

General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

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

treated in a sort of mythical way. So it is not as though a concept is playing a part in the creation of myth~ which your question seems to suggest, or to.. Because, just as you could look at punya in, sort of, rational terms~ you could also look at Sambhogakaya in rational terms, but when one normally speaks of, envisages, has any feeling for the Sambhogakaya, well, clearly it is myth, And when one says that that Sambhogakaya has come into existence, you know, due to punya, well, punya, too, is part of the myth. And then?

Padmavajra: Er, well, if there are any connection~ would they help us to a truer and better way of understanding what merit is?

S: What questions are these?

Padmavajra: This is the last clause of the question: If there are any connections...

S: Ah, connections..

Padmavajra: .. between myth and merit, would they help us to a truer and better way of understanding what merit is?

S: Well, the only thing I can say here is that it would suggest that merit

is not to be taken just as a sort of rational concept. Merit seems to have a sort of, well, creative power. If merit of sufficient potency can bring into existence the Sambhogakaya, then clearly merit isn't the sort of thing that you have in mind when you speak for instance of the merit marks that you gain in class, or something like that. You have invested the whole, well, idea - to use that term - of merit with additional significance. Does that answer the question?

Vessantara There's still one or two questions

Devamitra had a follow-up question on obedience (laughter)

Devanitra: This was just for the sake of completeness and to get it on record, as it were. Last night at the suppertable, you said it was important to distinguish between submissiveness and obedience, and I just wondered if you could explain why.

S: Before I do that, perhaps I had better say that one can not only have a follow-up question, one can have a follow-up answer, yes? I was giving further thought to this question of obedience - in particular to the question of whether obedience could be considered as an additional quality of the True Individual in the way, say, that awareness is, that emotional positivity is, that imagination is, that responsibility is, that co-operativeness is - I came to the conclusion that obedience cannot be considered as a quality of the True Individual in the way that those qualities are considered qualities of the True Individual for this reason: I felt that obedience could be either skilful or unskilful

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so that therefore you could say that obedience to the good, you know, was a quality of the True Individual, but you could not say that obedience per se was a quality of, you know, the True Individual. You can say that awareness per se is such a quality, you can say that imagination per se is a quality, responsibility, yes, none of those qualities requires any qualification but the quality or characteristic

of obedience certainly does, because you can obey, you know, a command which is good, and you can obey a command which is evil. So you would have to qualify obedience and say that if it was to be considered as a quality of the True Individual, it could

only be obedience to the good which could be so considered.

To come back to what Devamitra asked about the distinction between submissiveness and obedience, I think of submissiveness as sort of giving in, giving way, knuckling under, complying, in a

weak, knock-kneed, pusillanimous, cowardly, spineless sort of fashion, if you see what I mean, whereas obedience I see as a much more positive and much more heroic, a much more manly sort of quality. You don't obey because you are afraid to disobey, you don't obey out of weakness, you are glad to obey and you obey out of strength. In fact your obedience is - one might even say - an expression of your strength. Of course, here I'm definitely talking of obedience to the good. So I did go on to say, I think yesterday at the suppertable, that submissiveness bore to obedience the same sort of relation as passivity bears to receptivity. It isn't quite a near-enemy as distinct from a far-enemy, though perhaps one could look at it in that way to some extent, but certainly it is not the same thing. One could even go further than that and say that submissiveness has reference to the power mode, you submit to power, but you obey - in the sense of obeying the good - out of love, so that the two are very different. In that sense, you could say that submissiveness was even the far-enemy, as distinct from the near-enemy, of obedience. But anyway, I must say that whatever thoughts I have had on the subject of obedience are of a suggestive rather than a definitive character because it is only fairly recently that I have been thinking on this topic at all. But I think I'm certainly pretty clear that disobedience is not necessarily a virtue.

Vessantara: Now we come onto questions arising out of the lecture we have been studying for the last three days. (Altruism & Individualism in the Spiritual Life) Firstly, Mike had a question on the Bodhisattva as a living contradiction.

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~Mike Shaw: (a few words unclear).. The Bodhisattva as a living contradiction or a living union of opposites, and earlier on, on one of the earlier question and answer sessions, you also referred to the... you talked about the idea of dialectical synthesis, which seems to be a sort of a thread running through this series of lectures, and in ~his lecture, you appear to be presenting Dana and Sila as a sort of thesis and antithesis. So I was wondering if it is possible to give an intellectual expression to the synthesis of these premises or whether the only valid synthesis is the life of a Bodhisattva?

