

## 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*

## DISCLAIMER

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

cations of Buddhism much more fully than the original Buddhism itself did. So that when one is thinking more in those sort of terms, it seems more appropriate, you know, to use the expression Bodhicitta rather than the term Stream Entry, even though in a sense the two are inter-changeable. But even though, yes, they are interchangeable, they do present themselves, partly because of the historical, you know, associations, under a sort of difference of aspect; and it is because of that difference of aspect that I tend to speak of the Bodhicitta rather than Stream Entry, in the way that you describe .

VESSANTARA: Would you say that the denotations of both are the same, but that the connotations are different?

S: One could put it in that way, yes.

Yes, because in a way the denotation of Stream Entry is more as it were, you know, individual, not to say individualistic, though at the same time it cannot be, because it is, it represents a liberation, you know, from the sense of ego. In the same sort of way the Bodhicitta, one might say, is, you know, less egoistic because it has reference to other living beings: because it consists in the will, as I've called it, to Enlightenment for the sake of all living beings. But really there is only' as you've said, that difference of connotation and not really one of denotation at all. Perhaps we could say that, as well as I think I have said in that lecture on Going for Refuge, that the spiritual experience to which all these different terms pertain, and these are only two of the terms that we have, after all, they all revolve around that one experience and express different aspects of it. And for historical reasons, perhaps, rather than strictly spiritual reasons, or doctrinal reasons, one particular term seems to refer to one aspect of that process or that experience, better than a certain other term.

VESSANTARA: So the attainment of that experience whatever you called it, would you say that that was a realistic goal for a spiritually committed person to aim for in this life? [42]

S: Well, yes, this is what I'm saying, that every Order Member should aim at Stream Entry, and should also, perhaps, be aware that Stream Entry has this other-regarding aspect which we speak of in terms, usually, of the arising of the Bodhicitta. And just as Stream Entry represents your entering into the Stream, but there is no 'you' , the Bodhicitta represents the fact that you are going to work for the salvation, so to speak, of all sentient beings - but that there are no sentient beings. (laughter) So one operates in both instances with the concept of self and others: in the case of Stream Entry one is operating with the concept of self and negating that; in the case of the Bodhicitta one's operating more with the concept of others, and negating that. But between them both concepts are negated, or at least one realises their relativity.

WILL SPENS: I think that you said that the Bodhicitta is more likely to arise collectively within a Spiritual community: why is this, and how would this manifest?

S: Well, we've already seen that one can regard Stream Entry and the Bodhicitta as different aspects of the same experience. So if one says that the Bodhicitta is more likely to arise within the spiritual community, I think one also has to say that one is more likely to attain Stream Entry within the Spiritual Community. So why is that? I think the reason is pretty obvious, because a spiritual community represents a situation of intense mutual spiritual friendship wherein you encourage one another in your efforts. So if you have a situation in which you are all encouraging one another in your spiritual efforts as on, say, or as in a spiritual community, you're much more likely to achieve that sort of breakthrough, you know, whether in terms of Stream Entry, or in terms of the arising of the Bodhicitta, than if you were simply on your own. This is not to say that you can't do it on your own, and certainly many people have done it on their own: but I think for the majority of people the spiritual community is a much more favourable context for that sort [43] of experience. I must say, though, that, speaking in terms of the Bodhicitta, I was going somewhat further than that even, in a way that isn't quite applicable in connection with Stream Entry. I spoke of the Bodhicitta as representing the idea of working for the salvation or emancipation of all beings, but at the same time realising that there were no beings to be saved or emancipated. So in much the same way, what one is trying to do is to suggest something which is, as it were, supra-individual, but which is not collective - and this is very, very difficult.

