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 Mitras. These seminars were highly formative for the FWBO/Triratna as Sangharakshita opened up for the still very young community what it might mean to live a life in the Dharma.

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhisthana Dharma Team

SANGHARAKSHITA IN SEMINAR

TREVOR LING'S "THE BUDDHA"
*(Published by Temple Smith, London 1973 - and in **Penguin**)*
Held at: Aryatara
Date: September 1976
Those Present: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Manjuvajra, Vessantara, Nagabodhi, Siddhiratna, Lokamitra, Ratnaguna, Vajrakumara, Durangama, Tim McNally, Dave McNally.

TAPE 1-SIDE ONE.

S: Let's start. Just a few introductory words : we are not going to try to do the whole of this book. For one thing it would be rather a lot of material, and two, it's not really necessary. We are going to concentrate on parts one, two and three. If we have time we can do the first section of part four, which is on the Ashokan Buddhist State, though that isn't absolutely necessary; but we certainly won't try to do more than that. The central section, the one we will be most concerned with, is part three, Buddhist Civilisation in Principle. Part one is entitled "Perspectives"- is general ; part 2 gives background. So what we're going to do is : we are going to read through parts 1 and 2 rather more quickly, and spend the greater part of our time with part 3. Try to discuss that in greater detail, in greater depth. So in the case of these first two parts we will read them through fairly rapidly, pausing to discuss only those points that really need clarification; and try not to get off the track. You'll probably find that the very first section on Buddhism and Religion deserves a little more attention than the others. But apart from that, we'll be getting on with part 1 and part 2 rather quickly; and spending much more time with part 3.

All right, so let's do what we usually do : take it in turns to read round the circle . Let's read a paragraph at a time. Each person read a paragraph at a time, and then we'll stop and make any comments, or clarify any points that may be necessary in that particular paragraph.

Manjuvajra: This is working? Yes, maybe we could just check that you are O.K.

Do you want to check, Manjuvajra?

S: Just play back. All right, let's make a start then.

Text*"SOME REASONS FOR WESTERN INTEREST IN BUDDHISM*
*To say that Gotama the Buddha founded a religion is to prejudice our understanding of his far reaching influence. For in modern usage the word religion denotes merely one department of human activity, now regarded as of less and less public importance, and belonging almost entirely to the realm of men's private affairs. But whatever else Buddhism is or is not, in Asia it is a great social and cultural tradition. Born of a revolution in Indian thought it has found sponsors in many of the countries of Asia outside the land of its origin. What is a particularly interesting fact about these sponsors is that very often they were men concerned with **public** affairs, kings, emperors and governors. Yet it was not only to rulers that Buddhism appealed. Through its own special bearers, representatives and guardians, the orange-robed **bhikkhus** it has found its way into the common life of the towns and villages of much of Asia. Especially in Ceylon and South-East Asia it has continued to the present day to impart to the ordinary people its own characteristic values and attitudes, and has had a profound influence on the life of the home, as well as of the nation."*

S: Probably the opening sentence strikes the keynote - "To say that Gotama, the Buddha founded a religion is to prejudice our understanding of its far-reaching influence". Because as the author goes on to point out : in modern usage the word 'religion' denotes one

department of human activity , now regarded as of less and less public importance. I think that's quite clear. (Pause) All right let's go straight on.

Text*"Buddhism has its own long and noble tradition of scholarship, and of education of the young, with the result that some of the traditionally Buddhist countries of South-East Asia have an unusually high rate of literacy for Asia. It has encouraged equality of social opportunity but without frantic economic competition. Buddhist values have inculcated a respect for the environment and a realistic attitude towards the importance of material things, an attitude which sees the folly of plundering and extravagantly wasting what cannot be replaced. For Buddhism has not encouraged ideas of dominance, in the sense that man should, by some divine sanction, dominate either his environment, or his fellow men. Neither exploitation nor colonialism have any place in Buddhist civilization; the key word is cooperation, at every level of being. The values and attitudes implicit wherever Buddhist culture survives have proved resistant to the campaigns and the blandishments directed from the West towards Buddhist Asia. From the time of the first contacts with European culture represented by the sixteenth-century Portuguese, hungry for spices and Christian converts, to the more recent work of American, British and French missionaries, the people of Buddhist Asia have not seen in either the doctrines or the fruits of Christianity anything sufficiently compelling to cause them to abandon their own tradition and culture in any large numbers. In Burma in 1931, the year in which the last decennial census under British rule was taken, Christians were 2.3 per cent of the total population, and Buddhists were 84 per cent. Christian missionary activity in Burma had begun in the early eighteenth century. In Thailand, to take another example, according to the official report for 1965 issued by the Department of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of Education, 0.53 per cent of the total population were Christians and 93 per cent were Buddhists".*

S: Any query on that , or is that quite clear? (Pause)
The gap in the figures by the way, presumably, are made up of a few Moslems and also what the census reports describe as animists.