S: Yes, I think that is the real answer that the Bodhisattva himself is the living synthesis, so to speak, and perhaps you cannot produce the synthesis to intellectual terms. One can look at it even more, a bit more, radically than that. One can say that the Bodhisattva represents the synthesis - a living synthesis - of Nirvana and Samsara, but what common term do you really have, what common conceptual term do you really have for Samsara and Nirvana, the Conditioned and the Unconditioned, you don't really have one. You could say, well, there is Sunyata, you know, there is the Void, but that is in a way more of the nature of Nirvana, even though you do speak of the Voidness of, you know, the Samsara or the Conditioned, so it seems as though you have a situation in which so long as you think in conceptual terms you will always have a contradiction. If you try to resolve that contradiction intellectually, or rather, conceptually, that would give rise to a concept which has, which will have its own opposite and hence that you will need a further synthesis, so that the only real synthesis is to be found not in concepts at all but in living experience, which by definition transcends the contradictions inherent in certain pairs of concepts, because it transcends the conception, or rational level itself, altogether. So the Bodhisattva himself is the living synthesis of the various contradictions inherent in the path, say, as between Dana and Sila, or even the various contradictions apparently inherent in the so-called goal, as between, say, Wisdom and Compassion, similarly as between Samsara and Nirvana. Of course, you mustn't make the Bodhisattva, you know, a concept.

otherwise you'll get the Bodhisattva as opposed to the Arahant and then you'll need a further, you know, concept to unite them or another spiritual ideal to unite them. But yes, one might say that there

is no final conceptual synthesis possible for concepts which are contradictory,

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no final synthesis. A final synthesis can only be in the life, you know, of the individual for whom those concepts have meaning. Life transcends logic - it's as simple as that.

Prasannasiddhi: But you can have a sort of refinement of concepts...

S: Yes, you can have a refinement of concepts and therefore a refinement of syntheses.

Prasannasiddhi: Wouldn't that be a step forwards to that sort of silence

S: It could be, it could be, but it mustn't be a silence which supervenes upon, as it were, the exhaustion of concepts, it must be a silence which, you know, supervenes of the sheer richness, as it were, of the life itself.

Vessantara: There's some questions arising out of the perfection of giving

Mike had one... (pause). If you can hear me under the headphones?

Mike Shaw: Sorry, have I got a question. which one was it?

Vessantara: About giving.

Mike Shaw: Ah here it is. Yes, in the lecture you described the giving

of fearlessness as a more sort of psychological help and it occurred to me there might be other psychological qualities which could also be given, perhaps the qualities of True Individual...?

S: Er, yes, the term 'given' is not to be taken too literally, it's more like, sort of, sparked off. You can give fearlessness, you can spark off

fearlessness - in the same way you can give or spark off emotional

positivity. Sometimes you can even induce somebody to be emotionally positive against his will! (laughter) If your own emotional positivity, you know, is sufficiently strong. You can give inspiration, you can give all sorts of qualities in this kind of way.

Mike Shaw: The question I particularly wanted to ask was: I was wondering if you could comment on which psychological qualities it might be appropriate for us to consider in this way, that we could sort of give, and secondly, why fearlessness in particular has been singled out by tradition in that way?

S: Hm. Well, I would assume that it is possible to give to others, or to spark off in others, any positive quality, any skilful quality that you yourself have been able to develop. But of course you yourself must have developed it first. I mean, to use the language of giving, you must have something yourself, you must possess something yourself before you are in a position to give it to others or before you can spark others off you must, you know, possess something of the nature of a spark

yourself. But as I said, I think you can give, or spark off in others, give to or spark off in others any positive quality whatsoever, whether it's friendliness, or whether it's metta, or courage or energy, it's inspiration, fearlessness, you can I think give or spark off any of these qualities. But why does tradition especially mention fearlessness? I must say, I haven't come across, you know, in traditional sources, any discussion on this point, or any explanation. But it must be that fear was regarded as perhaps a quite prevalent, a quite prominent sort or, well, negative emotion, almost. It must have been that fear was quite widespread even, in the days of the Buddha, perhaps subsequently. But fear of what? What would people have been afraid of? Presumably, they were afraid of death, they were afraid of disease, they were afraid of the loss of their near and dear ones, they were perhaps afraid of the king, they were afraid, perhaps, of wild beasts, perhaps they were afraid of floods, earthquakes, you know, famine, fire, robbers, you know, bandits, magistrates. (flaw~r) Perhaps in those days people had more things to be afraid of, or perhaps I should say, perhaps, you know, they were less protected, you know, from these things than we are today, though of course, we have, you know, a fear such as, you know, people haven't had before in history - I hardly need to tell you, you know, what that particular, you know, fear is. So perhaps in modern times, you know, there is greater need than there has been in recent times, at least, in the west certainly, you know, for this freedom from fear. Or perhaps we shouldn't even speak in terms of freedom from fear - and I believe there is a book by Erich Fromm called "Freedom from Fear", isn't there? Perhaps we should also speak in terms of freedom from anxiety, because anxiety is very, you know, prevalent nowadays, I think, and I think very often people aren't always aware of the extent to which they are anxious, or to put it more crudely, are afraid. Very few people have got real, human, positive self-confidence, Even if you are sometimes asked to go and speak to somebody about something, - they'll be anxious they'll be afraid. There's no obvious reason for that but they hesitate. There's a certain lack of confidence, almost a certain anxiety. They can't just go and do that particular that. Either they're afraid of what sort of response they may get, or, you know, they are anxious about their own adequacy to that very small situation and so on. So perhaps, you know, fear and anxiety are quite pervasive emotions, perhaps they were quite pervasive emotions in the Buddha's day and thereafter, so perhaps the

giving of fearlessness was regarded as a very important part of the Bodhisattva's function, and perhaps we are better, you know, nowadays, able to appreciate that, than perhaps, you know, we were, people in the

