

## 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*

## 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](#).

Universe as being alive rather than dead, one is thinking of Brahma, say, rather than the Bodhisattva. Perhaps the Bodhisattva is also conscious of the Universe as a sort of Transcendental awareness of the Universe, but that consciousness doesn't, say, belong to the Universe, doesn't pertain to the Universe, in the same sort of way that the consciousness of Brahma does. Do you see the point? I'm not quite sure how you would go about relating the two. The image that occurs to me is of say the ocean, which is more like Brahma's consciousness but within that ocean there springs up a spring of water which is not salt, which is fresh, and that is more like the Bodhicitta's consciousness - it's a stream, as it were, within that ocean, rather than continuous with the ocean. Though at the same time, you could say, contradictorily, you have to find some way of expressing the fact that the Bodhisattva is at the same time conscious of the Universe. Perhaps one could say that Brahma is conscious of the universe but is not conscious of himself whereas the Bodhisattva is not only conscious of the universe, he is conscious also of Brahma as within that Universe. In other words the Bodhicitta represents an even higher level, in this case a Transcendental level. You could say, to pursue this a little further, that a mundane consciousness, even like that of Brahma, constitute in a way the life of an organism, the life of the world, the life of the Universe, but the Bodhisattva's consciousness, even though it is conscious of say the universe, is not its consciousness in the sense of not contributing to keep it alive, but if anything rather the opposite, as constituting a way of deliverance from, do you see what I mean? It's not a life principle. Brahma's consciousness you might say represents a sort of cosmic life principle, whereas the Bodhicitta or the Bodhisattva's consciousness is not a life principle in that sort of way, it's rather a liberation principle, liberation from that kind of conditioned life. So the Bodhisattva's consciousness is not constitutive of the Universe, in the way that Brahma's apparently is.

Padmavaira: In your lecture, the Bodhisattva Principle, you speak of the, if I can - remember this right, as in the Bodhisattva, the lower Evolution becomes conscious, in the sense of this sort of urge, this upward urge, to Enlightenment. Would then evolution be that stream of fresh water within a wider ... ?

S.: Yes, one could look at it in that way certainly, yes. I think the difficulty is in using language which appears to suggest that one thing has come out of another in the sense of being nothing but that, so that it's reduced to itself. So that you then become guilty of a form of what's

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called 'reductionism', and this is why in Buddhism we use the formula "in dependence upon A, B arises" so one might say that in dependence upon the Lower Evolution, the Higher Evolution arises. We do not say therefore, that the Higher Evolution is entirely the product of the Lower Evolution in the sense of being reducible to the Lower Evolution. It's not simply a more refined form of it, or something like that. Not that it's completely different from it, that's the other extreme, because it has arisen in dependence upon it. So it's neither the same, nor different. So there's no reductionism and there's no also, the opposite of reductionism (whatever that is, if there's a word for it) either. Do you see what I mean? I mean, for instance, if you say that the Higher Evolution emerges from the Lower Evolution, it's as though you are suggesting that the Higher Evolution was contained within the Lower Evolution, rather like something being contained within a box, and you sort of pull it out at some stage, you produce it from the box. But it's not really like that at all, in terms of Buddhist thought. So therefore one needs to ponder very seriously this formula "in dependence upon A, B arises", the two are not identical and at the same time they are not completely different.

Prasara Siddhi: So in dependence on the Universe, on Brahma's consciousness, the Bodhisattva's consciousness, the Bodhisattva consciousness arises?

S: No I don't think one could say that, because the Bodhicitta arises in dependence upon the consciousness of the True Individual. If one defined Brahma as a True Individual, well yes, one might say that Brahma, as a Brahma, could aspire to Bodhisattvahood, but one is getting perhaps then a little

beyond the limits of traditional Buddhism. Brahma is more of a sort of cosmic principle, though yes, appearing in buddhist texts as an individual in the sense of a sort of supernatural being almost. Obviously its not easy to express experiences and ~~~l~t~e5h pertaining to a higher level of existence, in terms of concepts derived from another level of existence.~But I think one has to beware of too literalistic an approach and therefore try to understand terms like Rodhici~ta, Bodhisattva and so on,

in sort of poetic and imaginative terms, rather than sort of strictly literal or scientific terms,

manner. (Pause.) In other words in terms of myth rather than in

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terms of history. Otherwise one finds oneself almost in the position of being forced against one's will of giving a sort of scientific explanation of a poem. Or is there a scientific reason why a sonnet has fourteen lines, not twelve?

Mike Shaw: I think you've partially answered this one. It's about the fact that you said that the bodhicitta is more likely to arise within a group of people working together, and also that you said the Bodhicitta is the other-regarding aspect of the same experience as described by Stream-Entry etc. I was wondering how the 'subjective experience' (inverted commas) of an individual in whom the Bodhicitta has arisen compares with that of an individual for whom it has arisen collectively, with other people? In other words, would the irreversibility of Stream Entry apply to that individual or would that be sort of shared collectively within the group

S: Well, one thinks of an experience as sort of be~nh~h multi-faceted, say Stream Entry being one of the facets, the arising of the Bodhicitta being another, and it is, no doubt, a question of passing from one facet, or one aspect, to another, in accordance with whichever facet or aspect constitutes one's starting point. So that for somebody, the aspect of Stream Entry might be the aspect with which they first make contact. That is to say, the first aspect of the total experience. They work their way round, gradually, to the other aspects;. Somebody else might start with, say, the arising of the Bodhicitta taken as a separate experience, that is to say, as a particular specific aspect of that total experience, and they might, as it were, work their way around to Stream Entry. You get much the same sort of question when you think in terms of Stream Entry itself and consider breaking the fetters and developing Insight. Sometimes people ask 'well which comes first?' Do you break the fetters, and because you've broken the fetters develop Insight, or do you develop Insight and because you've developed Insight, then break the fetters? Well the two are different aspects of the same thing. So you may as it were go from Insight to breaking the fetters, or you may go from breaking the fetters to developing Insight, depending on which aspect you, so to speak, give attention to rather. So one is concerned with, as I said, a multi-faceted experience, around which you gradually make