Vessantara: Although this section is headed 'Some reasons for Western interest in Buddhism -it doesn't really seem to be going into the reasons.

S: Not yet, anyway. Let's see what happens. (Pause) Alright, go straight on then.

Text*"IS BUDDHISM A RELIGION?*
It is clear that in entering the world of the Buddha we are confronted by something more than a religion, if by religion is meant a system of ***personal*** *salvation. The question could also be raised, and in fact often has been raised, as to whether Buddhism is a religion at all. It is possible from the historical perspective to answer both 'yes' and 'no' to this question".*

S: There is a certain ambiguity in Trevor Ling's use of the word `more'. "It is clear that in entering the world of the Buddha we are confronted by something more than a religion, if by religion is meant a system of personal salvation." (Pause)

_____; What is a system of personal salvation?

S: Well, presumably, a teaching or a path, or a practice ,which ensures salvation for the individual alone - or salvation for his soul.

_____: Personal in the sense of the soul.

S: Not necessarily that but the salvation of him, by himself rather than the salvation of society - the individual as opposed to the collective.

What I'm saying is: Trevor Ling uses the word `more' - "something `more' than a religion" that in a way, can there be anything more than a salvation , or enlightenment or whatever of the individual? This is the point I'm raising: even supposing religion or whatever you call it, does cater for the group, or the collectivity. Does that really constitute a `more' in the literal sense, or does it constitute a qualitative `more'? Do you see this? (Pause)

_____: No.

S: In the fore-going discussion he has made it clear that .....go back to the beginning : "But whatever else Buddhism is or is not, in Asia it is a great social and cultural tradition." At least that. He doesn't bring in the question of a spiritual tradition or anything of that sort. But here... "It is clear in entering the world of Buddhism we are confronted by something more than a religion , if by religion is meant a system of **personal** salvation".

So the `more' seems to indicate this social and cultural tradition, well, in what sense is it **`more'**? This is what I'm asking. There is an ambiguity there in his use of the word more. What **more** could there be than the individual gaining Enlightenment? You could have an individual gaining Enlightenment, that would be a `more', in a sense. But he is clearly not thinking of `more' in that sort of way. So in what sense can you say that Buddhism is concerned with **more** than the individual salvation? Or **more** than individual enlightenment? It's only in this quantitative, as it were collective,social sense. It isn't a **`more'** from the Buddhist point of view at all. So, in a way, the whole discussion is a little bit slanted. You get this again and again with Trevor Ling.

Nagabodhi: He seems to be a victim of the very blinkeredness that he goes on to talk about, in fact in the next few pages.

S: Whether it's Christianity or whether it's Buddhism it's concerned with the individual. In Christianity at it's best, it is concerned with the individual. It might put it in terms of the salvation of the individual soul but it's the individual; it's not concerned with the group as such, similarly, Buddhism is concerned with the Enlightenment of the individual. But if either Christianity or Buddhism concern themselves, say, with society, with culture, this cannot be described as representing an interest that is **`more '**than their interest in the individual unless you regard that as in a way more important and you can trace that emphasis on the individual.

But from the point of view of Buddhism, there cannot be a **`more'** than the individual. This is what I'm saying: society and culture do **not** constitute a **`more'** than the individual. Do **not** constitute a **`more'** in relation to the individual. So there's a definite ambiguity here :"We're confronted by something more than a religion, if by religion is meant a system of personal salvation". What more could there be than a system of personal salvation, not taking that idiom too literally. The question could also be raised, and in fact often has been raised, as to whether Buddhism is a religion at all. That is another question.

_____: Presumably he means that the sense that he's just defined it.

S: Presumably, yes.

_____: So he's even throwing into doubt the question whether

Buddhism's got anything to do with personal salvation.

S: With the individual, yes. As we shall see later on he's very ambiguous about the status of individuality. He hasn't quite made up his mind, I think , whether it's a good thing or a bad

thing.

_____: I don't think it's contrasting religion that teaches that one should save oneself compared to one that teaches that one should save other people.

S: Yes. Well, he is more concerned with the Theravada, and in the Theravada the emphasis is on: not saving oneself in the sense of not being concerned with others at all, but clearly the emphasis is on working on yourself rather than trying to help others without sufficient preparation on your own part. In the Mahayana, of course, the emphasis is altruistic, but it is still a concern for other **individuals.** It is not a concern for society as such. It is not concern for the **group** as such. So it's not one's **own** personal salvation necessarily, it's just personal salvation whether for oneself or for others. And this is what the Mahayana is concerned with as much as the Theravada. You can say the Theravada is concerned with one's own personal salvation more than with that of others; but the Mahayana is still concerned with personal salvation, but the personal salvation of other people, other individuals, both oneself and others; and even the Theravada is not individualistic. Even the Theravada has its altruistic dimension but its not stressed as powerfully or so dramatically as it is in the Mahayana. I'm dwelling on this a bit because I think you have to be aware from the beginning that there's a lot of semantic ambiguity in Trevor Ling and a lot of ambiguity therefore in his thought. We have to be on our guard against that. Carry on then.