West were, say, a hundred or so years ago. Simon Turnbull: Do you think it relates to their being more fundamental than some of the other qualities that could be given? Without fearlessness the other qualities perhaps can't be developed. 5. Yes, because fear or anxiety will weaken, will suppress, remember qualities. There's something else that does, me, I

reading in Mahayana sutras, and I think I have mentioned this in one of my writings somewhere, that the Bodhisattva is represented not only as giving fearlessness but sort of self-confidence in a very positive sense, and encouragement, and even inspiration, as well. When I say Bodhisattva, I don't mean one of the Archetypal Bodhisattvas, but, you know, the Bodhisattva as actually, you know, walking on earth and mixing with other human beings. (pause) But certainly, it does deserve consideration why abhaya-dana is especially mentioned here and there's of course an abhaya mudra,

you know, of the Buddha. So even that the Buddha himself is represented as fulfilling that function of imparting fearlessness. (pause) Perhaps the subject requires further investigation and further reflection, we might be able to say more on it then. That is to say, you know, why this emphasis on, so far as the Bodhisattva is concerned, on the giving of fearlessness in particular, as it would seem?

Vessantara: Abhaya had a question.

Abbaya: This is to do with the tension between altruism and individualism. You go into that within the lecture, and you mentioned that man is not just an isolated being but he's also a social animal. My question is: Do you think that (in man?) altruism is an inherent natural tendency, which at root is as strong as individualism but from which

man has become seriously alienated OR do you think he is just basically beastly and selfish and therefore he has to educate himself into a totally alien way of altruism?

S: Perhaps one should distinguish between altruism and co-operation. (pause) I remember reading many years ago, I think it was in my teens, a book by a famous anarchist called Peter Kropotkin. The book was called "Mutual Aid", and I think, as far as I can remember, it was intended as a sort of counterblast, almost, to the Darwinian - perhaps I should even say pseudo-Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest, or the struggle for existence. I think, as far as I can remember, that he

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maintained that mutual aid (you know) between human beings was necessary to survival and that it played therefore a part in the evolutionary process - that human beings would not have been able to survive if there had not been a certain amount of mutual aid among them, so that therefore one couldn't think of human beings in terms of unmitigated individualism, that unmitigated individualism is not evolutionarily speaking... is not conducive to survival. Do you see what I mean? Abbaya: yes.

S: But I distinguish between co-operation and altruism because you can co-operate with other, you know, human beings, you know, in your own interest, without necessarily having altruistic feelings towards them, I mean, of course, not in the case of primitive human groups, that they~ you know, they looked at it in rational terms in this sort of way. Simply - if we accept the evolutionary hypotheses and if we accept Kropotkin's point of view, well, simply those groups, let us say, of humans or proto-humans that didn't engage in mutual aid just didn't survive. Those that did survive, you know, were the ones that engaged in mutual aid, so to that extent mutual aid or co-operativeness is, I won't say inherent in human nature because how far back does one have to go for something to be inherent in human nature? - but certainly - that tendency has been there for a very long time. But altruism? I think altruism is another, you know, matter altogether, because individualism is essentially self-regarding - you are only concerned with your self, what pleases you, what suits you, what you need, what you desire, what is good for you, but in the case of altruism you are concerned with the good of the other person. So I think that even though mutual aid, you know, might have played its part in the survival of the human race - I mean, one might even speak of the sort of a tendency or instinct, to use the word very loosely, to mutual aid as being inherent in humanity - I don't think that you can speak in terms of altruism as inherent in humanity or as part of human nature in the same way. I think that altruism has very much to be learned. Of course, I'm not speaking metaphysically, I'm speaking, as it were, psychologically, you might say. I'm not speaking metaphysically in the sense that I don't intend to deny - let us say, deep down in human nature, you know a Buddha Nature, which is fully endowed with altruism, obviously. I'm not speaking in those sort of terms at all.

Leaving aside, you know, all sorts of metaphysical questions and taking man as one actually finds him, actually living and working and operating,

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I would say that altruism very definitely is something that needs to be learned. Man may engage in mutual aid out of self-interest, and that is an enlightened self-interest, but altruism is something quite different which, I think, almost goes against the grain of existing human nature and therefore it's something that has to be learned, you know, very often quite painfully. We could even ask ourselves, you know, how genuinely altruistic are we? You know, when we do something for the sake of others, to what extent is that, you know, tainted with subtle, you know, self-interest? Is it ever possible to be sure that we had performed an absolutely altruistic action? This is why it has generally been considered that the most altruistic action that you can possibly perform, though even this might not be a hundred percent altruistic, is to give your life for another, because unless you are obsessed with the idea of fame after death (laughter) or reward in heaven or something like that sort, there's nothing in it for you! So we might say that the most altruistic act that anyone could perform would be to give his life for another person when he himself had no belief in, you know, the survival of the soul after death~and a completely cynical attitude towards worldly reputation. (laughter) If a person of that sort was to give his life for, you know, the life of another, you might say that that was a completely altruistic action. But that is the sort of thing one means by altruism. I mean, only too often A altruism is, you know, deeply tainted with more self-interested factors.