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your way. You're having to reduce something which is, say, three-dimensional, to two dimensions, as when you try to produce a two-dimensional map of a three-dimensional globe. You have to do it bit by bit. You have to unroll it or unfold it bit by bit. So you may start unfolding here, and somebody else might start unfolding there, so there may be, to begin with, some difference, some apparent difference, in your experiences, but when you've both unfolded or unrolled all those different aspects you will have, so to speak, the same map before you. (Pause.) It's like in the case of the human

individual and the development of his different aspects. Someone may be working more on the development of Faith, but

sooner or later he will have to work on the development of

Wisdom. Someone may be working on the development of Wisdom, but sooner or later he will have to work on the development of Faith. So one who has developed Faith to a great extent, but not Wisdom, may appear very different from someone who has developed Wisdom to a great extent but not Faith. They may even seem to be on a different path. But eventually they both develop both. And when they've both developed Faith and Wisdom, Wisdom adjacent to Faith, then it will become more obvious that they are in fact both on the same path. But until they do that it might seem that they're on almost different paths - one is a Doctrine follower, one is a Faith follower, and that they're following different, even though perhaps parallel, paths. But that isn't really the case. So also one has to be quite careful comparing oneself with others, or comparing different people. Comparing, say, somebody's strength with somebody else's weakness, or somebody's weakness with somebody else's strength. And one also must be careful not to attach too much importance to what happens to be your particular strength. You may be very strong in Faith, so you may tend to over-rate Faith in comparison with understanding. Or you may be very strong in understanding, and you may be tempted to over-rate that in comparison with Faith. So because you have say more Faith or more understanding, you may consider yourself more highly developed, or more evolved, than someone who has less of those qualities, not remembering that they have no less of another, complimentary quality, which is of no less value than the quality that you happen to have developed.

This is also why it takes a long time; you can't

understand or try to judge people quickly and easily because they may be working on different aspects of themselves at different times, and you very likely may be doing the same. You have to give it a good stretch of time, say at least ten years. But of course they have to be working on something, and you have to be working on something. All right, anything else?

Mike Shaw: I've got a small one, but it's connected with Universal Consciousness. Before, you mentioned that it might be possible that it's in the nature of things that humanity cannot be destroyed by nuclear war. I was wondering if you thought that was actually the case, and if so, if you could explain why that is?

S: Well, I mentioned it as a possibility (and I must say I don't see it as anything more than a possibility) for the reasons that I mentioned in connection with the fact that a Buddha could not be killed. That the universe, if it is in fact a sort of living organism, if it is (as it were) conscious, possesses for that very reason a sort of self-adjusting, self-regulating mechanism, for want of a better term, so that when things do become too bad, or when it does seem that a certain section of sentient existence - in this case a portion of the human race - is threatening the existence of the whole, that self-regulating mechanism will function in such a way as to counteract whatever that particular section is doing, perhaps even by ensuring that that section disappears or dies out, like the dinosaurs, or something of that sort. One can certainly conceive of that sort of possibility in an ethical universe, assuming that universe to be ethical, which is the traditional Buddhist position. I wouldn't like to say whether I could actually guarantee it as working in that way, but it is certainly conceivable at least, given the postulates of traditional Buddhist thought. Do you see the sort of thing I have in mind? One sees the universe as having (for want of a better term) a sort of collective intelligence; and one sees that collective intelligence as capable of intervening at crucial moments which affect, say, the safety and well-being of the organism - in this case the world or even the cosmos - as a whole. And traditional Buddhist thought does not render that sort of possibility out of the question. In other words, balance is not simply mechanical. If one recognises of, say, an intelligent universe, one would have to recognise that intelligence as playing some sort of part in the maintenance of the balance of things, and as possibly intervening from time to time to maintain that balance. All I'm saying is that given the basic postulates of Buddhist thought, it is not an impossible conception; it is conceivable. But whether it is actually the case, that is another matter. That I wouldn't like to say.

prasannasiddhi: When you say the universe has this sort of consciousness, is this something much wider than just this planet? Does it include sort of other...?

S: Yes, one could, one could. For instance one speaks about the intelligence of certain organs in the body. They carry out all sorts of complicated functions, and it is as though they

had an intelligence. Intelligence is not necessarily conscious; I think this has been in practice established. One is not thinking of an intelligent, individual consciousness, but one is certainly thinking of something more than a series of mechanical reactions. So perhaps there is something in the world, or in the universe, collectively, that is analogous to a sort of subconscious intelligence that runs the internal organs of our bodies. Does that make it clearer? Only clearer, I don't necessarily say more convincing, but more clearer as a concept.

Shanks: Within an organism, in biology, I think they say that functions take place to restore equilibrium within that organism. Equilibrium is the sort of base level, and if things get too far out of equilibrium then things like feedback systems will operate to restore that equilibrium. Is that the sort of thing?

S: That is the sort of model or sort of pattern that one has in mind. Whether that is a legitimate extrapolation of the model - well, that remains to be seen; one would have to investigate further. I'm only saying it is- conceivable, I'm saying no more than that at this stage.

