea that something of this sort will come up later on. Also give myself some time to think about it. Perhaps I don't like this word 'garbha' which means womb (laughter), or matrix.

Kamalasila: Phil's question is about the Council of Vaisali and the difference between arahantship and

Buddhahood. 'The division that occurred in the Sangha at the meeting of Vaisali seems to indicate that the influence of the arahants was not as strong as the Buddha. So, what, therefore, is the difference in the quality of the Enlightenment of the arahant and that of the Buddha?'

S.: One can see in the history of Buddhist thought a sort of change in the concept of 'arahant'. It would seem that originally, in the days of the Buddha, so to speak, the spiritual content of Buddhahood and of arahantship was the same. In fact, both the word Buddha and the word arahant came into existence as technical terms rather later on. It is said even, in some places, that the only difference between the bodhi of the Buddha and the bodhi of the arahant is that the arahant's bodhi is an anubodhi, that is to say, a subsequent bodhi. The Buddha realises first and the arahant realises afterwards by following the Buddha's advice, the Buddha's teaching. But there's no difference in the spiritual content of their realisation. This seems to have been the original position. But, as time went on, and especially as the generations and the centuries went by Buddhists came to feel, it seems, that there was, in fact, a difference between Buddhahood and arahantship. Because the Buddha, after all, had been the first~ He was the pioneer. I mean, he had rediscovered the Dharma at a time when it was lost. So they developed, it would seem, the idea that, you know, he'd qualified himself to do that by practising the paramitas for countless lives. Whereas the arahants, not having had that particular task to do - that is to say, of discovering the Dharma when it was unknown, didn't need to go through that period of very intensive training. So, in this way, the achievement of the arahant came to be regarded as something lower in comparison with the achievement of a Buddha. And then of course,

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Since the Buddha had prepared himself for the attainment of Enlightenment by the practice of the paramitas the question arose - well~ why had he chosen to do this? Why had he chosen the difficult way? Well, obviously, out of compassion. If the arahant had not chosen the difficult

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Tape of 13th and 17th September - end of session I (13th sept)

Bodhisattva Ideal 2 - side I

S.: continued you know, the broad trend of that development~

Kamalasila: But, at the same time, the arahant couldn't be said to have no compassion.

S.: No. That is quite clearly the case, because even the arahant is represented in the Pali scriptures as teaching and is exhorted by the Buddha to go forth - out of compassion.

Kamalasila: It's a question of degree.

S.: Yes. But even, I mean, actually we have to go right back to the origins of Buddhism and recognise that, in principle, there is no difference between the two and that the difference came to be seen, as it were, for historical reasons, in the course of historical development.

Kamalasila: So are you saying then there is a real difference between the two?

S.: I mean, there is a difference between what some schools have thought of as Buddhahood and what some schools have thought of as arahantship. But I do not think one can trace that right back to the Buddha's own day or the Buddha's own teaching. I don't think you can really have wisdom, real wisdom, apart from compassion in the way that is sometimes suggested. (Pause.) I mean, the Mahayana had to assert, so to speak, its Bodhisattva Ideal against what was, in fact, a degenerated Arahant Ideal, not the original Arahant Ideal of the Buddha's time, which was, it would seem, identical with what later came to be the Bodhisattva Ideal.

It all does become very complicated so therefore I have tried to avoid all these, sort of, historical complications in this simple

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introductory lecture. Otherwise, if people have to trace the historical development of all these notions to too great an extent they just become confused as to what they themselves have to be doing.

But the basic Buddhist position is that self, and therefore non-self, are not ultimate realities, so therefore how can one speak ultimately of a realisation or an Enlightenment which is either for oneself or not for oneself, or for others or not for others. You cannot really separate your individual spiritual development or you cannot separate the self-regarding aspect of your individual spiritual development from the other-regarding aspect. You cannot really separate wisdom from compassion - or compassion without wisdom? You start dividing yourself into two beings.

So, I think, in some ways, we have to cut through all these artificial distinctions and, to some extent, artificial problems.

Dave Living: Could you see it in terms of the fact that the arahants, perhaps, did not have quite such a strong effect on people's abilities?

S.: The Buddha does seem to have had an extraordinarily strong effect on people.

Dave Living: Perhaps the arahants didn't quite seem to make such a strong impression after the Buddha died.