Abhaya: So how would you relate this to what you were saying the other evening about ~ur that maybe (you hadn't reached any conclusions) there's an ethical, conscious element in the universe. Would you say that is a sort of collective self-

interest, if you see what I mean? t' ~ S: I think I spoke of~a sort of balancing or regulating factor. I would

say it is individualistic, even, but collectively individualistic. It's the sort of sub-conscious intelligence that is concerned to preserve the whole of life. The whole in any given case being perhaps this planet, or even the whole universe - it's not anything spiritual, I think I did make that point at the time. I compared it even to the ~ntelligence of, say, your liver or your lungs, it's more (again, I'm thinking tentatively) of that order.

Geoff Mc~~abon: Do you think that altruism can be learned without the intervention of the metaphysical?

S: I think it can, but I doubt whether it can

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be developed to any great extent without the intervention of concepts or myths of that higher spiritual or even, you know, transcendental order. But I don't know, because human nature is a very strange thing, you know, I did envisage the possibility of someone who had no belief in an after-life and no belief in the value of posthumous reputation, you know, sacrificing his life, you know, for somebody else, apparently with, at least in this instance, this hypothetical instance, there weren't any sort of metaphysical underpinning. But one can certainly conceive of such a person, can one not? Perhaps, I mean, one might even say there is in human nature a lot that is unformulated. It's not even a sense, not even a sort of vague awareness, but, I mean, a human being is a human being and there is after all, to bring in the, you know, the metaphysical, a sort of latent, in a manner of speaking, you know, Buddha

Nature, the fact of the

existence of which does not have to be present, you know, to consciousness in the form of a concept or a myth in order to be perhaps operative in some cases. But I must say, the long and the short of it is that altruism as distinct from the capacity to co-operate with other members of the human species, you know, for purposes of survival or for certain practical purposes, you know, altruism as distinct from that sort of capacity is something that has to be learned, and which usually requires some sort of spiritual or philosophical or metaphysical or transcendental underpinning. But perhaps not always, not in an explicit manner, not always in the case of some individuals, at least. Because one does sometimes come across certain people who seem, or certain individuals who have in a completely ethical manner, or even a completely spiritual manner, apparently without any explicit ethical beliefs or spiritual principles. I mean, the Buddha himself, when he first became known in the West, presented himself as that sort of person, because in those days it was believed that ethics, you know, depended on religion and religion of course depended on God, therefore some of his early admirers, you know, said about the Buddha - I think it was especially Rhys Davids who said this that "none so God-less and none so God-like", because to them it was a great paradox that someone who didn't believe in God should exhibit so many spiritual qualities and lead such a spiritual life. So one might say in the same way, well, not to speak of belief in God, perhaps it might be possible for somebody without any sort of belief, any sort

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of philosophy of any kind and still lead out of (as it were) sheer instinct of goodness a completely spiritual life. And you do find such people as that, on perhaps a lower level, they don't read their Bible, and they are not interested in Buddhism, and they don't consider themselves in as much as religious people, perhaps they don't even think about things of that sort, but they seem to possess a natural, innate goodness which does manifest in their lives. No doubt they are very fortunate. Sometimes it is a handicap in the long run because it prevents them from going any further, but nonetheless such people do exist.

Prasannasiddhi: And they don't even have a concept of God?

S: No, they don't even have a concept of no God, in some cases! Anyway, let's carry on.

Padmavajra: You mentioned co-operativeness. Were you thinking of it as a quality of the True Individual?

S: No, I was thinking of co-operativeness as a sort of equivalent of Kropotkin's 'mutual aid' for purposes of survival and practical utility and so on..(break in recording)... I haven't seen it for decades. But I do ... I have occasionally come across references to it but that book which was a very, very early

Pelican or Penguin, I'm not sure what it was in those days but it was a very, very early one and I read it during the war. Vessantara : Aloka has a copy at Padmaloka, and last year Sanghapala gave a talk on it.

S: Oh, that's ~nt:erestin~.... (another break in recording, 11 convento is subject to sporadic power cuts) ...

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... 'Mutual Aid', yes. He was a Russian prince who was an anarchist and who lived and worked in England for many years and was, I believe, quite well-known around the turn of the century. Mike Shaw: Similar ideas have been discovered by computer now. They've actually worked out that some sort of system of co-operativeness or mutual aid in evolution works at a much faster rate apparently. Someone was telling me you actually need to have that present. - S: Anyway, it seems common sense, doesn't it? I mean, human nature being what it is, human capacities being what they are. Probably not

everything can be done co-operatively~ I don't think that, say, a poem which is written co-operatively is likely to be very much better than one which is written by the unaided individual.