It's as though you've got a number of stages: you've got first of all the sub-individual, that's stage one, where there's no individuality, where there is as it were only membership of the species, membership of the group. Then you've got a second level, you might say an intermediate level where you have got the individual: perhaps in opposition to the group. Sometimes two kinds of individual are

distinguished here: the individual as held down by the group and the individual as (laughs) - as dominating the group - or the individual as dominated by the group, and the individual as dominating the group. But then there's another stage still, a third stage, where the individual as it were stands free from the group altogether, and is just an individual. Hm? I mean, all understand what that means because we've been into it so much. But then, beyond that, you've got another stage where the individual enters into free association with other individuals, and this is what we call the spiritual community. And time and again, of course, we've insisted that this is not the same as a group: a free association of real individuals is not a group, it's a spiritual community. It's a sangha. But you can envisage something even beyond that - hm? But we don't have any word, even, for that - we don't have a word, even, for spiritual community: but if you can envisage what happens as a result of the intensive interaction of individuals, real individuals, one might say even transcendental individuals, well, what results, one might say, is the Bodhicitta. [44]

It's not an individual thing, in the same way that, you know, the individual is an individual - it's another level beyond that. At the same time it isn't something collective which all those individuals possess in common. I think some of the language that I've used in this particular lecture might give that impression, but that was not my intention.

So one has got really these four different levels. But one speaks of the Bodhicitta here, rather than of stream entry, or the arising of the Bodhicitta rather than of stream entry, because the Bodhicitta, perhaps for more historical reasons, has this other-regarding reference which stream-entry doesn't. Stream entry has, so to speak, a self-regarding reference, even though in the case of Stream Entry there's no self, just as in the case of the Bodhicitta, you know, there are no others, in an ultimate physical sense.

VESSANTARA: Could you see the Bodhicitta as a sort of common purpose. Of an Aryasaugha?

S: Well, you could certainly speak of a common purpose of an Aryasangha, and you could even speak, you know, of the arising of the Bodhicitta as being the common purpose of the Aryasangha. But at the same time you mustn't think of it as something, as it were, collective. And that Bodhicitta, when it had arisen, would not be a purpose in that sort of collective sense. One has come to a level where it's very difficult to find words which adequately express, you know, what happens.

PRASANNASIDDHI: Don't you also say that the Bodhicitta will arise when one sees the sufferings of sentient beings? It would seem to imply a sort of more worldly, as opposed to spiritual community - associated with the world, or, you know, people of the world as opposed to the people of the spiritual community.

S: Well, yes, certainly I've mentioned that in the course of a lecture. This is one of the four factors which, you know, Vasubandhu mentions. That constitutes, in a way, a spiritual practice: you know, that you [45] reflect upon the sufferings of others, and in this way stimulate yourself to develop the Bodhicitta so that you can help others. But inasmuch as it's a spiritual practice, all spiritual practices can be intensified within the spiritual community, inasmuch as you encourage one another. You can encourage one another in this respect too. So to that extent the Bodhicitta is still more likely to arise, so to speak within the spiritual community.

But of course one is not to take this expression, 'within the spiritual community' too literally - not that within this particular closed circle of people. What it is really trying to convey is that it is another level of development beyond even individuality, perhaps even transcendental individuality, as we usually understand it. The spiritual community is not necessarily that which is located in a particular place occupying certain physical bodies.

PRASANNASIDDHI: So you could be living in society, and involved with sentient beings who are suffering, but on another level you're in contact with...

S: Well, just as you could be on your own, you could be on solitary retreat, but in a sense you could be in contact with other members of the spiritual community, in the sense that you would be very aware of them, and they would be aware of you. One mustn't think too much in terms of actual physical contact, though obviously one has to do so at first, and one certainly shouldn't use the fact that you are, or are supposed to be, in contact on another level as an excuse for neglecting contact on the level on which you are actually operative. But nonetheless it is the... well, in a sense the non-physical contact which is important - even though that is mediated through the physical body, because we are identified,

or we identify ourselves, with the physical body to such an extent.

PADMAVAJRA: So, to take the case of the movement, you wouldn't think of the Bodhicitta arising within your own particular community, you could think in terms of, say, the wider movement? [46]

S: Yes indeed, yes.

PADMAVAJRA: Perhaps even beyond that.

(pause )

S: But you mustn't even think of the spiritual community in that wider sense in too literal a sense. What I am trying to get at is that the arising of the Bodhicitta represents a quite different type of experience, a further level of experience, above and beyond that level at which you've got a number of individuals - even, so to speak, transcendental individuals - freely associating and co-operating. The emergence of the Bodhicitta represents a level beyond even that...