Text*"Some attempts to deal with it appear to end inconclusively, in a circular argument. If one asks, 'Is Buddhism a religion?' it is obvious that one needs to know what a religion is, in order to say whether Buddhism is one or not. And when one asks, 'What is religion?' the definition will frequently be found to include reference to a belief in a god or gods. If this is to be regarded as an essential constituent of religion, and if the absence of such a belief denotes something other than religion, then the objection is likely to be raised, 'But what about Buddhism?' By this is usually meant early Buddhism, which does not appear to* ***require*** *belief in a god or gods as an essential part of the belief system. Emile Durkheim ran into this difficulty in his attempts to define religion. He pointed out that early Buddhism was not covered by such a definition of religion as E.B. Taylor's: that religion consists of 'belief in Spiritual Beings'. In his support he quoted Burnouf's description of Buddhism as 'a moral system without a god', H. Oldenberg's, that it is a faith without a god', and others of a similar kind. Durkheim's argument is that Buddhism is in essence a non-theistic religion, and that in defining religion in general one should have this case in mind, and formulate a definition which will cover both theistic and non-theistic systems".*
S: This is fair enough if one wants to use the term religion at all. All right let's carry on then.

Text*"The assumption that Durkheim appears to be making was that Buddhism must be regarded as a religion, that is a particular example of a general category 'religion', a word about whose meaning there is some common agreement, or he may simply be saying, I have a feeling that Buddhism should be included in, rather than excluded from a survey of religions. For if it is not a religion then what is it? It might in fact be more useful as ??? Theroux has pointed out, to pursue the latter question if not a religion then what is it? For it may be that no conclusive answer will be found in terms of any of the other possible conventional categories. If early Buddhism was not a religion this does not necessarily mean that it was therefore a philosophy or a general code of ethics or anything else for which a category exists. The inability to find any satisfactory answer may have the effect of stimulating further research not only into the nature of what is generally regarded as 'Buddhism', but into the nature of what is regarded as 'Christianity', or as 'Islam', and so on. It might be found that these titles merely serve to indicate large, complex structures whose constituent factors have to be studied by the psychologist, philosopher, sociologist, the political scientist, the historian and the economist. If this were found to be the case, then, since the entities concerned ('Buddhism',etc.) are so comprehensive and at the same time so diffuse that they are virtually*

coextensive with human life itself, they should be known respectively as the Buddhist way of life, the Islamic way of life, and so on. Another way of dealing with the matter would be to speak, for example, of 'Buddhist civilization' or 'Islamic civilization'. In the next chapter it will be suggested that this is what they once very largely were, and that 'religions' as we know them are reduced civilizations."

S: You notice that so far Trevor Ling has spoken of Buddhism, which in a way prejudges the issue or almost predetermines the issue, without apparently he being very aware of that. Do you see that? What do you think he might have spoken of instead of Buddhism.

_____: The Dharma

S: The Dharma. Yes. So if he'd spoken of the Dharma instead of Buddhism do you think that would have made some difference to his whole line of thought?

_____: Very much so.

S: Could you for instance have said that whatever else the Dharma is or is not, in any case there's a great social and cultural tradition. It wouldn't have sounded quite so plausible, would it. What would one therefore say the overall or general difference was between Dharma - after all the Buddha taught Dharma - he didn't teach Buddhism - and Buddhism?

Nagabodhi: I think Buddhism is what happens when the Western mind tries to fit something like the Dharma into its recognised pigeon holes. The Dharma seems to be, among other things, the basis for everything that happened in the East which we've called Buddhism. It was the basis which was a teaching, which was something for the individual, something which conduced. We from our point of view have looked on some of those things that we vaguely recognise and fitted them in a system and called them Buddhism.

S: But as I've said it is in a way prejudging the whole issue, not to say predetermining the whole discussion, if one even asks is Buddhism a religion?

Nagabodhi: Because by calling it Buddhism you've done that to it.

S: Yes, you have virtually done that. Also you notice there's an ambiguity in the use of the expression 'way of life'. "If this were found to be the case, then, since the entities concerned ('Buddhism' etc.) are so comprehensive and at the same time so diffuse that they are virtually coextensive with human life itself" - would you for instance have said that the Dharma was virtually coextensive with human life itself?

_____: No.

S: No. At the most with the skilful aspect of it. "They should be known respectively as the Buddhist way of life, the Islamic way of life, and so on." Here he seems to use Buddhist way of life in the sense of the social and cultural way of life but not in the sense of a way of life in accordance with the Dharma, or a way of life in the sense of the individual's life as lived in accordance with the Dharma. Again there's ambiguity.

Siddhiratna: Why is he not saying that? That's what I've understood by what he's written, that he's not talking about a Buddhist way of life as something apart from the Dharma or the principles involved in knowing and studying the Dharma.