S.: Well, that is not altogether true because, I mean, there are accounts in the Pali scriptures themselves of the tremendous impression made by Ananda. In fact, he was even criticised by some people, and accused of, sort of, perambulating the country like another Buddha. (Pause.)

But, you know, a special significance, even a special value, always attaches to the pioneer just because he is the first. Because he, sort of, sets the pattern. Anyway, any more?

Vessantara: I am not quite sure (unclear)

Will S~ens: I just have one question. In the transcript there is a point where you say that when the Buddha passed away, everyone grieved except for the arahants and I just wondered to what extent - whether the arahants would feel an emotional loss or whether they would just take it perfectly equanimously?

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S.: Apparently they did - according to all the traditional accounts. They were not moved. They did not feel and they did not exhibit any grief at ~ll. In the conclusion of the Pali ~h~ Parinibbana Sutta, this is quite extraordinary in a way, because the gods even and unenlightened human beings are represented as becoming really dis- traught at the time of the Buddha's death, the Buddha's narinirvana. But the arahants remained absolutely calm and absolutely, in a sense, unmoved. Because they realised that even a Buddha, in a sense, even a Buddha's physical body, must break up. Even the Buddha must, so to speak, die. So, their realisation of this truth is so profound that they are not moved by the parinirvana. They don't feel any sense of loss. I mean, after all, what have they to lose? Even though the Buddha has died, because they are Enlightened~ 1 rean, in as much as they are Enlightened they have got the Buddha with them. In a sense they are the Buddha. So what loss is there? It's as though one particular physical body had been detached from the unitary experience of Enlightenment - which was neither theirs as a personal possession nor his as a personal possessionq There'd been really no essential change from their point of view. They'd not lost anything at the time of the Buddha's i) arinirvana. They certainly hadn't lost the Buddha because they hadn't lost Buddha- hood. And it is Buddhahood that makes a Buddha a Buddha.

So, it was not - one must be very careful to understand this - it was not that there was any coldness, or any detachment in a purely negative sense on their part. Though sometimes the account is presented in that sort of way. But it is more, or was more, as I have said, that since they, so to speak, possessed Buddhahood, just as the Buddha himself did, since they were Enlightened, the Buddha's parinirvana did not represent to them a loss. But it did represent a loss to those who were not themselves Enlightened because En- lightenment was not only outside them, but, so to speak, associated with the physical body of the Buddha himself. So, it was as though when the Buddha's physical body disintegrated, Enlightenment dis- appeared from the universe, because they'd associated it with that particular physical body, that particular personality. So, therefore, some of them exclaimed 'The eye of the universe has gone out.' But, in a sense, it hadn't.

I mean, you could say that a shadow had moved across the face of the sun but the sun actually was still shining.

Abhaya: Wade, who isn't here, had a question, which I think was

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basically, - Is it possible to have Enlightenment as an Ideal in a kalpa without an Enlightened being?

S.: Well, this raises the question of, well, what is an ideal? Or how does one distinguish between an ideal and a concept? Can you actually have an ideal if you don't actually see that ideal em- bodied anywhere? This is what it really comes down to. Because you have nothing, so to speak, to measure the concept against. But, even supposing you've got an enlightened person around, say, a Buddha, even then can you necessarily have an ideal? Because, do you necessarily understand that Buddha, or really see him as a Buddha? So, it is as though, in a way, paradoxically, one might say, that one can only have Enlightenment as an Ideal if one is En- lightened. Because it's only then that the ideal will be not just a concept to you. Perhaps you can say that you need to have around someone or some peol~pe who are to some extent Enlightened, if one can use such an expression, so as to give some actual spiritual content to what would otherwise have been simply your concept of Enlightenment. But

to the extent that you yourself are not En- lightened you cannot give that concept its full content. If you could you would yourself be Enlightened.

So, does that answer his question do you think? Or perhaps the question isn't quite as simple as he might have thought.

Abhaya: I feel he was trying to formulate something which I could not quite understand and no one else in the group could (unclear) I got the impression he was not happy. The way he has written down (unclear)

S.: You see, I mean, what he really means, in a way, is - how do you know that what you are aiming at is Enlightenment if, in fact, you are not Enlightened?

Abhaya: Yes.

S.: Of course, you might say, alright, an Enlightened person tells you that you are doing the right thing. But how - you not being Enlightened - do you know that he is Enlightened. You can't, you can't.