PRASANNASIDDHI: It would actually require some amount of contact.

It wouldn't be telepathic. It would have to be...

S: Well, it would depend on the degree of development of those individuals, it could be telepathic merely, but I did simply caution against, you know, (laughs) jumping to the conclusion that because it was all right to be in telepathic contact, or you could be, therefore you could neglect actual physical contact. One could say it is a question of a higher level of consciousness, or experience, arising in the sense of a number of individuals, that is to say, real individuals, especially what I've called transcendental individuals, then, in dependence upon those individuals taken as it were collectively, what is the next stage that arises? Well, that next stage is what we call the Bodhicitta.

In other words the Bodhicitta is not to be thought of as somebody's individual achievement or individual possession; it is not, at the same time, that it is not your individual achievement or your individual possession. It is to show that it is not that, that one speaks of it as arising within the spiritual community - not that it belongs to the spiritual community instead of belonging to an individual.[47] I mean, the concept of belonging hopefully is transcended altogether.

LALITAVAJRA: Quite often in the scriptures, Bhante, the Buddha would call up the buddhas from the other worlds. Is this getting at the same, this wider consciousness?

S: One could put it like this, because in the Mahayana Sutras, some of them more than others, you do get the conception, if you like, of the inter-relatedness of all things, and you get the impression that every Buddha is aware of whatever is going on throughout the, well, not just the universe, but the trichilocosm! - the three thousand great thousandfold world. So in this way, it is not only that everything is interconnected but that the Buddhas at least are aware of the interconnectedness of everything at every level. And the Bodhicitta, you know, as a movement in the direction of Buddhahood in that sense, clearly represents an awareness to some extent of that interconnectedness of things at every level.

PADMAVAJRA: The point about the next level beyond the transcendental individuals co-operating being the Bodhicitta, is that what you're suggesting as being got at in the Virnalakirti Nirdeśa when the Licchavi youths who will develop the Bodhicitta, through their parasols to the Buddha, who turned them into one parasol?

S: Yes. Though of course one mustn't take that 'one' too literally! One could put it differently and say that those - I think it was five hundred - parasols, without ceasing to be five hundred parasols, became what was at the same time one parasol. Though not that you had a sort of mosaic of tiny parasols! (laughter). Not that either! Really, you're transcending the concepts of sameness and difference.

You have, say, you no longer have five hundred different parasols, you no longer have five hundred units, but they've not actually been resolved, or dissolved, so to speak, into one unit. The one represents a quite different order of experience. [48] In other words one might say that, for Buddhism, featureless unity does not represent Reality in the highest sense. For Buddhism, Reality is essentially, one might say, diversified, it's a unity in difference and a difference in unity - this is why in the

Avatamsaka school, they have this simile of the, you know, the different beams of coloured light going in all directions, intersecting one another and passing through one another, and being transparent to one another, and one not obstructing the other. So that there is oneness, and at the same time there is diversity.

So not that everything is reduced to one, so that there are no differences; at the same time not that there are differences to such an extent that unity is obliterated: but that you've got unity in the midst of difference, difference in the midst of unity, and even difference revealing unity - and unity making difference possible. That is more the Buddhist vision of things, certainly from the Avatamsaka point of view.

So when I speak, say in this particular lecture, as I believe I do, in terms of one Bodhicitta, I'm not to be understood as meaning a Bodhicitta in which individual Bodhicittas, so to speak, have been obliterated, so that there is a single, as it were collective Bodhicitta in which everybody participates: I believe my language might, you know, lend itself to that sort of understanding or misunderstanding. But in the lecture, which was given, of course, quite early on in the history of the FWBO, I was simply concerned to counter the view that your Bodhicitta might be just an extension, so to speak, of your individuality, so that you had a number of different Bodhicittas. But the fact that I spoke of one Bodhicitta is not to be, you know, understood as meaning that the differences are cancelled out.

SUSIDDHI: You use the simile in the next lecture of white light coming through a prism, or through different prisms.