S: He seems to equate Buddhism with the whole social cultural complex. All the manners, customs, beliefs, art, architecture, social life and so on; political institutions. Some of which

may have very little to do with the Dharma. So he seems to be using the term 'Buddhist way of life' to indicate that the way of life within this whole complex, rather than a way of life in accordance with the Dharma. In other words to put the contrast very sharply, you could be following a Buddhist way of life in that sense and not following the Dharma at all.

Siddhiratna: Yeah. I would have thought, I've always assumed that if you were following a Buddhist way of life you were in accordance with the Dharma.

S: Exactly, but he doesn't use therefore the Buddhist way of life in that sense. That's what I'm pointing out. He doesn't use the term Buddhist way of life in the sense of a way of life in accordance with the Dharma but a way of life which is in accordance with or within the overall pattern or structure of what he calls Buddhist civilization, Buddhist culture and so on.

Siddhiratna: And that makes it ( ) at best.

S: Which is at best a particular application of the Dharma. But he's also come to include all sorts of things which are not in accordance with the Dharma but which are part and parcel of Buddhism as a cultural institution, as a civilization and so on.

Nagabodhi: There are lots of atheists in the West who wouldn't kill, steal or commit adultery.

S: There are lots of things in the West which are part and parcel of Christian civilization, which have nothing to do with the actual practise or the actual following of the teaching of Christ. So usually we use the expression Buddhist way of life in the sense of the way of life of the individual which is in accordance with the Dharma, and which is aimed at Enlightenment. But Trevor Ling is using the expression Buddhist way of life in the sense of a way of life which is in accordance or within the context of Buddhist civilization and culture which itself may or may not be in accordance with the Dharma. But in any case this is a **group** matter and not an affair of the individual.

Voice: It seems to be a derive from his definition of religion as diffuse civilizations.

S: Yes, which again begs the question, because you could say, and this will come up in detail as well, what were they before they became civilizations? Did they start off as civilizations? What was the basis, what was the starting point? Even though they gave birth perhaps to civilization, was that their real business? But as it said this we'll be going into in detail much later on.

I'm merely pointing out ambiguities again in his thought and even in his terminology so that we can be on our guard against them and try to understand some of his assumptions.

Manjuvajra: The very ambiguities in a way make it clear that he's got the wrong end of the stick.

S: Yes, you could put it that way. For instance 'Buddhist way of life' is ambiguous only if one is accustomed to thinking of Buddhist way of life in other terms.

Vessantara: Also he seems to have totally misunderstood the Mahayana.

S: Yes, well again that is a point that will come up later. Anyway let's go on to *"Buddhism and the Sacred"*.

Text*"BUDDHISM AND THE SACRED*

First, there is the question of Durkheim's hunch, referred to a little earlier, the conviction which he seems to have had that Buddhism belonged in the category of community belief systems of a certain kind. What distinguished such belief systems, said Durkheim, was ***a sense of the sacred*** *which each of them manifested, and which differentiated them from secular belief systems. Furthermore, Durkheim suggested where the source of this sense of the sacred was to be found: it was in the human individual's awareness of his own dependence on the values and the collective life of the society to which he belonged, something which greatly transcended him, with his own short span of life, something to which he was indebted, which upheld him, and which provided the sanctions for his conduct. One might say that that which totally* ***sanctions*** *the life of an individual is the* ***sanctus****, the sacred. This need of the human individual for a collective with which he can identify, and which 'sanctions' his existence can be seen as underlying a good deal of what goes by the name of religion, and may be seen, also, as providing a powerful source of motivation for much of the activity which is called 'political'."*

S: This seems all quite clear though rather besides the point as regards Buddhism or as regards the Dharma. Also there's the ambiguity in the use of the word 'individual'. "Furthermore Durkheim suggested where the sense of this source of this sense of the sacred was to be found: it was in the human individual's awareness of his own dependence on the values and the collective life of the society to which he belonged." Well clearly this is not what we would call the individual. It's the individual in the much more general sense of what I call the numerical individual or the statistical individual.

Nagabodhi: I really wouldn't have taken this paragraph seriously. I just read it I think within days of finishing "Anna Karenin" in which one of the characters who's struggled for faith all through the book, in the last sort of chapter finds his faith simply by somebody kind of making him realise that he knows how to live. He suddenly realises that yes, he's been brought up with certain beliefs and he understands them and acts according to them and this is his great breakthrough of faith. And I couldn't relate to that and then I read this...

S: It's the reconciliation of the group. You find the same sort of thing in some of the Communist countries, especially say in China perhaps, that is Mao's China or what was Mao's China. We don't know quite what's happening at the moment. But when the socially deviant individual is sort of got at by a whole group of people and actually breaks down and weeps and experiences a feeling of great reconciliation with the group, after confessing and purging himself etc., etc. So the individual who's related to the group in this sort of way is what I call the statistical individual, not the individual as such in the sense of the aware and responsible person who has taken his own destiny into his own hands.