So, in a sense, you can't have an ideal of Enlightenment in the full sense. You can have a concept of Enlightenment but you can't

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give it a proper content - yourself being unenlightened. So you can't ever be absolutely sure that you are heading in the right direction. I mean, not until you have got some Insight of your own, as it were, to fall back on. Insight with a capital I. How can you know? You can't have that sort of knowledge, really. You always have to take a chance. That may be a calculated chance.

Abhaya: (Unclear)..0..

S.: Yes, yes. But you might even sa~ that it's a worthwhile chance, in the sense that even if it is, so to speak, the wrong chance, you are in most cases considerably happier and perhaps even healthier than you would have been otherwise. (Laughter.) Or you might even say, well, if you are healthier and happier in that sort of way, well it must be the right chance. But you don't know! I mean, though again one can raise the question of what one means by know- ledge. Or one can even question that whole conception of Enlight- enment and the way to Enlightenment.

Some people - not so many in the FWBO, are over-concerned that they are doing the right thing. I used to meet people like this be- fore I started the FWBO. They were very, very, concerned that they got exactly the right teacher, the right mantra, that they read the right book, that they were doing the right thing, that really would get them to the real, right Enlightenment. (Laughter.) But it does not actually work like that.

But, I mean, if one is, so to speak, on the right path, if that path is actually the path that leads to Enlightenment, I mean, using that m~de of expression, one can only be - if it is possible for one to be sure in that sort of way - it is only because, or it can only be because there is in you already,

undeveloped something, however embryonic, which, so to speak, corresponds to what, in, you know, the Buddha himself and in the path itself is more fully developed. If there was not that sort of consonance you could never know and in fact, you can never follow the path itself or never gain Enlightenment. But there cannot... (overrides interruption),..be a, sort of, logical certainty which can be rationally demonstrated to the satisfaction, say, of some third party.

Abhaya: If one answered that question which you did at first - Someone comes - Well, how do you know? Well, you can't know. I do not know if I'm on the right path or not. It's pure chance. And that might not be a satisfactory answer to

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S.: No. I didn't say that it was pure chance. But, at the same time, I did also say that it raises the question of what one means by knowledge. One could use the word, you know, the term knowledge in the sense that I just used the expression response or consonance and so on. You could say that that was, or could be regarded as a sort of knowledge - but not knowledge in a rational sense, and it would not be communicable in the sense of being demonstrable to some disinterested third party. But, you know, supposing an orthodox Christian came along and said 'Well, no, you are not on the right path. You are on the wrong path. You are definitely going to hell.' What can you say against that? You cannot prove that you are not. So, you don't know in that sort of sense - that logical, demonstrable sort of fashion. But is that sort of knowledge applicable to what we're speaking of when we speak in terms of Enlightenment and the path to Enlightenment? It is, sort of, almost quasi-scientific knowledge or knowledge in the quasi-scientific sense. So, is that sort of knowledge appropriate to this sort of experience?

So, one might say that, well, an unenlightened human being and an Enlightened human being, i.e. the Buddha, are still human beings. So we've something in common. I mean, I've something in common with the Buddha, the Buddha has something in common with me. And, one might say, what I am trying to do is to increase what is common on ever higher and higher levels so that there will be less and less difference between the Buddha and myself. When that happens or when that process comes to an end then I will be Enlightened and there'll be no difference between the Buddha and me. One could put it in that sort of way too.

So, in a sense, I know that there is that common element, one could say, using the word 'know' simply because I know that I am a human being and that the Buddha was a human being and even though the Buddha is an Enlightened human being that Enlightened human being, so to speak, out of an unenlightened human being. So, there is a sort of continuity between the two.

Abhaya: But then, don't you go back to the very beginning. Then the person will say "How do you know the Buddha was Enlightened? How do you know that the Buddha was an Enlightened being?" - which is what you started off with. It would seem to me that you've no ground at all to talk...