S: Right, yes, yes. So that there are differences I mean as it were, within unity, and unity within differences, in this respect [49]

PRASANNASIDDHI: But when you say differences in unity, unity in differences, doesn't Buddhism actually even sort of go beyond that in a sense? That in a sense, even that's too limited?

S: Yes, but once you go beyond that, you can't say anything at all (laughter). That is fair enough. Vimalakirti goes beyond in that sort of way, perhaps we should too, but at the end of the course. (laughter).

SUSIDDHI: In the Survey and the Three Jewels, when discussing the arising of the Bodhicitta, you lay great emphasis on the tension produced between the two opposing tendencies in the spiritual aspirant: the desire to gain Enlightenment on the one hand, and the desire to help other beings on the other, in producing the Will to Enlightenment. I wondered why this wasn't stressed so much in the lecture.

S: I gave the lecture, as I said, many years ago. I can't remember now why I didn't stress that - it may be that I was trying to keep it simple, or at least not to approach the subject from too many different points of view. But it is true that that is the sort of process of development, from one level to another, all along the line. It reminds me a little bit of the dialectical movement in Hegel, where you've got a thesis and an anti thesis, and then a synthesis. So to begin with you have to have the thesis, and then, you know, after that you have the antithesis which opposes, or even if you like contradicts the thesis, and you have both of them together, both are equally valid, it's not possible to get rid of either. But obviously that is an uncomfortable sort of position - a position of opposition and, you know, contradiction. But you have to stay with it, you can't escape from it. But what happens is that after a while there is a sort of breakthrough. You rise, so to speak, to a higher point of view, a higher position, where you can see that both the thesis and the antithesis have their own limited truth or limited validity; and they are subsumed, they are integrated, into a higher position, which is the synthesis. So it's much the same as that, one might say, in the spiritual [50] life. Because you are at a relatively lower level, there will be certain contradictions which are inherent in that level and which you will experience. And the fact that you experience them, and in fact experience them in a painful manner, will force you to rise, not just to a higher point of view, but to a higher level of experience altogether where those contradictory positions are no longer contradictory, and the arising of the Bodhicitta is an instance of that. So one might say that whenever there is a breakthrough, from one level to another of spiritual experience, something like that usually happens. There is some painful dilemma, there is some problem, which you can't reconcile. You can't reconcile it theoretically or intellectually. It's exemplified above all, perhaps, in the Zen koan, a sort of paradoxical self-contradictory situation which you can only resolve by, you know, rising to a level of experience, or a level of perception or vision, where the contradiction, where the paradox, where the koan no longer exist as such.

VESSANTARA: Could you see the Wheel of Life as consisting of a situation where you have those pairs of opposites, but you always suppress one side or another of that opposition, and therefore inevitably sooner or later, react back to it - and the Spiral Path is one where you allow both of these, the thesis and the antithesis, and then transcend them?

S: Yes, one could say that, I mean, I was thinking only a few weeks ago, this grew out of the lecture I gave on 'Buddhism, World Peace, and Nuclear War'. I was thinking that we are involved in various existential situations, or existential dilemmas - death being, of course, one of them - and that they are, in fact, of this nature. And usually we do suppress one side of the dilemma, and, of course sooner or later, the other side of the dilemma hits us and confronts us forcibly, and then we are compelled to take that side of the dilemma into consideration, and it's only if we take both of them into consideration, both sides of the dilemma into consideration, that the dilemma can actually be solved. [51] Sometimes, of course, we suppress one for a while, and then we suppress the other, but we never confront both of them simultaneously, and therefore we're never in the position of being able to resolve the dilemma or to rise above it.

I mean, for instance, we could say life and death are the dilemma - we want life, we don't want death, so you try to resolve the dilemma by hanging on to life and shutting your eyes to death, and hoping, so to speak, that death will go away. But sooner or later you are forced to confront death, either in the form of somebody else's death or if you won't do it in that way, well, in another way (laughter) later on. But, you know, you can only, so to speak, solve the problem of life if you are prepared to face the problem of death: if you are prepared to see life and death as inseparable, and as different sides of the same coin. So how can you, you know, even try to think of solving a problem of life without taking death into consideration.