Prasannasiddh-i: Well, organs of the body do die from time to time as well.

S: Well, yes. But that would not be any point against there being such a subconscious intelligence in the universe as a whole, because it is admitted anyway that the universe as a whole, with or without that subconscious intelligence directing it, will come to an end eventually. Anyway, what further points?

Will Spens: I had two questions on this aspect. Is natural morality an expression of Transcendental morality on a lower level? Is it connected with the ethical dimension of the universe? And do you need to be a Buddhist to practise natural morality?

S:~ Hmm, I think there are several things in a way mixed up here. When one speaks of natural morality in this sense, which is not the natural morality simply as practised by the individual, what one means is that morality operates itself, that karma operates itself. I mean for instance, it's a postulate of Buddhism (at this point I give it only as a Postulate) that unskilful actions are followed by suffering. It is not that suffering is attached to unskilful actions subsequently, so to speak, by some supreme law giver or judge; but they naturally follow. And this is what is meant by the fact that morality is (sort of) inherent in the structure of things, inherent in the cosmos - that unskilful actions will (so to speak) automatically be followed by suffering, that there is not needed any extraneous force or power outside nature (so to speak) to bring that about. So this is wh~at is meant when it is said that the universe is intrinsically ethical: that the universe itself, as it is constituted, is sufficient to account for the fact that such a thing as morality -exists or is possible. There is no need of a supreme law-giver. So what we usually call natural morality as -practised by the individual is only that morality, or that behaviour, which~ takes account of that fact. And of course

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conventional morality is morality which doesn't have anything to do, really, with natural morality at all~ is ethically neutral -- is really a matter of custom, without any basis in natural morality. Is that clear or is it still sort of mixed up? I think it's not a conception that's perhaps easy-- for us to grasp; we're familiar with the conception of natural law I think, but not of natural moral law-. In pre-Buddhistic times in India, in the vedas, you have the conception of Rita~ which was not only law, but also that wh~ich was right. And it is generally held by scholars that the Buddhist conception of Dharma, as a sort of cosmic moral law, is to some extent an extension, a broadening- out, even a deepening, of this Vedic conception of Rita - that the moral law functions without anybody- (as it were) operating it. That suffering does result from unskilful actions, and happiness does result from skilful actions- (~as it were) auto- matically. There is no-one to apportion those particular results. So it is essentially a non-theistic conception. It's like the law of gravity -- there's no god of gravity to operate the law of gravity, there's no god of ethics to operate the laws of ethics - the laws of ethics are self-working, and in that sense inherent in the universe rather~ than sort of superimposed upon it. I don't know that I've explained that satisfactorily, p~erhaps it needs to be gone into much further. It is

something that is perhaps quite remote from our thought in the West. I don't know whether even there~5 any classical analogue for it, except possibly in stoicism, though Stoicism was often theistic.

There is also the question of the relation of the fact that the universe is (as it were) an ethical universe, in the sense that it is a universe within which ethics (~so to speak) operates itself, and the fact that it is also a conscious universe. One would need to work out the connection between those two things. What it does suggest, of course, is the limitations of the usual sort of mechanistic, rationalistic way of looking at existence, or looking at life.

Abhaya: There was a little bit of discussion in our group, relating to this. If the universe follows this natural law, if suffering follows unskilful actions, isn't there an open choice, always, as to which way it goes? So couldn't you have, just as a hypothesis, a preponderance of unsk~ilfulness just as much as you could have a preponderance of skilfulness? Because it's a natural law.

S: Ah. I think one perhaps has to distinguish between a universe which is actually ethical, in the sense of a universe in which all the beings are ethical, and a universe in which ethical behaviour is possible. Because you can't have the possibility of ethical behaviour unless you have also the possibility of unethical behaviour. Because both depend upon free-will, so t7speak. So the fact that a universe is funda- mentally of an ethical nature does not necessarily mean that all the beings in th~at universe wh~o are capable Qf ethical behaviour, are in fact at any' given moment behaving-ethically. They may, conceivably,~ all be behaving unethically, but-they are still ethical beings, inasmuch as they're capable of ethical behaviour, and they could not be capable of that ethical behaviour unless

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they were also capable of unethical behaviour. An unethical person is an ethical person.~

Abha a: Which- leads me to wonder:If-the balance gets out of an,so to speak, how' could it be righted?

S: Well, from a traditional Buddhis-t point of view, it can only then be righted by th~e intervention of some Transcendental element, in the fomr of, say, a B~odhisattva. Because (I think I'm express- ing it correctly- in the sense th~at I think I'm expressing the traditional Buddhis-t view correctly when I~ say that) the ethical, in the long run, can only be sustained by the~ Transcendental.

Abhaya: Yes, but I was thinking back to- what you said about nuclear war ~~ I mean, that wouldn't be...

S: Well, for the sake-of argument, put i~t in entirely traditional terms. It is possible, say, in those traditional terms, that say, a Buddha or Bodhisattva, let's say, in some far off universe, may see, let's say, what is happening in this particular world of ours, and decide to intervene, decide, say-, to actively influence the thoughts of large numbers of people, in such a way that the balance is again righted. This is conceivable, certainly against the background of Mahayana scriptures. Whether it is actually so in its literal sense - that is obviously another matter. Whether we can take those sutras as literally as that, or in that sort of sense.

Abhaya: I didn't realise you were including the Transcendental when you were talking about the conscious, possibly ethical, universe.