So it's true that the human individual in the statistical sense has a need for a collective with which he can identify. There's no doubt that a great deal or a good deal of what goes by the name of religion can be included in this sort of category. Whether it's very helpful to speak in terms of secular and sacred, that's another matter. Perhaps that only confuses the issue. As regards how it applies to Buddhism, whether this distinction of sacred and secular is very meaningful, that's another matter. But if you are going to start identifying Buddhism with those collective values, as it were, which are labelled as sacred in their influence or impact on specific individuals, then you're going a very long way astray indeed aren't you? You could hardly go further astray than that.

Vessantara: Defining sacred in terms of the secular, isn't it. The sentence, "One might say that that which totally sanctions the life of the individual is the sanctus, the sacred".....

S: It sanctions the individual as a member of the group. So it doesn't sanction the individual as such at all.

Vessantara: But it seems like a false derivation of whatever sacred can be.

S: Anyway this is the view especially of Durkheim.

Nagabodhi: It's more likely that sanctions came from sacred than that sacred came from sanction.

S: All right, let's carry on then.

Text*"It was this, rather than belief in a spiritual, superhuman being or beings, according to Durkheim, which was the dominant strand in 'religion'. This very useful distinction provided by the concept of the sacred will be taken up later, in connection with the Buddhism of Ceylon, where the classical Theravada form exists in association with local beliefs in gods and spirits"*

S: We probably won't be going into that.

Text*"The answer to the question whether Buddhism is a religion is thus both Yes and No. It is not necessary to regard it as a religion if by that is meant a system of beliefs focusing in the supposed existence of a supernatural spirit being or beings, a god or gods. For in at least one of its major forms, the Theravada school, prominent in India in the early centuries, and still the dominant form in Ceylon and South-East Asia, Buddhism has no essential need of such beliefs. Later on in India a form of Buddhism emerged, alongside the Theravada, which was characterized by beliefs in, and practices associated with, heavenly beings who possessed superhuman spiritual power, and who were known as Bodhisattvas. This form of belief seems to be virtually indistinguishable in practice from polytheism (or trans-polytheistic monism), whether of India, China or Japan."*

S: I wonder what he means by trans-polytheistic monism.

_____: .....manifestations of the one god.

S: Not necessarily even manifestations but that there is at least defined these many gods. A single reality, a monistic reality would be superior to them all and it exists on a higher level.

What about this belief in Bodhisattvas being virtually indistinguishable in practice from polytheism. Do you think that's a justified comment?

_____: Not in our form.

S: Not in our form, no. In some Buddhist countries I think probably one could say that, especially say in China, Japan. Probably not Tibet. They seem to have a better sense of these things. You get the figure of Kuan-Yin, Kuan-Yin is at least originally the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, and Kuan-Yin is appealed to by barren women to grant them children and so on, without in many cases, apparently any sort of significant awareness of any sort of higher spiritual significance of the figure of Kuan-Yin. The difference seems to be down to what he's saying, that in practice even though, technically, yes it is a bodhisattva, that the way in which ordinary people worship the bodhisattva, in the form of Kuan-Yin, makes the bodhisattva just like a god in the ordinary polytheistic sense. No doubt there is a background of spirituality and awareness but probably not participated in by many of the people who worship the bodhisattvas. They worship them virtually in practice as gods. I think one has to admit this.

I think this is why even in the West you have to be very careful about introducing the, as it were, worship of bodhisattvas, and probably have just The Buddha, certainly where one has as it were public images and things. Otherwise if you have a whole shrine full of different sort of Buddhas, different Bodhisattvas, the ordinary person cannot but take this as polytheism. This is just the same or much the same in the Catholic Church. Technically the saints are not worshipped. There are special terms. In practice many of the peasantry, especially in France, they do worship the saints and regard them as sort of wonder-working gods, whatever the theologians may say to the contrary. I think even though bodhisattvas are bodhisattvas one should not introduce such a thing in such a way as to lend oneself or one's practice to this sort of interpretation. Be quite cautious about bodhisattvas.

_____: There's kind of a wide gulf now in western society between the worshippers and small time gods. But do you think that people could seriously believe that other people would do that seriously in this society?

S: I think so. People go to places like Glastonbury and they may not engage in any actual worship in a formal sense, but the feeling with which they go is much the same I think. It's a sort of they're attracted by a sort of local spirit or sort of energy or power that seems to be geographically located. It's not that from a Buddhist point of view there's anything wrong with the worship of gods - Buddhism has no objections to ( ) but what is dangerous is when **bodhisattvas** are mistaken for gods. If you worship gods then you are aware that there's a whole higher spiritual and transcendental dimension as represented by the Buddha or by the Buddha and bodhisattvas and arahants, well that's fine. But if, as it were, the bodhisattvas become submerged in the gods so you've no awareness of the bodhisattvas nor awareness of the buddhas, no awareness of any spiritual dimension, but only an awareness of the mundane dimension represented by the god, as which you now treat the bodhisattva, then that means a derogation of Buddhism itself, and you are in fact no longer a Buddhist. But to give the gods their place in the total hierarchy of being and given the appropriate respect, there's nothing in that against Buddhism or against the Dharma I should say. But to lose sight of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas, it's that that derogates not from the Dharma itself but from your status as a practising Buddhist or practising follower of the Dharma. You then become just a worshipper of the gods, even though the gods are there. But that doesn't make you a Buddhist. If you regard those gods as a refuge, then that derogates from your going for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