I won't tell you what the other dilemmas were, but I probably will give a talk on them at some time or other. I sort of singled out three main existential dilemmas, that of death being one of them. (pause)

A dilemma being, of course, a problem, so to speak, which cannot really be solved on its own level, but which one unavoidably finds oneself involved in. Anyway., what was next?

VESSANTARA: To the extent that you equate insight and the Bodhicitta, if it's also true that it's only in the eighth bhumi that one becomes irreversible, but if insight is something which you can't lose, how is it possible, in a sense, to fall back from the Bodhicitta?

S: Well, this brings us back to what I was talking about earlier on in connection with historical development. If you follow the traditional pattern, and you do regard the arising of the Bodhicitta as occurring further along the spiritual path (assuming that there is a single spiritual path) than entering the stream, than stream entry, [52] then one distinguishes between irreversibility and stream entry, as well as the arising of the Bodhicitta, in the following way. In the case of stream entry your irreversibility is from rebirth in lower levels of existence - you cannot be reborn in a state of suffering, you cannot be reborn as a preta, you cannot be reborn as an animal, but only as a human being, and you must, so to speak, make further progress. So your irreversibility is from that. Then of course, later on, later on in your spiritual progress, the Bodhicitta arises, so you are no longer thinking in terms of Arahantship as you were when you entered the stream; You are now thinking in terms of Supreme Buddhahood, so you progress further and further along the Path until you become irreversible from that goal, that is to say, from Supreme Buddhahood. But until such time you can still fall back, that is to say fall back from the goal of Supreme Buddhahood, fall back to the goal of Arahantship. But this is from the point of view of historical development, and looking at these three things as constituting successive stages of development along a single path. But if you don't take that particular view, if you take the view that the arising of the Bodhicitta is in fact the same sort of experience as entering the stream, then irreversibility from the Enlightenment of a Buddha will be synonymous, at least in denotation, with irreversibility from Arahantship, because you no longer distinguish between Arahantship and Buddhahood in what became the traditional sense.

So you have as it were consolidated not only stream entry and the arising of the Bodhicitta but also stream entry, the arising of the Bodhicitta, and irreversibility from Supreme Buddhahood. In other words, irreversibility is within the specifically Mahayana context, what stream entry is within the specifically Hinayana context: and since one is essentially a restatement of the other, the two really, spiritually speaking, coincide.

I don't think I've spelled that out before, but this is what it amounts [53] to. But you see how important

this is, this alternating between the perspective of historical development and a purely spiritual perspective. And I think one will never be able to resolve all these numberless differences, real and apparent, within the Hinayana and the Mahayana, until one understands this really thoroughly, otherwise there will be endless confusion. You can't, you know, solve the various problems that arise merely on the basis of a study of the texts, or merely intellectually, you have to ask what is happening, or what did happen, spiritually, you know, what are the spiritual experiences involved. Unless you ask yourself those sort of questions, you will not make sense of all these different teachings from a spiritual point of view; in other words you won't really make sense of them at all.

That is not to say that in the course of their historical development all these different teachings, because of that development didn't assume a sort of additional richness of connotation - that is certainly the case, and therefore, as I've said in the case of the Bodhicitta, one term may be more appropriate than another in a certain context or with regard to a certain aspect of the spiritual life. One can't after all, ignore the historical development - that is to say the historical doctrinal development - but one has not at the same time to take it literally, or, so to speak, on its own terms. So therefore stream entry and the arising of the Bodhicitta do amount to the same thing, but nonetheless in certain situations, or with reference to certain aspects of that experience, the term Bodhicitta is more appropriate than the term stream entry.