S.: Well, you can approach it like this. You can say, well, 'Here

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am I, so to speak, and there is the Buddha. Or even assuming, or even granting that the Buddha did not exist, we have this record, or what purports to be a record of a being of that sort, and when I examine that record I can see whether the Buddha actually lived or not - that, well, there are certain things in common and there are certain things which are not in common. There are certain things which according to that particular record, that person had to a much greater degree than I have. I feel that I have those qualities within me but to a very limited extent and this record, whether true or otherwise,

suggests that actually I can develop those qualities to a much greater degree. Alright, accepting that as authentic, let us say, I will see whether I can develop those qualities. For instance, this particular text says that that particular person, who is alleged to have existed, had very great metta. I have very little metta. Alright, is it possible, in fact, to develop more metta? So I actually try and I find that, yes, it is possible. So then I conclude, well, if I can develop a little bit more I can develop a lot more. I can develop a very great deal more metta. And that is the sort of thing this text is talking about when it describes this imagined person who gained what these records call Enlightenment.' So it still works in the same sort of way.

I mean, it still comes down to one's own practice. There's no point really in saying that you believe in the Buddha and alright, even if the Buddha is demonstrated actually to have lived if you do not make any sort of effort to close the gap between the two of you.

Pete Dobson: It's just like a sort of continuous refinement?

S.: One can look at it in that way. And the more you refine also the more happy you become and you feel that you are becoming more integrated. You could, of course, theoretically, regard that as the wrong development, but there is something within your being, as it were, which refuses to agree with that - that that is wrong, that the more happy you become~ well, it shows clearly that you are on the wrong path, or~he more integrated, well, you must be on the wrong path, or the more mindful, that is the wrong path. No. There is something in you which says - No, that is just the wrong way round. There is something in you which insists that when you become more emotionally positive and more mindful, well, that is the right path. But, theoretically, it's possible to question that and

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to ask why it should not be the other way round - why you should not be improving and developing when you become more full of greed, hatred and delusion.

But it is just like when you feel healthy. When you feel healthy, well, no, one can say 'Ah, no, that is a state of disease.' You know it's a state of health. At least, if it lasts a little while, if it is not just that sort of experience you get, I believe, in advanced stages of tuberculosis, just before the end. (Laughter.) There's no point in someone coming along telling you you're not really well. You say, well 'Yes, I am.' That is the healthy body's healthy response. So, in the same way, if you are full of metta and karuna and mindfulness and the rest, you can't be convinced logically that you are on the wrong path, you ought to be developing in some other way.

In a way this comes back to one of the points that were mentioned in Padmavajra's question about the naturally self-transcending nature of the conscious being. When you are all the time, as it were, transcending yourself, well, you know that you are on the right path because that corresponds to your innermost nature - you're fulfilling your nature~in that way, not otherwise0

Anyway~ any further question?

What's the time anyway. How are we going?

Vessantara: It's quite late.

S.: No question left? Alright, fine, good start!

LALITAVAJRA: Can the samskaras be regarded as sort of archetypal forces, which are certain stages of one's individual life?

S: I think this introduces an entirely, you know, different terminology from a completely different field of thought: especially from Jungian analytical psychology. I think that the main point about the samskaras is that they are forces. I think I've referred to the expression 'steering force'. Sometimes the term is translated as karma-formations, in the sense of those karmic factors which are responsible for forming or setting up the new, or rather the neither old nor new, 'personality' - inverted commas - in the present life. Those forces no doubt operate at different levels, and inasmuch as they operate at different levels, it might be thought conceivable that, at one level or another they could be of a, so to speak, archetypal or mythical character (laughs), but that would require - to say that with any confidence would require - a quite exhaustive comparative study of the two psychologies: you know, the traditional Buddhist, the original Buddhist psychology, and Jungian analytical psychology. So I couldn't answer either positively or negatively with too great a degree of confidence.

Padmavajra: Did the Buddha discover the five skandhas or was it an already existing concept to which he gave new meaning and significance?

S: To the best of my knowledge the classification of the five skandhas is not pre-Buddhistic. In order to be quite sure about that one would have to comb through the pre-Buddhistic Upanishads .. though I have learned recently, with some surprise, that the so-called pre-Buddhistic Upanishads may not be so pre-Buddhistic after all (laughter) - but that is another question. Certainly the term nama-rupa is a very ancient one, and I believe that the [35] term nama-rupa is found even in the Vedas, and certainly in the Upanishads, whether pre-buddhist or otherwise. Of course, nama-rupa is the primary division, so to speak, primary analysis, of the so-called human personality: nama then being subdivided further to give one one's four mental skandhas as distinct from the rupa skandha, which roughly corresponds to materiality.