_____: So the bodhisattvas are just a representation of the transcendent.

S: Yes, that is what I call the archetypal bodhisattvas rather than the historical personalities distinguished for their devotion to the Dharma or their very striking spiritual life like Milarepa or Tsong Kha Pa. But if I wanted to put it a bit broadly, bodhisattvas are embodiments of particular aspects of buddhahood. So they are definitely connected with the transcendental, not with the mundane. But in practice, and this started in India, the bodhisattva very easily became in the popular mind just a god who was worshipped for purely secular ends, purely worldly ends. You pray to the bodhisattva for say wealth or you

pray for children, pray for position and so on. You forget that the bodhisattva's a bodhisattva. The bodhisattva becomes virtually a god, even though he may bear the name of the bodhisattva. If you're not careful you may even treat the Buddha in this sort of way and have the vaguest of understandings that the Buddha is the Buddha and maybe just some sort of powerful being that answers prayers and for some Buddhists in some parts of the Buddhist world, the Buddha is little more than this.

And all this is of course part of Buddhist civilization and culture. It's part of Buddhism but it's not part of the Dharma.

Right go right on.

Text*"In both senses of the word religion (belief in spiritual beings **and** belief in the sacred), the Bodhisattva school of Buddhism, sometimes known as Bodhisattva-yana, sometimes as Mahayana, was a religious system. The common element which it shares with the Theravada (the one survivor of eighteen schools of non-Mahayana, which collectively are called Hinayana) is the sense of the sacred. But even here an important distinction between the two schools has to be made. For Mahayana Buddhism the sacred has its special focus in the heavenly realm where dwell the Bodhisattvas, the superhuman spiritual beings who are said to exert their influence to help poor struggling mortals."*

S: Again ambiguity. Heavenly realm, which would suggest the realm of the gods - "superhuman spiritual beings". All right we'll sort it out at the end.

Text*"In directing their attention to this supramundane heavenly community the Mahayanists showed themselves correspondingly less concerned with the need to order the earthly society of men in such a way that would facilitate the pursuit of the Buddhist life, and would enhance and encourage human effort. More reliance on heavenly power meant that less attention need be given to earthly factors. The Mahayanists became more concerned with devotions to the heavenly beings, with ritual and speculation, and less with the nature of the civilisation in which they lived."*

S: What do you think of this sort of analysis? It seems rather difficult to know where to begin in clearing up the confusion.

_____: Is it all wrong?

Manjuvajra: But some of it's right in some ways.

S: In what way?

Manjuvajra: I would have thought that in a way you could see the archetypal bodhisattvas as existing to help poor struggling mortals.

S: Well yes, certainly.

Vessantara: But there again that's ambiguous. You can see them as existing to help struggling mortals to gain enlightenment or you could see them as existing to help struggling mortals survive a little bit better in their only situation.

S: In a sense Mahayana sutras which deal with the bodhisattvas.....

[End of side one side two]

..... make it quite clear that the bodhisattvas do help where they can and if they can, in all sorts of material ways, but it also goes on to say and to make very very clear, in the case of the bodhisattvas especially when addressing the bodhisattvas, that the only real help is to give the Dharma. All other help is quite insignificant in comparison. So even though the bodhisattvas do grant all sorts of material help, their distinctive function really is to help one gain Enlightenment, not anything less than that. So their distinctive, their characteristic function, is definitely transcendental for want of a better word.

Nagabodhi: I've always thought that the whole bodhisattva career is concerned with, if

anything more than any other system, it's facilitating the pursuit of the Buddhist life or life within the Dharma. That any help that's given whether it's material or is really to help that individual grow above all and that maybe the individual would grow without certain material help, then it wouldn't be granted. That the object of it is exactly this, the opposite to.....

S: Well for instance there are passages where the bodhisattva is advised not to give material things to people who might misuse them. Also there's another point. Trevor Ling's basic argument seems to be that inasmuch as in the Mahayana the interest of the Mahayana Buddhist was deflected onto the bodhisattvas who were a sort of heavenly power helping, less attention was paid to the things of this life, less attention to civilization, politics and so on. But you could argue in the same way as regards the Theravada, because the Theravada had in every Theravada country, the Theravada had a whole array of gods who were worshipped as gods in the same way as the bodhisattvas were worshipped when they were worshipped virtually as gods. So one might say that similarly the attempts of the Theravadins was deflected.

Siddhiratna: Isn't Trevor Ling more concerned with the Hinayana. As far as I know that man himself is more interested in Ceylon.

S: Well he seems to be but partly for the reasons he gives here, because he thinks of the Theravada as more preoccupied with the social, the cultural and the political than.....