GREG SHANKS: In the Survey you discuss two possible approaches to the spiritual life: reliance on self-power, and reliance on other-power: I've got a definition of them if we get lost. Is there a connection between the self-power approach and leading the spiritual life directed towards stream entry, and the other-power approach and leading that life as directed to the cultivation of the arising of the Bodhicitta? [54]

S: This distinction of self-power and other-power is taken really from Japanese Buddhism: it's jiriki and tariki - and Zen is supposed to exemplify the approach of jiriki or self-power, and Shin the approach of tariki, or other-power. One might say that it doesn't really matter which approach one adopts. One is confronted by the basic distinction of self and other, or, if you like, subject and object. From a deeper point of view it's neither self nor other that's going to achieve what you want to achieve, because what you want to achieve is going to transcend the distinction of subject and object and therefore the means to be adopted must also transcend subject and object. And when the means really start to transcend, you know, the distinction between subject and object, that's where progress really begins, because that's where insight begins: but meanwhile you have simply to think either in terms of subject or in terms of object.

So you either think in terms of making the effort yourself, or in terms of the effort, as it were, being made for you. But you'll soon find that if you adopt the approach of self-effort or self-help, you can't ignore the other, the help coming from the other; and if you adopt - you know - the approach or the attitude of relying on other-help, you can't ignore self-help. For instance, supposing you decide that you want to rely upon the other, say in terms of Japanese Shin, you want to rely entirely upon Amitabha, the vow of Amitabha, so that means you mustn't rely upon self-power, self-effort, self-help: you have to give that up, it takes a lot of effort (laughter). It takes a lot of effort to rely on somebody else's effort (laughter). You can't separate the two in that sort of way. What you are trying to do, in both cases, is to arrive at a point where you're depending neither on self nor other. As I said, that's where the real progress starts. (pause) [55] Looking at it of course from the other point of view in terms of self-power and self-help, it's like walking along a road: I mean, you walk along by your own effort, so to speak, but did you build that road? The road is there for you to walk on - without the road being there you couldn't walk, so you walk, so to speak, by grace of the road. So your self-help, or your self-effort, cannot exclude an objective element. The fact that you can walk also depends on the law of gravitation, the fact that there is an earth there - you didn't create either of these things, so there are definite limits to your self-help and your self-power. It's the same in the spiritual world - you make the effort yourself, but supposing there wasn't such a thing as the Dharma, there wouldn't be anything which you could follow by your own effort, with your own energy. So in the same way you can't exclude the other altogether. So even if you take up, initially, the approach of other-power, self-power is also involved, and if you take up the approach of self-power, well, other power is also involved. So you're confronted by a dilemma in fact, and it's only by confronting this sort of dilemma, experiencing it, that you can rise to a point where the dilemma is resolved and you have, say, an experience which transcends that particular dichotomy. That also comes back to the sort of question that Susiddhi was asking.

ABHAYA: [a question on behalf of Steve Webster] In the 'Endlessly Fascinating Cry', you said words

to the effect that the Bodhicitta has great value as a myth or symbol. I wondered if you could say more about that.

S: I'm not sure what I had in mind when I said or wrote that, but what occurs to me now is that it means you shouldn't take the Bodhicitta literally as a sort of doctrine or theory. By saying that it is a myth one means that the term Bodhicitta refers to an experience, a transcendental experience if you like, which cannot really be adequately described in conceptual terms. Also, if we use the word myth or the word symbol, we suggest that the Bodhicitta is something which is emotionally moving. It's something which stirs us very deeply. On a much deeper level than that of the intellect [56] or the ordinary waking consciousness. So therefore perhaps it's better to think of the Bodhicitta in those sort of terms, rather than taking it as representing one of the doctrines of Buddhism or one of the teachings of Buddhism. The term myth or symbol suggests something that has a definite impact upon us, something which we necessarily experience, something that we cannot simply think about.

ABHAYA: I wondered also if it had any tie-up with what you were saying a few years ago about the Gestalt, and the Movement finding a gestalt, fragments of myth deep inside. Does it relate to that at all?