Phil Miller: Can you say that altruism would be more likely to arise in one country than in another?

S: Well, in a sense yes, in a sense. To put it in what might appear to be cynical terms, you have got to be able to afford to be altruistic. If you are occupied with the struggle for survival yourself, if you don't know where your next meal is coming from, the chances are that you won't be very altruistically inclined. Not that that possibility is necessarily altogether excluded, because it is well-known that very often those who have least are in fact, within the limits of their resources, the most generous, and you're not necessarily automatically more generous just because you do have more resources. But broadly speaking, I think you do have to be able to afford to be altruistic. Certainly on any scale. Because altruism is not just a question of giving, say, money or material things, but of giving time and energy and interest and if one is oneself too much preoccupied with earning a living, say, just won't be able to operate in that sort of way. So you might therefore say - going back to your question - that in those parts of the world where they have to bother less about survival and making both ends meet they are perhaps more likely to be altruistic.

Vessantara: It's nearly 9 o'clock, what do you think? One more question?

S: One more.

Lalitavajra: In the past, attempts have been made in communities to financially practise a common purse system. This doesn't seem to have been very successful as the majority of communities no longer have this practice. It would seem to me to be an abrasive practice, concerning one- self and one's appreciation of others. As people in communities are maturing, do you think it is worth communities reconsidering the common purse as a method of intensifying practice?

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S: There are three questions here. Let's have the first bit.

Lalitavajra: er.. urn (pause)

S: It comes right at the beginning! (laughter)

Lalitavajra: In the past there have been attempts in communities to financially practise the common purse...

S: Yes, that's it. Because that's an assumption. I would say -

has an effort actually been made? - you know, Aa whole-hearted, all-out,

genuine, sincere effort, you know, been made? I'm very

doubtful about that.

Phil Miller: At Sukhavati, towards the end of the building there, as far as I know, all the money went into the common purse. If there was someone

that was taking money on the side, well~ then they were deceiving it. S,> S: I'm not~ sure that that's a case in point, because to have a common purse,

first of all, you have to have separate incomes, you know, which you pool... Phil Miller: There were some who were working outside...

S: So was it a case of everybody, you know, who was working outside, pooling their incomes & was it a case of those who were just working and without any sort of other source of income and living. as it were, off the common purse, doing that quite happily and by choice?

Vessantara: Well, there were quite a number of people, a few people who were working outside.. and quite a number of people working on the building who were paid by Tower Hamlets - under the Manpower Services scheme, -

so they were putting in about £70 a week and everyone was receiving two pounds a week pocket money.

Phil Miller: F~ur pounds.

Vessantara: Two . Well, when I was around... (laughter)

S: And was there nobody with, as it were, a private income? Phil Miller: No.

S: You are quite sure? Phil Miller: Mike Scherk was doing some work and he was getting paid for that and putting it all in, - and then they asked us to give our four pounds back, too. (laughter)

S: What makes me a little sceptical, you know, in that particular case - first of all, it was, you know, an exceptional situation and I doubt whether everybody there was sort of consciously accepting a common purse situation because they really believed in that ideal. It was more that it was an exigency of the situation, that everybody just had to give, you know, whatever they could. And there was also another little incident, which gave me cause for thought, you know, when on one occasion Subbuti, because he

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was, so to speak, in charge there then, wanted some urgent work done on a Saturday, which was a day off, and he just couldn't get anybody to do it and it really was very urgent, so then he announced that those who worked on Saturday would get an extra five pounds each and he got any number of volunteers. (laughter) So this, I'm afraid, gave me great food for thought in the sense that... I thought of the extent to which, or maybe realized the extent to which* people operate with an incentive, and that it's going to be very, very difficult for us to get around that. I mean, certainly we must try but then we shouldn't (so to speak underestimate the strength of the opposition. So therefore, yes, maybe there was to some extent, a limited extent, a sort of, you know, common purse situation at Sukhavati, but I would regard it as rather flawed, to say the least. I doubt whether (you know) everybody involved in that saw that as an ideal situation, but rather, in some cases at least saw it as a situation to which there was in the circumstances no alternative. So this is why, you know, I, you know sort of query that assumption. I'm not really convinced that it has been tried and so to speak failed and no-one has sort of thought about trying it again. I don't think it has really been tried. I think you couldn't really try it in a situation like that at Sukhavati, it was too big, there were too many people. I think you would have to start off trying it, if you tried it at all in a very small community, you know, with between just four or five people, between whom there was very strong, you know, mutual confidence and on the whole a very positive relationship, so they really felt like giving their money, you know, or sharing their money, you know, with one another. I mean, just as for instance when you are married, well, most people nowadays, they don't think of, well, my money and my wife's money~or my money and my husband's money - they think in terms of our money or the family's money because the situation, because the tie is such. So you've got to have that sort of feeling, or an even more refined form of it, if you are to have, you know, a common purse in the community, you've got to really feel that you are one family, you're all in it together and no reservations, not one of you sort of quietly putting aside something for a rainy day or for a holiday, yes?, or, well, keeping anything back in any way. And it's quite a difficult situation because different people have different needs, I suppose if you very desperately want to buy a new record that you really want to listen to, you feel it's a real...