Siddhiratna: Which implies something against the Mahayana.

S: Yes, one could say that to put it strongly. His interest in Buddhism seems to be largely sociological. In other words an interest in Buddhism as a sociological phenomenon rather than in the Dharma as a spiritual phenomenon.

Siddhiratna: If you become interested in Buddhism in this country sooner or later you become aware of the split between the Mahayana and Hinayana and the split that occurs in Asia also gets transferred to this country.

S: Also of course it's a temperamental thing I think, to some extent. Some people are temperamentally drawn to the Theravada for the right or wrong reasons. Some are more temperamentally drawn to the Mahayana. They think of the Mahayana as being more colourful and devotional and attractive and warm and loving, well they tend to go that way. If their impression of the Theravada is that it's strict and austere and pure and authentic and original, if their temperament is of that type then they're drawn to the Theravada.

Siddhiratna: Is that the case with Trevor Ling?

S: Possibly. His interest seems to be much more sociological than spiritual as we shall discover I think time and time again.

_____: Is he a sociologist?

S: I don't know. He seems preoccupied from the beginning with Buddhist studies.

_____: Comparative religion is.....

S: Comparative religion. He started off with a study on Mara, didn't he? "Buddhism and the mythology of evil" was it? Here we are. "Buddha, Marx and God", "A History of Religion East and West" and the "Dictionary of Buddhism", which I haven't seen.

Vessantara: It says concerned with the sociological significance of the Buddhist symbol of Mara.

S: All right let's carry on ..... Before you go on just one little point occurs to me. Of course in the case of the Mahayana with the great exception of Tibet. You can hardly say that they were not concerned, though they were Mahayana Buddhists, with civilization, culture, politics and so on, because you had a whole Buddhist state, you could say, which was Buddhist far more thoroughly and radically than anything that you ever had in Ceylon or Burma, and lasted several centuries. Even though they were worshipping bodhisattvas probably more than any other Mahayanists anywhere else in the Buddhist world. But he doesn't go into Tibetan Buddhism at all. That is the example of the Buddhist state par excellence. The bodhisattva far from just sitting there and being the object of prayer, the bodhisattva actually heading the administration. Anyway let's carry on.

Text*"On the other hand there was the hard core of Buddhist tradition which never totally disappeared from Buddhist India even in the period when Mahayana flourished in such great citadels as Nalanda (in Bihar). This tradition was that reliance on the saving power of heavenly beings is contrary to the teaching of Gotama, the Buddha, who emphasized that men's supreme need was for sustained moral effort and mental discipline.*"

S: Recently in study seminars, going through texts which were important for Tibetan Buddhism, again and again one is struck by this emphasis on self-help. This runs very strongly throughout Tibetan Buddhism. It's not that it is sort of neglected or just to be found at the core if you look hard enough. It's an emphasis which runs throughout Tibetan Buddhism and is a very strong emphasis at all levels.

Text*"Where this point of view prevailed there was also a general tendency to realise Buddhist values as far as it could be done in the life of the society concerned; wherever possible this would be at the national level. In the areas were Theravada has been influential there has been a strongly developed sense of the need for a Buddhist state. It has been in the Theravada countries that Buddhism has most clearly expressed its character in this way, and that Buddhist civilization has been most strongly developed and has endured."*

S: Any point there?

_____: That last comment's possibly not really true.

S: Yes. You could very likely say that it is in the case of Tibetan Buddhism that Buddhism has most clearly expressed its character in this way. Reading the history of Ceylon, many of the so-called Buddhist kings who did a lot for Buddhism in an organisational way were very far from being Buddhists in their personal lives.

Nagabodhi: I would have thought it's just a general point, that wherever people are trying to practise the Dharma they want ideal conditions.

S: Right. I think this is where it springs from. Their considerations are not sociological. They are based in the spiritual. I think this is where it springs from. All right carry on to that last paragraph.

Text*"This should not, of course, be taken to mean that Mahayana Buddhism is of less significance for the sociological study of religion. In a sense a much greater refinement of approach is needed in dealing with the sociological inter-relation of, say, economic factors with certain kinds of belief. That is an important task for the cross-cultural sociology of religion, but is one which is not undertaken in the present work. The focus of the present*

study is in the idea of a Buddhist civilization, and the particular form this takes in the Buddhist state."

S: It's as though he doesn't go sufficiently into how you get a Buddhist civilization or why don't you see a Buddhist civilization. As you pointed out a Buddhist civilization, a Buddhist state, is ideally simply the sum total of those external factors which make it easier and more encouraging for the individual to develop as an individual and gain enlightenment. That's why there is a Buddhist state or Buddhist civilization to begin with. But Trevor Ling seems not aware of that, not aware of that sort of connection. Almost as though he thinks of a Buddhist civilization as existing in its own right or for its own sake.

So any general points about this section on Buddhism and the sacred?

Looking at it in this way the tendency seems to be to make Buddhism a group phenomena and make religion itself a group phenomena. To regard the individual as simply the statistical individual, the member of the group.