S: I think one could say that, because, after all, I have spoken of the Bodhicitta arising, say, within the context of the spiritual community, I mean the spiritual community of especially, let's say, transcendental individuals. So one could even think of that in a poetic rather than a precise doctrinal sense, as constituting their myth. (pause) - In the sense for instance that one speaks of the myth of the Sukhavativyuha Sutra. The Sukhavativyuha Sutra, when speaks about Amitabha and how he was originally a monk called Dharmakara, is not giving you, you knew, sort of factual information about other universes, and past ages of history, or, rather, pre-history. It is creating a myth, and similarly one can speak of the Bodhicitta as a myth, speak even of the Bodhisattva as a myth, though one must be careful of course to make it clear that one isn't using the word myth in the sense of something which is simply false or simply imaginary. So one could, in that sort of way, speak of the Bodhicitta as constituting the myth of the Movement rather than speaking of the movement as having a blueprint, or a five-year plan, or even a five hundred year plan, or the idea of the movement. It might be more evocative and more inspiring, and more emotionally moving, to speak of the myth of the movement, making clear of course what exactly you meant by myth. I think the word myth nowadays has been generally rehabilitated, and most people would not misunderstand, perhaps, what you meant. [57] Maybe they wouldn't put into the word myth quite so much as you would be putting into it in that way.

SIMON TURNBULL: For the benefit of those who might misunderstand it, how would you define or how would you explain myth in this sense?

S: Well, just very off the cuff, and without trying to remember what Jung said, what is a myth? A myth is a story you might say. A myth is a story, so - a story about what or about whom? It's, well, a story, one might say, about the gods and goddesses, and beings of that sort. So what are these gods and goddesses? Well, they're beings, or if you like, powers and forces that exist on some other level, on some other plane of being. So when one speaks of the myth, say, of the FWBO, what one means is that the movement isn't really, it doesn't really consist of this collection of rather scruffy-looking individuals (laughter) - that's only, to change the metaphor, the tip of the ice-berg, that's only the little tiny apex of that pyramid I spoke about earlier on.

Actually, what one sees as the movement, materially, is only a tiny fraction of what is actually happening. There's something else happening on some other level, on some other plane, which is infinitely vaster. And what one sees of the movement, what we call the FWBO, is just a tiny part of that, a very limited manifestation of that, a working out of that myth on a particular level, at a particular time, in a particular set of historical circumstances - so it's in that sense that one speaks of the myth of the FWBO. It's not that the FWBO has a myth, no! It's not that the FWBO possesses a myth, no! It's the myth that possesses the FWBO, you could say, in the double sense of that term. (pause)

So it is in that sense that the FWBO is working out, say, on the historical plane, something which is of archetypal, or archetypal-spiritual significance. So if one can feel oneself, as a member, so to speak, of the FWBO, working out that myth, I think that will give one a much truer idea, so to speak, or feeling of or for, what is [58] actually happening, or what one is actually involved in. Subhuti's book (and this only just now occurs to me), with all its virtues, and they are very many indeed, does not bring out this aspect. Perhaps it's just as well that it doesn't, because it's maybe an aspect that people (that's people outside the movement) need to be introduced to gradually. Maybe it's an aspect people within the

Movement don't fully grasp, but it is something that will need, I think, to be made more and more explicit as the years go by, something that will need to come more and more into people's consciousness. Not something that they claim, as it were, but something that they actually feel, to a greater or lesser extent.

In other words it means one needs to look at things in a completely different way. Not just with the old, rational, conceptual, historically orientated consciousness, but in a quite different sort of way - in a more imaginative way, one might say, or a more archetypal way, to use that rather vague word. (pause)

One can look at it, say, with the help of the analogy of dreams. You've got your waking life, and you've also got your dream life. And in the case of some people, their dream life is a very rich and vivid life indeed, sometimes much more rich and vivid than their waking life. So if you are to give a whole, a total account of yourself, you cannot only describe your waking life, you also have to describe your dream life. But that may be very difficult to do, because you may not always remember your dream life. And very often, of course, your dream life does not remember your waking life. They go along, as it were, quite separately, occupying their different regions or different planes.

So in the same way you might say that you individually have got a dream life; the Movement as a whole has a dream life - and that is its myth, though this still doesn't fully represent what is meant by the myth of the Movement. But perhaps it goes some way towards it, you know, that perhaps the movement does have an existence on another level which also needs to be taken into account, just as you have, you know, an existence on another level that needs to be taken into account, namely the dream level.