S: No - actually I wasn't. Actually I wasn't at that time. So therefore one has to recognise the fact that a universe that is merely ethical in the narrow sense may conceivably become actually unethical. perhaps that possibility is (sort of) reflected in mythic terms in the stories of the battles between the devas and the asuras. It is said in some parts of the Pali Canon that the gods always rejoice when human beings follow the righteous path, because it means that they'll be reborn among the gods, and in that way the forces of the gods will gain in strength, and they'll be more likely- to overcome the asuras. So this does suggest that just on that (~as it were) ethical le~el the narrower sense there is a balance which can change in , from time to time, between what we call the kusala and the akusala.

Abhaya: But if the akusala did get really out of hand, one could only (sort of) posit the intervention of the Transcendental?

S: One could posit the possibility of such an intervention. Whether there was an actual intervention would depend on that particular Bodhisattva. But also it is pointed out in the Pali Canon that it is only due to the appearance of a Buddha, who is of course a Transcendental figure, that more human beings do in fact follow the righteous rather than the unrighteous path. So it's as though the Transcendental doe-s underpin the ethical in the ordinary sense all the time. But in the long run, without such underpinning, the unethical might overpower the ethical.

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So this is why it's sometimes said that if one doesn't have, say, within a spiritual community, at least a few beings who are Stream Entrants, well, the spiritual community, in the long run, is almost bound to collapse. Because the forces of the 'gravitational pull' are such - they are operating all the time, unremittingly. Whereas your mundane spiritual effort (to use that expression) is not operating all the time, it is an intermittent thing. It's only your Transcendental effort (though it is not then an effort, more a sort of attainment) which will be operating all the time, and will therefore be all the time counteracting the 'gravitational pull', and therefore not being overcome by it, ever. So you can't have devas without Buddhas, you might even say. At least you can't have a multiplication of devas without there being at least one Buddha.

prasannasiddhi: Couldn't you also say that if beings within the universe were acting unethically, their suffering would increase, and they wouldn't like that suffering, and they'd realise that if they keep doing this it's going to hurt more and more, so that in that sense there's a self-regulating mechanism?

S: Well, that might be so if beings were logical (laughter) but actually one doesn't often find that with people. That people who have reduced themselves to a state of extreme suffering will very often go on making things worse for themselves and not see why they should be in that state of suffering. They can be quite blinded by their own past actions, and even blame other people for landing them in that sort of situation.

Prasannasiddhi: I was just thinking about evolution on this planet, and how in a sense it had taken billions of years for the lower evolution to have been completed, and then just within the process of a few thousand years you get the higher evolution going all the way from self-consciousness to Buddhahood, or at least occurring amongst...

S: It's true that in the case of the individual the spiritual path does start with initial feeling of dissatisfaction, but if an individual is too much overpowered by pain and suffering I think it's very doubtful whether they will ever really be able to see the possibility of a way out. As in the case of - according to the Wheel of Life - the beings in the hell states. In the case of the historical Buddha, he started with a feeling of dissatisfaction for what he had, therefore he experienced pain and suffering. But he had what we might regard as an easy life, a comfortable life, but he was able to be objective about that and recognised its limitations, and in a sense experienced it as suffering. But it would seem that there is not the possibility of a low level ethical achievement on the part of a large number of people without what I've called the underpinning of a high level spiritual achievement on the part of a small number of people. If you've only got, say, the low level ethical standard on the part of a large number of people, like everybody, it would seem that conditions will deteriorate more and more, and that's perhaps what we are seeing today, certainly in many parts of the West.

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Prasannasiddhi: But it has been such a short time - civilisation has only been developing for a few thousand years. When you compare that to the time scale of the lower evolution - I almost feel that we've done an enormous amount, or consciousness on this planet is developed an incredible amount...



S: Well, when one compares where the human race is now with where it was millions of years ago, well, yes, it's come a long way. But if you compare the human race as-it is now with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, well then it still has a long way to go. Anyway, was that all, or was there some more?

Vessantara: There are quite a few more.

S: All right. Carry on then.

Vessantara: You talked about the need for Stream Entrants in the Order. I think Devamitra had a question on this.

Devamitra: Perhaps it's a question that's already been answered, but I'll put it for the sake of completeness. I've heard it said that some time ago you said that in order for the spiritual integrity of the movement to survive your own death, Stream Entrants would not be enough; what was needed was the Bodhicitta. Did you in fact say this?

S: I don't remember, actually. But if I did say that, well clearly I was distinguishing between Stream Entry and the Bodhicitta, but if I was distinguishing, clearly it was for some provisional purpose which I can't remember now. Perhaps I was drawing attention to the importance of the other-regarding aspect of that experience. But certainly it goes back to what I was saying a few minutes ago: that the 'gravitational pull' is operating all the time. So unless you develop Insight, well, it will get you sooner or later, if you live long enough, so to speak. So in the case of a movement or a spiritual community which is made up of people who all the time are subject to the 'gravitational pull', and who are not resisting that all the time (and by the very nature of things they will not resist it all the time, unless they've developed Insight) well, that spiritual community or movement or organisation must sooner or later disintegrate. Hence the need for the development of Insight, the need for Stream Entry, the development of the Bodhicitta, within that community or movement.

Devamitra: Yes, but I suppose what was in my mind was why weren't Stream Entrants enough?

S: I can't remember now what I had in mind in making that sort of distinction in that connection. Perhaps (I~only hazard a guess now) what I meant was that it wouldn't even be enough to develop this or that aspect of that experience (let's call it just that for the moment) , but that what would be necessary would be people who had actually an all round experience, and who had explored every aspect of that experience, not only Stream Entry but also the aspect of the arising of the Bodhicitta. Possibly that is what I was getting at.