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people are nodding sympathetically. (loud laughter) but somebody else wants a new pair of shoes, so how are you to assess,

you know, the relative need, how are you to adjudicate? So in those circumstances there has to be a very strong positive feeling for one to be able to do it amicably, I mean, the situation should be, well, the man who needs boots says "No, no, you go and buy that record, please, go and buy it!" And the one who wants the record says: "No, no, please go and get yourself a pair of boots, you need the boots more than I need to listen to that record" and maybe the argument goes on amicably, you know, for maybe half an hour until some third party settles it in some ingenious, you know, Solomon-like way. So it's not easy, you know, to have a common purse for all these sorts of reasons, therefore I doubt whether it has been really tried. I don't think it has been tried fully and consistently and with real awareness by the number of people, you know, who would be likely to be able to make it a success, that is to say, a relatively small number of people in very close contact with one another. Anyway, pass onto your next

point.

Lalitavajra: I think the next point has been answered. It would seem it has an abrasive effect- concerning oneself and one's appreciation of others...

S: That is very much the case because... I'm not sure if I am very happy with the word 'abrasive' except, you know, unless it's understood as 'having an abrasive effect upon one's ego', you know, it sort of rubs it away like (laughter) a rough file, a rasp! (laughter). What was the second part of that? "Abrasive effect...?"

Lalitavajra: ... concerning oneself and one's appreciation of others.

S: Yes, and one's appreciation of others. It would be even more than appreciation, you must have real friendship, and real metta, so that you want to share your resources with others, and you don't want to take more than your share of the common resources, more than your fair share of what is pooled. And you are not subject to feelings of jealousy, well, he's getting more out of it than I am you know~that sort of feelings can creep upon you so easily, yes? You mustn't be susceptible to that sort of thing, at least not unduly so. And then what was the third part of the question?

Lalitavajra: As people in communities are maturing, do you think it is worth communities reconsidering the common purse as a method of intensifying practice?

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S: I think yes, I think they should, or I think it must be something that grows on a community. I don't think it's so much something that can be discussed and decided upon and sort of passed, you know, I don't think, really, except, you know, in a quite informal, friendly way. I think that as people within the community become closer and you know, more and more good friends, and also especially if they are working together and have the same ideas about work and want to work for the same things, they will tend naturally to pool their resources. But supposing someone is living and working in a community and is really a, you know, a very good, positive, faithful member of that community but supposing he has got the idea that in five years time he is going to start a centre, say in Africa, well, he may well want to save up his own resources for that purpose, which would be a quite positive thing, but would certainly get in the way of his pooling his particular resources with the rest of the community. I mean, you could say that, well, he could agree with the rest of the community about his, sort of, income, you know, going eventually for that purpose, but then that means that the community as a whole adopts that sort of project, in a way, if you see what I mean. But you might get rather awkward situation developing, I mean, different people in the same community all sort of keeping back their own income for their separate projects later on! If you had too much of that sort of thing, then you couldn't really speak of a common purse. So it does seem, that in order to have a common purse, you need to have to have, you know, common objectives, that is to say, immediate objectives, on which you all want to spend your money, leaving aside the fact that you're spending money on your personal needs in the form

of food, clothing and shelter. Do you see what I mean? But yes,

I think it probably would be a good idea if, you know, these sort of common purse situations did develop more. There might be technical difficulties because you'd have to have perhaps a common bank account and, you know, all that sort of thing. There'd have to be a very good feeling and a very good understanding among all the people concerned to make it really work. So I think it isn't something that one can hurry or that one can insist upon or demand, it has, I think, to arise naturally, you know, out of the feeling that people have for one another and out of their wish to intensify that feeling, and to intensify the closeness of their relationship.

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I,'

Vessantara: Would you like to leave it there?

S: Or do you want one more? (laughter) OK, one more.

Vessantara: There were one or two questions about Western culture... you mention the giving of culture in the lecture.

S: Ah.

Vessantara: Devamitra has a question.

Devamitra: In a way you have already touched upon this...

S: Hm. . languages! (lots of laughter)

Devamitra: Many of the greatest works of art in Western culture give direct expression to Christian values or depict, for example, incidents in the life of Christ etc. One is frequently moved by the beauty of the form and yet disturbed by the content. Conversely, when we turn to traditional Buddhist works, while we may be inspired and deeply affected by their content, the form to which they are expressed may seem quite alien and so we may not be able to respond to them fully. Both Western art and the Buddhist tradition give us necessary nourishment in different ways but until the Dharma is given expression to our own culture in equally sublime forms as actually found in previous Western traditions, our responses will necessarily be ambivalent and in a certain sense unintegrated. Is that a matter of any consequence?