I think that the point to be made about the skandha classification in general, I have made it elsewhere, I think in the 'Survey', but it is important, is that the five skandhas do not constitute the five 'things' of which the so called personality is made up, but rather five different kinds of process that are going on on different levels, in different ways, all the time: which processes are, of course, interacting with one another. It's not as though you've got five building blocks, or even five groups, five heaps, of building blocks: rather that you've got a number of different kinds of processes going on, and that these processes can be very roughly classified under five different headings.

KAMALASILA: Could the Formula of the five skandhas be used as a meditation practice, rather like the Six Element Practice? It seems, as a breakdown of our existence, it seems more complete - in fact rupa corresponds, more or less, to the first five stages of the Six Element Practice.

S: Well, it is traditionally so used: it is mentioned, is it not, in the Satipatthana Sutta. One begins by being mindful of the physical body and its movements, then one progresses to feelings, and then one goes on to thought, and from there one progresses to dharmas; and among those dharmas, there is, of course, the five skandhas. Certainly it would be a thoroughly traditional procedure to reflect upon the five skandhas, and to develop insight by means of that introspection.

PHILIP SHANN: Following on from that you were saying, Bhante, about regarding what we normally regard as inanimate objects as [36] animate, I was wondering whether you could say that these inanimate objects, so called, did in fact partake in all the five skandhas to some extent - for instance, mountains, and things.

S: Mm.. the five skandhas are rupa, vedana, samjna, samskara, and vijnana. The Jains had a quite interesting classification of sentient beings from this point of view. I don't know that the Buddhists did in quite the same way, but I would say that one couldn't regard all living beings so to speak, to use that expression, as necessarily possessed of all five skandhas. When one considers what the five skandhas are. I mean certainly all possess rupa, whether gross or subtle, and all, to be sentient beings at all, would have to be possessed of vedana, by which is meant feeling or sensation - which constitutes a very low level or low degree kind of consciousness, one might say; but when one comes to samjna, then it becomes rather more questionable. Whether all beings possess samjna - because samjna seems to approach something like, if not self-consciousness in the full sense, certainly consciousness in the

sense of not really consciousness of an object, but the ability to recognise an object as being specifically that object, and not another: and clearly not all sentient beings would have that. And then when one comes to samskara which as I've said are sometimes translated as karma-formations, the question of karma, and therefore of volition, and therefore of the individual, comes into consideration. And clearly not all sentient beings are sentient beings with individuality in that sense. So therefore I think the short answer would be that not all forms of sentient existence can be regarded as possessed of all five skandhas. It may well be that somewhere in the Abhidharma this is discussed, but I can't remember and actual discussion, only that [37] I do remember the Jains as having discussed something of this sort, and classifying sentient beings in accordance with the number, I think it was, of senses that they possessed. But again, one has here the notion, or the concept, of a hierarchy of existences and this notion is of course of very great importance indeed

PRASANNASIDDHI: You've mentioned, in the Three Jewels, the Five Niyamas, and karma is in a sense just one of those niyamas. But you also use - I think I've heard you also use - karma in a wider sense in which you do equate it with all five niyamas, using it in a sort of broader sense. So therefore could you not say that animals in a sense partake in, of a sort of cosmic

S: Ah, you're probably thinking in terms of sort of collective karma. I think I have said that the term collective karma is not actually used in BUddhist texts - but nonetheless, there is a sort of coincidence of individual karmas on account of which people find themselves (as it were) living in the same world, in a common world, and sharing common experiences. But that is, of course, a collective karma of individuals. Whether there could be a karma of, say, a species, within which there were no individuals, that is a different question. I don't remember that this is considered as all in Buddhist texts.

PRASANNASIDDHI: I was sort of thinking, like, if you thought that the universe sort of evolved, and all forms of life were in process of evolution, that to some extent a sort of universal volition, or universal cosmic samskara was sort of in the process ...

S: Well one could speak in those terms, but one would be speaking, as it were, poetically, you know, rather than very precisely or technically - and of course, to the extent that one was speaking poetically, one would not be speaking in the sort of way that the Abhidharma speaks. (laughter)

But broadly speaking, you know, spiritual development and the higher [38] Evolution is essentially an individual process - so at this level one cannot speak of collective karma, except of course in the sense of a coincidence, or as it were overlapping, of those same individual karmas; and though one could speak, you know, of a sort of general force perhaps, you know motivating the lower evolution, it might be confusing to speak of it as being karma - that term being reserved for something pertaining essentially to the individual volition. Even though, of course, karma in the literal sense means simply action so it would be applicable in that way, but I think it's probably best to restrict the usage of the term karma to the narrower sense.