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Prasannasiddhi: I think you also said a Stream Entrant can look after his own development, but he can't look after the development of others.

S: But that is distinguishing individuals in a way which I think one can't. One can only distinguish aspects. So if Stream Entry is an aspect of that experience of which the arising of the Bodhicitta is another aspect, one cannot (at least, not in the long run) make that sort of distinction. Maybe, for the time being, even though you are (so to speak) a Stream Entrant, you can only look after your own development, but in the long run you will be able to look after the development of others too. But it is only a distinction of aspects - not that there is a type of person literally called 'Stream Entrant' and another type, a different type, called 'Bodhisattva'.

Vessantara: Wade had a question about conditions for the arising of the Bodhicitta.

Wade McKee: Well, actually I thought Abhaya was going to put that one.

Vessantara: It was something about the LBC.

Abhaya: I think it's already been answered, but I'll throw it in. I was wondering whether (laughs) it

was more likely that the Bodhicitta would arise, or will arise, in, say, the LB... (laughter) I mean out of an outsized(?) difficulty they've created an environment - there's a lot of people working together in a co-operative way...

S: But clearly it depends not just on the number of people, but the intensity of the effort made by the individuals involved. I mean if there's a larger number of people making the same intense effort then there is a greater possibility, I would say. But the fact that the number of people is larger by itself doesn't really make any difference. But a number of people making a really intense effort, can achieve I'm sure more than a quite small number of people, even though all the individuals, in the case of a smaller number of individuals, were making, as individuals, an effort of the same degree of intensity.

So the short answer is it's a question of intensity of the effort on the part of the individual that really counts, not just the number of individuals involved.

Lalitavajra: In a way that wouldn't actually enable us too see (?) not just the LBC but of all the individuals(?)

S: Yes. Well, assuming that people were able to operate tele- pathically (so to speak) and not just on the material physical level. You might have been living and working all by yourself in Bombay, but unless you were actually telepathically in contact with Order Members living and working elsewhere in the world, you'd stand a relatively small chance of the Bodhicitta arising in that particular situation, inasmuch as you were just one individual on your own and not effectively an individual working in co-operation with other individuals. Anyway, I think all this can be worked out from what I've already said.

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Greg Shanks: Taking it that you've related these five different doctrinal terms: Going For Refuge, Opening the Dharma Eye, Stream Entry, Going Forth, and the Arising of the Bodhicitta - in the early series of lectures entitled The Meaning of Conversion in Buddhism, you spoke of four experiences: Going For Refuge, Stream Entry, Arising of the Bodhicitta, and Turning About in the Deepest Seat of Consciousness. Could this last doctrinal term be incorporated in this...?

S: This again is another aspect, which should be brought into the general pattern. This I haven't yet done. I did have it in mind, but at the time I thought it would perhaps complicate things just too much. I also haven't said anything, really, on Going Forth in this connection. I haven't sort of gone into that in any depth. So that also will need to be done at some stage. So really you've got six different aspects. Probably there are others.

Greg Shanks: Irreversibility.

S: Yes. Though Irreversibility really amounts to the same thing as Stream Entry. It's the same sort of concept.

Padmavajra: In that lecture series I think you also seem to refer to conversion in the vajrayana sense as well. Would there there- fore be experiences in that tradition which would be part of that one experience?

S: In principle, yes. Because in historical terms the Vajrayana does restate the Mahayana. So therefore one would expect that there was an experience within the vajrayana which corresponded to the arising of the Bodhicitta, or to Irreversibility, within the Mahayana. Perhaps one has it in the case of the Vajrayana abhiseka, but I must say I haven't yet worked that out in any detail. I'm not so sure that it~'s so clear in the case of the Vajrayana, because one mustn't forget that within the Vajrayana the Bodhicitta ideal figured very prominently, it was in the background all the time. So perhaps the restatement in the case of the case of the vajrayana was not so complete, or exhaustive, as it was in the case of the Mahayana with reference to the Hinayana. And in any case it wasn't conducted so much in doctrinal terms.

Padmavajra: Is there anything resembling the Bodhicitta in the Pali Canon? Using the language of irruption or cosmic will?

S: Not Bodhicitta as Bodhicitta. I don't think that term occurs at all. The term Bodhisatta does occur, but as far as I recollect it's used only with regard to the Buddha himself before his actual attainment of Enlightenment. I think I wouldn't be wrong in saying that the term Bodhicitta doesn't actually occur. In other words one has the concept of Stream Entry, and that does seem to be considered fully adequate to describe that particular experience. It was only later perhaps that its meaning became more restricted and therefore needed to be supplemented by other terms.

--Padmavajra: I believe you've referred to the Maha-govinda sutta

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of the Digha Nikaya as perhaps showing that tradition which in a way has been lost and which the Mahayana picked up on. Do you think there's anything in that sutta which suggests perhaps something like the Bodhicitta?

S: Yes and No. I mean the four Brahma Viharas do figure prominently in that particular sutta, and of course very often in Mahayana practice the development of the Bodhicitta is pre- ceded by the practice of the four: Brahma Viharas. So one could regard the metta bhavana in particular as a sort of seed out of which the Bodhicitta developed. Because what is metta essentially? Metta is the wish that all living beings should be happy. But what is the highest happiness? This is Enlightenment. So really, if your metta is complete you'll wish that others will gain Enlightenment, that being the highest happiness. And if your wish is sincere, you'll do all that you can to further that. So in a way, the metta bhavana implies the Bodhi- citta. So you could therefore regard the metta bhavana as supplying the seed, in a way, for the development of the Bodhi- citta, or what came to be regarded in the Mahayana as the Bodhicitta. So perhaps therefore - and I certainly have suggested this - the Mahagovinda sutta, especially the practice of the metta bhavana in that, might be regarded as indicating the shape of things to come in the form of the Mahayana.