S: I think that one can find both within Western culture and Eastern culture examples of art which is ostensibly Christian or ostensibly Buddhist to which one can respond wholeheartedly. I think, in the case

illustration of some paintings aspects of life of Christ or A

different aspects of, say, Old Testament History, the treatment is sufficiently

generalized, so to speak, for one not to be offended by the content in particular instances. For instance, if you take certain treatments of the annunciation, hm?, that doesn't have to give rise in your mind to sort of theological doubts about the, you know, the virgin birth, because if you just look at the picture, the painting, at least in

certain cases, as depicted by certain artists, what you actually see, 4'

say, if you forget all about Christianity, what you actually see? On one

side of the painting, almost invariably, you see a beautiful angelic figure, you know, with wings, holding a lily very often in his hand, on the other side you see a young woman, a maiden, sort of half bowing before him in a very respectful sort of attitude and in between those you sometimes see rays of light, a dove, so it's pretty clear what it stands for. The illustration is really of the receptivity, so to speak, on the

part of somebody, if you like on the part of the human soul to some kind of higher influence, you know, to some kind of higher power, to a messenger

S: (cont.) so to speak, coming from some other realm. You are quite able to take it in this sort of general, almost archetypal way, do you see what I mean? I think there are quite a number of paintings within the Christian tradition, you know, in Western culture, which you can in fact take like this. If for instance you are confronted by a blood-stained crucifixion, well, no, you can only turn from it in something like horror, - - and there are lots of crucifixions - there are lots and lots of paintings in Western Christian art and I think there are quite enough of them in which the content of which is not offensive for you to be able to obtain quite a bit of as it were artistic nourishment. Take them as it were, - I was going to say at their face value - but their face value in the sense of, you know, just leaving aside at least for the time being what you know, as it were rationally, about Christianity, the history of Christianity, Christian doctrine, and just consider the painting, just consider the images involved. And in the same way, you know, in Buddhist art of the East, there are lots and lots of images which just leave one cold; there are lots of thangkas that leave one cold, very often because they are bad works of art, you know, not every Buddhist work of art is a masterpiece, but here and there you do find an image or a thangka or a woodcarving, you know, that really does mean something to you, and I think there are a sufficiency of these, so it's as though you have to make your own little collection, you know, whether no postcards or in some other way, and nourish yourself on those. But you don't really need very many, you need perhaps just a few. There's again, there's this painting of Tobit and the Angel, a lot of people get inspiration from that. Out of all the people who have looked at that painting from the studio of Verrocchio, as everybody knows, of Tobit and the Angel, who has read the Book of Tobit? Who has bothered to read the Book of Tobit? I mean, some people don't even know where the Book of Tobit is or even that there is a Book of Tobit! (laughter) Some people probably think that Tobit is a sort of Jewish form of Tobias. (laughter).. You've got this picture in the FWBO with the figure of Tobit, sorry Tobias and the Angel - it's the Book of Tobit, Tobias is the son of Tobit - this picture, the angel, you know, leading the little boy along by the hand & the little dog, you know, following and this has become a picture or an

image of Spiritual Friendship! (laughter) So I think we've taken over,

almost biblical, this Judeo-Christian image, and the fact that it is an illustration of the Book of Tobit just doesn't bother people in the least, so this is in fact the sort of thing that happens. And think about all those people who fall flat on their noses in front of Michelangelo's David - well, they don't think of David and Goliath and all the rest of it, well, they probably haven't read that particular book in the Bible for years and years if they have read it at all, if anything, they sort of they have got vague associations of David with Classical, you know, sculpture and so on and so forth. So I think, except in those cases where the content is offensively Christian as in some of those dreadful martyrdoms and, you know, crucifixions, there is

a lot to which we can be completely open. Very often one suspects that the artist himself, even though he did live in the Renaissance, wasn't particularly

Christian - he just seems to have been painting a good picture, satisfying his client and maybe satisfying himself at the same time. So I think that actually in practice this is not such a problem as it might seem to be in theory. I think we can make what I have called our, you know, own sort of, you know, collection. Very often in the case, say of bits of broken Gothic sculpture, statue, one doesn't know what the figures represent, they are so badly damaged, but you can see that there is something very impressive there - but whether it's Saint Matthew or whether it's Saint Mark or whether it's Jeremiah the Prophet nobody knows any longer, it doesn't matter, it's just a magnificent head of an old man or a middle-aged man with, you know, long flowing hair and long beard and a fierce expression and you can admire it and

get something out of it without being able to track down, you know, what exactly its provenance is and who the artist was and who it actually represents. Does that answer that query or is there still

something sort of unresolved?

Devamitra: I think for the moment.

S: I have been giving some thought to this and it might emerge in a little paper, you'll see the connection if it does emerge in that particula~ way. (pause) That's probably a good sort of run-up to the puja.

Vessantara: There are still quite a few questions left over.

S: I'll leave it to you to arrange the where and the when.

Vessantara: Would tomorrow evening suit you?

S: I don't see why not.

Voices: Thank you very much....