One might go even further than that - supposing you were all not simply dreaming, but supposing you did a lot of meditation and spent most of your time at Vajraloka (laughter). Well, not very much might be happening on the material plane. You might not be moving about very much, or saying very much, but a lot would be happening on other levels, on the different levels of meditation. And that would be, one might say, where it was all really happening, and what you were doing externally would be just a faint reflection of that. So in the same way, the movement has its existence or its being on this other level which we call the mythical, or if you like the archetypal or the symbolic, and is a sort of bodying-forth of that. If it merely existed on the material plane, then it would probably wither away fairly quickly. It needs to have really deep roots; roots, so to speak, in the sky, to change the metaphor around a little bit, if it is to survive at all.

The Bhagavadgita, by the way, since I used that figure of speech, does refer to the Aspatā Tree, the Banyan tree, which has its roots in the sky, so this is what one needs to have, one needs to have one's roots in the sky instead of in the earth, and when [59] one speaks of the myth of the FWBO one means some thing like this, that it has its roots in the sky, so one can't really understand it without reference to the sky.

Greg Shanks: Would there be an analogous situation with dreams then, that the more importance you give them, the more conscious they can become; so with the myth, the more one paid attention to that aspect of the movement ...?

S: Yes, you need to live out the myth more, and that means you have to be more aware of the myth, just as if you really want to integrate your dream life and your dream experience with your conscious life and your conscious experience then you have to dwell on that dream life and that dream experience, you know, quite a lot. So if you don't dwell on the myth of the FWBO you can't embody it. But it's something you have to feel and not just think about - that is quite important.

Greg Shanks: Someone could initiate you, in a way, someone could get you to start looking at it in that sort of way., but after that you would have to ...

S: I'm not quite sure how you would go about it; I don't want to make it sound something as it were, very cut and dried. It really does have to emerge as different people start becoming aware that the Movement is more than what it appears to be. And that will only happen, you see, when they start becoming aware that they are more than they appear to be, that they're more even than their dream life. They'll start becoming aware that they have a part to play, that they are playing a part in that myth', on another level, and their physical activity is [60] only a bodying forth of that. And then they will see that other people with whom they are connected are doing the same and in that way they'll begin to appreciate the myth that is behind, so to speak, the FWBO as a whole. I think that will be the way in

which they approach it.

Greg Shanks: This is what we've been saying recently about living on the mental plane, trying to live more on the mental plane.

S: Yes it does obviously imply becoming aware that you do in fact live on another plane. Not that you have to live on another plane, or ought to try to live on another plane, but that in a sense you are already living on another plane, and you have a being almost in another universe, in a way that you are not really aware of, but you may sometimes get a faint glimpse of it, or sometimes be vaguely aware of it, that you are, as it were, somebody else. You're not who you think you are. And that everybody is in fact, 'somebody else', they're all wearing masks, so it's like a sort of masquerade. (Pause.) Any way, what other questions are there?

Vessantara: Mike had a number of questions I think, relating to the Bodhicitta.

Mike Shaw: On the last question and answer session you said it's better if we consider the universe as animate rather than inanimate, and suggested that if this was the case, the universe would have a sort of consciousness, and you implied that that would be ethical in nature. For instance, killing the Buddha couldn't be part of the nature of things. And in this lecture on the Bodhisattva Ideal you said first of all that we could consider the Bodhicitta as a sort of Transcendental entity, and also as a sort of Cosmic Will in the universe in the direction of liberation. So I was wondering first of all, if this universal consciousness could be equated with the Bodhicitta at all, and if it couldn't be, would that mean that that consciousness was un-Enlightened and could, so to speak, follow the path to Enlightenment and gain the Bodhicitta? (laughter)

S: Well, certainly in Buddhism traditionally, there is a conception of an Enlightened consciousness and an un-Enlightened consciousness, and the Enlightened consciousness, one could say, is especially embodied in the Bodhicitta and the Bodhisattva, and the un-Enlightened consciousness in the figure of Brahma. And I did mention, I think, the other day, I did refer to a text in the Majjhima-Nikaya where Brahma is represented as pervading the whole universe with his metta. So when one speaks of the