Padmavajra: I think in that connection you also spoke about a sort of 'free-floating' metta. Does that, do you think, come close to the Bodhicitta?

S: One could say inasmuch as when I spoke of metta as free- floating, I thought of it as not being literally the possession of any particular individual. And of course the Bodhicitta is not that. In other words it's not an extension, however refined, of any particular mundane individual. It's a question more of: in dependence upon that refined, mundane individual the Bodhi- citta arises, or Insight arises.

Kamalasila: I hope to find out something about the Bodhicitta practice, which some Order Members do. It seems to correspond roughly to Vasubandhu's four factors. The question is: given the importance of the Bodhicitta, do you think that the Bodhi- citta practice should be more regularly and widely performed?

S: Hmm. I think the question is more than that. It's really a question of, well, given that (say) the breakthrough from the mundane to the Transcendental is so important, should not the Going For Refuge be intensified? Should not the arising of the Bodhicitta be intensified? Should not the Turning About in the Deepest Seat of Consciousness be intensified? Should not the Going Forth be intensified? And of course the answer is that they should all be intensified. In a sense it doesn't matter which one you start on, and from which you work your way around gradually to the others, but at least you should start by perhaps intensifying one of them, with a view to intensi- fying all the others in turn. Maybe you start off by intensi- fying your Going Forth, maybe if you're living in a rather lax commune, well, you move into a stricter community. Or, say, you decide to intensify (as you said) your practice of the Bodhicitta. So all right, yes, you devote more time to that

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particular practice-, and so on. But it's not a question simply of intensifying one's this-or-that aspect of

the total experience, but of intensifying the total experience itself, via a more intense practice of this or that aspect of it, and eventually all the aspects. But perhaps a general sort of all round intensification is in fact in order.

Kamalasila: I suppose part of this question is the relevance of the foundation yogas generally.

S: Well, they're relevant not, so to speak, for the FWBO collectively, but for individuals. I mean, if individuals find that they do help, then they're relevant. If individuals don't, then they're not relevant. And quite a few individuals do find at least some of them relevant - some of them helpful - and therefore they are to that extent relevant. But obviously you must try to make the effort and try to find out, by actually practising, whether they are helpful or not, and whether they are relevant or not.

Simon Turnbull: So equally, a more intense practice of the sevenfold .....

S: Yes indeed. Yes, because that is the sort of (?) to the arising of the Bodhicitta anyway. I think it's very easy for people to settle down in a sort of moderate practice of this, that, or the other; I think from time to time at least there needs to be an effort to intensify quite definitely and quite strongly in the particular direction or with reference to a particular aspect, whichever that might be - whether it's ethics or meditation or study or this practice or that practice... Otherwise one can very easily in the end just be jogging along in an comfortable, easy, undemanding sort way.

Vessantara: A question about how the Mahayana sees the Arahant Ideal.

Mark McClelland: Bhante, you've said in The Survey, and I think elsewhere, that the Mahayana, specifically in its relationship to the development of the Bodhisattva Ideal, developed very much as a response to the ideal of the Arahant, which by this time had degenerated somewhat from the original ideal. But from a reading of the Mahayana sutras, it appears that the Arahant ideal is presented as inferior per se - I was thinking of the way that Sariputra is portrayed. Could you elaborate on this?

S: Well, I think the point here is that in ancient India people generally, including the Buddhist, did not have any conception of what we see as historical development. They were faced with, say, the Arahant ideal as then presented, which they didn't find acceptable. Nonetheless they had to accept it as having been preached by the Buddha. So they couldn't think in terms of the historical development - that the Buddha had in fact preached something different, but in the course of time it had degenerated, and therefore one had at present this rather negative arahant ideal - they were not able to think in terms of historical development at all. So what they thought in terms of was: the Buddha did teach it, even in that ~ort~of form, but that was a provisional preaching to those who were comparatively undeveloped,

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and then he preached, of course, the Bodhisattva Ideal. They could only make sense of the situation, or relate the two, in that sort of way. They had to refer it all back to the Buddha's own lifetime because - yes, all these different teachings and scriptures and ideals were presented as having been taught by the Buddha, and they couldn't think in terms of a process of historical development in the course of which there might have been some degeneration, they couldn't explain things in that way. So they had to see whatever process there could be regarded as having been as taking place within the lifetime of the Buddha himself. And not even then a process of degeneration, as we might regard it, but as being a process in the sense that the Buddha was confronted of different capacities, and therefore addressed different teachings to them and presented them with - different ideals. They could only see it in that sort of way. I mean the culmination of that came with the Tendai School when all the teachings of the Buddha were classified into five great periods, and the different sutras allocated between different periods. There were further refinements upon that but we won't go into those. But it's only in more recent times that due to the influence of modern, Western, evolutionary modes of thinking that it has been possible to think in terms of a development of Buddhism, or for that matter a development of Christianity, or any other religion. So that entirely alters the perspective in which we see them. So we don't ourselves have to think in terms of - well, the Buddha taught the Arahant ideal in the very limited way as well as the Bodhisattva Ideal; he taught the Arahant ideal to disciples of limited capacity, and he taught to Bodhisattva Ideal to disciples of superior capacity - we don't actually think in those terms. That is if we approach Buddhism with a modern conscious- ness, imbued with this evolutionary way of

seeing things. We think in terms of the Buddha as having originally presented the Ideal as fully as he possibly could, and people having originally appreciated that, but then failed to do so progressively as the generations went by. So that then Mahayana had to, so to speak, come along and restate the whole teaching so as to bring back the emphasis to where the Buddha himself originally placed it. We can think in those terms, it's natural to us, but it wasn't natural to those ancient Indian Buddhists - they couldn't think in those terms, all they could do was produce another sutra, so to speak, or find another sutra.