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Vessantara: We still have quite a number of questions from last night.

S: So which lecture do these pertain to?

Vessantara: These pertain to the one on altruism and individualism....

S: Yes, that's number four then.

Vessantara: There are a number questions about Western culture.

Kamalasila: Again it's to do with the connection between myth and culture. At the end of your lecture in the Sutra of Golden Light series called Buddhism and Culture you ask and answer a number of questions regarding Buddhism and its relationship with both Western and Eastern culture. One question you said was too big to answer then and there, you said 'another time' (laughter) And that question was, 'what is Western Culture?' It seems to me that there is a strong link between culture and myth and I would be interested to hear what you have to say now regarding the nature of Western culture.

S: There's really three elements to this question. There's what is culture?' and then the connection between culture and myth. When one speaks of Western culture, then, what does one have in mind? It seems to me that Western culture, emphasising the Western, has a number of components. The most important components are, first of all, the classical component, both Greek and Roman. Then there is, of course, the - what shall we call it? - the semitic component~ that is to say the old testament component, the Hebrew or Hebraic component. We have also the pagan, Celtic, Tuetic, element which is probably of somewhat lesser importance. Of course all of these enter into the synthesis that developed under, we may say, the auspices of Christianity. So we might say that when we speak of Western culture we really mean Christianity, or we mean Christian culture as including those elements which it took over from the classical culture, the Hebraic culture and even, to a much lesser extent, the various Northern European pagan cultures. But to all that must now be added what we may call, almost, post Christian elements, especially scientific culture. So all these, I personally comprise under the heading of Western Culture. Western culture is therefore a very composite thing. In this respect you might say that it differs very much from Indian culture. Indian culture, broadly speaking, is quite homogeneous. Yes, different elements do enter into it if one goes far enough back, Aryan elements, let us say, and Gravidian elements. But, in historical times they have been so much blended that one is justified in speaking of a single culture. Chinese culture is remarkably homogeneous except, of course, for that great irruption which was represented by Buddhism, or which Buddhism, rather, represents. Similarly one might say with Japanese culture. So it is perhaps interesting and possibly significant that Western culture should be such a very composite product. Islamic culture is also quite a composite thing, because into Islamic culture there enter very definite elements of classical,

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especially Greek culture, but not to the extent, I think, that they enter into Western culture. So that is what I understand by 'Western culture'. And then, what does one understand by culture? One can look at this from two points of view. What are those areas of human interest and activity to be included under the term 'culture'? And what is the nature of culture generally considered? The great areas which are traditionally included under the heading of culture are the arts and the sciences. It is mainly of those that one speaks of when one speaks of different areas of culture. Of course in modern times, in recent years, we've had this great devate started off by, who was it? Snow, C.P. Snow, on the two cultures. I believe he maintains that we now have, effectively, in the West two cultures, a humanistic and a scientific. And his complaint, I think, as far as I can remember, is that people who are involved with culture in the more humanistic sense have very little time for, or sympathy with, usually, culture in the more scientific sense. And he considers that a great weakness and a great drawback. Perhaps it is. So, such are the areas of culture. And as regards to the nature of culture. I have discussed this in the past, some of you may remember in some of my writings from way back, in the days when I was in India. I can't remember where I have discussed this, it might not even be in writing, I did give quite a number of lectures on this topic at one time. Looking at what is culture and Buddhism and culture, and so on. I took up terms like agriculture and horticulture. When one thinks of agriculture what does one mean? One -means the cultivation of the field, of the soil, of the earth, and making it to produce, to bring forth its fruits. So when one speaks of just culture, this clearly has reference to the human personality and the human mind, one is thinking in terms of an analgous activity, an analgous operation, ofabringing forth, as it were, of the fruits of the mind. Even, you might say, the fruits of the spirit, in every possible way. And that is, very broadly, what I have always understood personally, by culture. In other words I tend to look at culture in the li9ht of the etymological meaning of the term itself. And that is probably justified at least to some extent, even though very likely it doesn't exhaust the full meaning of the term culture. But perhaps it is at least a good starting point, at least a good point of departure. Then, thirdly, the relation between culture and myth. I've spoken of Greek and Roman culture, I have spoken of Hebraic culture, I've spoken of the Norse and Celtic cultures. I have spoken of the Christian, specifically. They all have their myths, so presumably there is some association. Of course they don't always, in all cases, take their myths as myths. In the case of Christianity, notoriously, it has tended in the past to consider its myths as history. But the Greeks have their myths, I hardly need remind you of that fact. The Romans also have their myths, in some cases, in the case of later Roman paganism perhaps borrowed or imitated from the Greeks. The Hebrews had their myths, the book of Genesis contains mythic material, some of it paralleled by Sumerian, Babylonian mythic material, as we now know. For instance the story of Samson is believed to be myth rather than history. Samson is supposed to have been, actually, a solar hero. So yes, one has myth in the Hebraic culture. And certainly one has myth in the culture of the Teutons and the Celts. In the case of the Teutons one has, of course, the myths of the gods and