ABHAYA: I have read in different places you've linked up Stream Entry and the Arising of the Bodhicitta, and last year in a question and answer session you brought in this image of the scales - with reference to stream entry - whereby an individual might only realise that he's entered the stream in retrospect. So I wondered how the Bodhisattva .. the Bodhicitta as an eruption - you definitely describe it as an eruption - ties with this. How could it be an eruption if you only become aware of it after the event, so to speak?

S: Hm.. there are two things here I want to say. First of all, I only smiled at the beginning because this very morning I was reading something about the scales. These were the scales of St Michael the archangel. There is a connection here (laughter), but I'm not going to go into it now. (laughter) It would mean going quite a long way around, as it were. But with regard to the second part of your question, did you say eruption or irruption? Because I definitely said irruption. When I used the word irruption I wasn't thinking so much of something violent and dramatic and cataclysmic so much as the emergence within our ordinary, or usual, or mundane level of experience of something of a totally different order: and [39] that can happen, of course, on, so to speak, a very small scale. It's rather like, if you've got a horizontal sheet of paper and underneath you've got a pyramid. Supposing the apex of the pyramid, which is very sharp like a needle, just pierces through, that is the irruption, because it's coming from a different dimension. So the actual is very very tiny, there's a lot more to come, but it is spoken of as an irruption just because it does as it were press through from that totally different dimension. (general amusement) That is not to say that sometimes so many grains of dust may be deposited at the same time that there is a very noticeable irruption of the whole pyramid, practically. It

may suddenly emerge. But it is in a sense no more of an irruption in principle inasmuch as there has been a breakthrough from a completely different dimension.

SIMON TURNBULL: You've said the idea of Stream Entry should be the aim of every Order member whilst the arising of the Bodhicitta is something which as a Spiritual Community we might manage to get a glimpse of. I was wondering if you would explain the apparent disparity. Itt~ -jilt if

S: Hm. Hm.. Well, one can have, say, as an Order member, the arising of the Bodhicitta is one's aim inasmuch as one is a member of the Spiritual Community and shares, so to speak, its aim. There's of course a difficulty in talking about these things inasmuch as, if one looks at the history of the development of Buddhism, one sees a sort of process going on: one sees a process of what one might describe as solidification from time to time. A certain concept, which began by expressing a spiritual experience comes to be solidified; and therefore inasmuch as it has been solidified, and has been, as it were, identified with its solidified form, there has to be a sort of negation of it, or a sort of protest against it. But what actually is protesting is in fact what that particular, now solidified concept, as an experience, originally was. So you've got a rather [40] strange sort of situation, because, at bottom, the negation is affirming the very same thing that the solidified concept - you know, as I've called it - was originally affirming. So that there's only a negation on the surface, so to speak, from a historical point of view. And one gets this, you know, with the whole question of Stream Entry in relation to the arising of the Bodhicitta, because if one thinks in terms of the solidified concept, you know, being negated by the protest, then the arising of the Bodhicitta is something subsequent to and superior to Stream Entry - because after all Stream Entry belongs to the path of the Arahant, and the arising of the Bodhicitta belongs to the path of the Bodhisattva. But in fact that is not really so, not spiritually speaking. That is so only within the historical perspective. Within a purely spiritual perspective, as I've tried to point out, what was originally spoken of as Stream Entry is, more or less one may say, the arising of the Bodhicitta. In fact one may say, as I have said, that the Bodhicitta represents simply the more as it were positive and other-affirming aspect of Stream Entry itself. So there is only a discrepancy between the two when one looks at things, you know, from the point of view of historical development, and takes that as representing some actual difference of spiritual realities and spiritual experiences.

VESSANTARA: When you've talked in the past about Stream Entry being something which it is realistic for everyone to aim for, and the arising of the Bodhicitta being something which at best a Spiritual Community might get a glimpse of, does that mean that you were using Stream Entry in a sort of solidified sense? Otherwise surely they would be either equally near or equally distant.

S: Well, the fact is that the expression 'the Arising of the Bodhicitta' cannot be completely divorced from the historical circumstances in which it arose, in which it was developed. It's got around it all the associations of the Mahayana. And the Mahayana, perhaps, brought out the universalist, even the cosmic, implications