Greg Shanks: In an extract from the Last Vandana seminar given in Mitrata Perfect Emotion 2, you talk of the puja as being an act of spiritual community, and after that: "in which every element should subserve that rather than detract from it". You go on to say that this is why there is in a sense no such thing as an 'individual puja', "If you recite the sevenfold puja by yourself it's a completely different thing, if you like it's a completely different experience." My first question has, in a sense, been answered, because it was: Is the collective context of a puja which makes it a practice for the cultivation of the Bodhicitta? But following on from that, hence, would performing puja on one's own not constitute such a version(?)?

S: Well, again I've in a sense answered this, in the sense that if you were sufficiently conscious of other people (as it were) performing the puja. In the case of (say) the Going For Refuge

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and prostration practice, you do actually visualise all living beings as doing it with you. Whether that is an actual experience? that is another matter, but that's part of the practice. So even if you are seated by yourself, say on solitary retreat, performing the sevenfold puja, if you can have actual experience of other members of the spiritual community performing it with you, if you actually feel that very very strongly, then in that sense you are not simply performing it on your own. So that has the validity (so to speak) of a performance of the sevenfold puja by the spiritual community itself. But obviously that isn't easy to achieve, but it isn't impossible.

Greg Shanks: So when you spoke of it as another thing - a different sort of experience -

S: I was thinking then more of the spiritual community or a number of individuals actually, literally, performing it together. Because that is the level on which most people are. But I don't preclude the other possibility.

Prasannasiddhi: If you were just imagining other members of the spiritual community were performing it with you, but there weren't actually any other... in actual fact the other members of the spiritual community were on a much lower level - say your imagination was sort of abstract...

S: Well, it would be a stronger experience if it could be mutual, and not one-sided. But then one is to consider that on that level one not only transcends space but also time, so other members of the spiritual community, even if they were not performing the sevenfold puja at that particular time, had performed it at some other time, and you were, in a sense, out of time, and in that sense performing it at the same time that they were performing it. But again, as I've said, if others are actually performing it at the same time as you, though not in the same space, because it really amounts to the same, whether it's in the same space but not the same time, or in the same time but not the same space, if you see what I mean. If not only the performance but the awareness is mutual, then obviously that will be mutually enhancing and mutually intensifying. Just as in the literal sense if you look at a person you can have quite intense awareness of them, but if they look at you at the same time, your awareness of them is intensified. So if you are aware that others are performing the sevenfold puja with you, well yes, that is a quite intense experience, but if they, not being with you, are aware of -you too in the same way, well, obviously that will enhance the whole experience for you both. But again that isn't easy to achieve, though not impossible.

Simon Turnbull: Are you implying somewhere that the fact that you have to imagine other members of the spiritual community doing it with you... the sevenfold puja doesn't in itself stand... even if you weren't imagining other members of the spiritual community even existed, the fact that you were doing the puja, and especially the Transference of Merit, the nature of the puja itself includes others in it. So

surely it has validity as it stands for raising the Bodhicitta, even if you...

S: Ah. No. You must have a sufficiently intense realisation of the meaning of the words, and that would involve the sort of

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situation that I've described. It wouldn't be enough just to say those words obviously. It wouldn't even be enough to sort form a mental picture of other people, but there would have to be almost an experience of them. Well, sometimes of course people aren't even sufficiently aware of themselves as performing the sevenfold puja, what to speak of awareness of other people as performing it, even if they're actually present. (laughter) Even to be aware of oneself as performing it is for some people sufficiently difficult. Their mind wanders off, doesn't it? I think very few people could say they remained fully aware and conscious throughout the whole of the sevenfold puja and were fully present in the case of every word that they uttered. So you have to start there I think. (laughter)

S: Anyway, what else? How is the time going by the way?

Abhaya: It's five past ten.

S: Is it? How many questions are there?

Vessantara: It's probably just a few oddments. We could hold them over.

S: I think it might be better if we hold them over, because I did think reading through the lecture that it was probably one of the richer in content in the series, 50 perhaps we could have those few questions at the beginning of the next question and answer session, and then go on to whatever questions have since arisen on the third lecture. I suspect they may not be as many as we've had this evening. Let us see.

Voices: Thank you very much.

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL Tuscany 21st Sept.1984 SESSION 3

Vessantara: Firstly we want to know: Is the word Bodhisattva actually a Buddhist coinage, or does that pre-date...

S: I think one can say quite categorically that it is a specifically Buddhist term. It seems to have originated in Pali rather than Sanskrit; that is to say: Bodhisatta, and the Sanskrit for it of course is Bodhisattva. But some scholars are of the opinion that the term has probably been wrongly "Sanskritised" and that the Pali Bodhisatta meant not a being of Enlightenment, but one who strives for Enlightenment. So that it should have been Sanskritised, according to some scholars, as "Bodhisacta", rather than "Bodhisattva". But as Bodhisattva it was Sanskritised, and it always has subsequently, that is to say traditionally, been understood as meaning a being of Enlightenment.

Vessantara: Jonathan had a question about the Four Factors. Jonathan Brazier: Yes, you describe two methods of setting up the conditions for the arising of the Bodhicitta. I wondered if there's any particular reason that we only use one of them in the FWBO, and whether there's a "Vasubandhu's method" in current use?

S: The first of course being the Sevenfold Puja. Well, clearly that, in a way, lends itself more to use in the sense that we do have a Sevenfold Puja which we regularly perform, whereas it would seem that the other four conditions have not been reduced in that sort of way to something that one can practise in that form. But nonetheless, there's no reason why Vasubandhu's Four Factors shouldn't figure more prominently in our practice, if only to the extent of recollection, or reflection, of study.

Vessantara: Mike had a question...

Mike Shaw: Confession plays a central part in both the Sutra of Golden Light and the Bodhicaryavata. So it seems as if confession is very strongly linked with the Bodhisattva Ideal in some way. Is this actually the case, and why is that so ?

S: I wouldn't say that confession is linked through the Bodhisattva Ideal in the sense that it isn't linked to other Buddhist ideals or formulations of the ideal. Because confession does figure quite prominently in the Theravada, especially in monastic life. In fact it's a regular part, a regular feature, of monastic life. I think I have mentioned before that it is the normal practice in the case of Theravada bikkhus and samaneras that the samanera, or even the bikkhu disciple, habitually makes a confession to the teacher with whom he

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is residing, and with whom he is studying, morning and evening. He asks for forgiveness for any faults of body speech and mind that he

might have committed, especially against the teacher, either during the preceeding day (you know, when he confesses in the evening) or during the preceeding night when he confesses in the morning. So that even if in a dream he has for instance thought ill of his teacher, he confesses that. And then of course there is the confession in the sense of the confession that, in theory at least, preceeds the recitation of the p~atimokkha (or the pratimoksa), the code of monastic law. So in this way confession does figure very prominently indeed in Theravada monastic life generally. So the confession certainly isn't peculiar to the Maha~y~ana, or especially associated with the Bodhisattva Ideal. Nonetheless one can probably say that inasmuch as the Bodhisattva Ideal represented, if anything, a more difficult ideal, to the extent that one does distinguish it from the arahant ideal, any lapse from that ideal, any failures to fulfill any of its requirements, would represent an even more catastrophic failure, and would therefore need confession to an even greater extent. So one might say that there does come to be an emphasis on confession in the Mah~ayana, in association with the Bodhisattva Ideal, that we don't quite find in the Theravada. In the Theravada it's much more of an acknowledgement of offences committed, whereas in the Mah~aya~na it is really much more of a confession in the sense of a heartfelt pouring forth of your regret that you have committed such and-such an offence, and your resolution, your determination, not to commit that again.

Again, it is rather as though in this case also, in the case of the Theravada a practice which is common to both the Hinayana and the Mah~ay~ana is treated rather more coolly. One especially feels this perhaps when reading Shantideva's Bodhicaryavata where confession is represented in very vivid and emotional sort of tones. And in the same way in the Sutra of Golden Light the confession has a sort of poetic quality about it that one doesn't really find in the Theravada.

So one might say therefore, summarising, that even though confession is common to all forms of Buddhism, confession in the Mah~ay~ana has a special flavour of its own, and in connection with the Bodhisattva Ideal is all the more necessary.

Vessantara: Phil had a question.

Phil Shann: This is to do with compassion. It struck me that most of what we experience as compassion isn't compassion in the transcendental sense, but a refined sort of sentimentality. So I wondered whether

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it was useful to think in terms of a heirarchy of emotions associated with compassion, with sentimentality at one end and compassion at the top end, with (say) romanticism between the two, where romanticism would be defined as those set of emotions which have elements of both true compassion and sentimentality to different degrees ?

S: Hmm. (laughter). I think one could establish a sort of hierarchy of this kind, but I think one could put romanticism in between not only sentimentalism and compassion, but also between sentimentalism and love, in the higher sense. In the Mahayana itself I think there is a hierarchy of compassion: there's compassion which has beings for its object, compassion which has dharmas for its object, and compassion of course which has s~unya, the void, for its object. So a hierarchy of compassion is in principle thereby established, but there's no reason why there shouldn't be other hierarchies too in this sort of way. It also is probably a matter of distinguishing near enemy and far enemy - you could say that sentimentality was the near enemy of compassion, and even that romanticism, in a sense, in another sense, was a near enemy of compassion. Though I'm not quite sure in what sense you're using romanticism here - especially in relation to compassion.

Phil Shann: Well, I was thinking that romanticism had an element of compassion, and also an element of sentimentality... (unclear)

S: But again that raises the same question, because I don't think the term romanticism as usually used is considered to have an element of compassion (especially) in it. Hmm? It would be perhaps just a question of usage. But certainly sentimentality is not the same thing as compassion in the Buddhist sense. The Bodhisattva is not a sentimentalist, far from it. I mean, very often, in modern pseudo-traditional Buddhist art, the Bodhisattva is represented as a sort of sentimentalist, sentimentally agonising over the sorrows of the world, sort of wringing his hands in almost ineffectual despair (laughter). I remember years ago Li Gotami Govinda gave me a little drawing she'd done of a Bodhisattva to illustrate a poem of mine, and I'm afraid that little drawing, which I reproduced I'm sorry to say in *Stepping Stones*, did illustrate that particular point. And an English Buddhist friend of mine made some rather caustic comments on this figure of the Bodhisattva, the gist of which was that that particular Bodhisattva seemed lacked in a certain noteworthy respect (laughter) and it did seem to be rather true. He had a sort of little sentimental smile which isn't what is meant. If you for instance have ever seen a good reproduction of the Padmapani Bodhisattva from Ajanta, and certainly