Manjuvajra: It's very much trying to make it an "ism", to make that the individual sort of takes upon himself to make it a theory that he tries to put into practice.

S: Well I think the basic difficulty is - or Trevor Ling's basic error, he hasn't distinguished between Dharma and Buddhism. The Dharma you can say gave birth to Buddhism and in that way you got Buddhist civilization and Buddhist culture and so on. But the Dharma is distinct from Buddhism in that sense.

_____: His ideal of a Buddhist state seems to be in a way very undesirable from the truly Buddhistic point of view of what he seems to want.

S: Well we'll have to see how he deals with that and whether he does try to give any justification for the Buddhist state, or whether he sees any justification for it.

All right lets carry on with *"The Historical Perspective"*

Text*"THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE*
There are various ways in which one can study the teachings of some outstanding figure such as Gotama the Buddha (or Jesus, or Muhammad). Ultimately, however, the various ways will be seen to resolve themselves into two main ones. The first of these may be called the literalist approach. The sayings of the Buddha are to be regarded as propositions to be understood literally without any necessary reference to the context in which they were spoken; as they stand they can be examined (if one is an historian of ideas), or thought about (if one is an interested enquirer), and acted upon (if one is a devotee). Usually it has been the devotee (of a certain type) who has been responsible for encouraging the literalist approach. For he who, in the first instance, has come to regard the total teaching of the founder of his religion, contained in the canon of scripture, as ***the*** *truth will also very easily apply such an evaluation to this or that particular saying which he finds in the canon; such sayings become invested with the quality of 'eternal truths', propositions which are universally valid in all circumstances and under all conditions. The historian of ideas and the interested inquirer note this claim and proceed to work within these terms of reference: to be a Christian, or a Muslim, or a Buddhist, is to accept the canonical words of Jesus, or Muhammad, or Gotama as inspired, eternal truths. From such absolutist claims there follows all too easily the clash of rival 'absolutes', as well as the alienation of the more thoughtful."*

S: What do you think of this? Do you think his assessment of the literalist approach is

correct? Do you think there is such a thing as the literalist approach? It seems to correspond with what I've called in the *"Survey"* the fundamentalist approach.(Pause)

_____: That would seem to be the predominant approach of most people really. Say when they first come into contact with Buddhism they'll start to look at the teachings and see whether they think that they are absolutely true and as soon as they come across a few things which they don't think are absolutely true or absolutely right, then they'll get put out.

S: As Trevor Ling says they regard the sayings of the Buddha as propositions to be understood literally, without necessary reference to the context in which they were spoken. But don't you think that there are some sayings which can be considered without reference to the context in which they were spoken?

_____: Yes.

S: Yes.

Siddhiratna: What would be an example of that?

S: For instance "hatred never ceases by hatred, hatred ceases only by non-hatred". Would it be necessary in order to understand that truly to know the circumstances under which the Buddha spoke it, or can it be taken out of any such context and regard it as something which is true under all conditions?

_____: True.

S: Yes, or if the Buddha says, "all things are impermanent", do you need to know why he said it and to whom he said it, under what circumstances?

_____: A certain class of scriptures are rather like that. The short ones, the Dhammapada is quite like that.

S: Or on another level the Perfection of Wisdom. Leaving aside the question of whether the Perfection of Wisdom sutras were taught by the Buddha or not, but does one need to know anything about the historical situation etc., etc. to assess the truth of those teachings as teachings?

So perhaps one can't generalise quite to the extent that Trevor Ling has done. It may be that what he calls the literalist approach may be quite justified with regard to those teachings which are of such a high degree of generality that one does not need to refer to the context, in order even fully to understand the meaning of those particular propositions. For instance, to take that saying that all things are impermanent, if you were to be told that the Buddha enunciated this to a particular person who had just lost his only son and was very upset on that account, would that enable you to fathom the truth of that saying more deeply?

Nagabodhi: If anything it would limit it.

S: It might even limit it, yes.

Manjuvajra: I don't know. It might give some extra into the teaching, in that the teaching has got a human relevance. Whereas if it's just stated coldly then it becomes kind of philosophical fact, which is not so directly connected with the lives of individual people.

S: But surely that will be just your lack of imagination because if you contemplate the saying

that all things are impermanent, you will surely see what that means to human life. That means human life is impermanent. Or even if you said you needed to apply it to a concrete situations that doesn't mean that you need to know that actual concrete situation in which the Buddha spoke this saying, in order to understand it. If you applied it to your own situation or to someone whom you knew, that would be just as good. It would serve the same function. You don't need to know the situation in which The Buddha first spoke it in order to understand the truth of the saying, in this particular instance.

Nagabodhi: It has to do with the different levels on which one can take the word Dharma. There's Dharma as truth eternal and Dharma as teaching. It's doctrine and method as well. There's doctrine could be maybe a matter of unchanging principles. There's method which, although it may be conceptual, is more of a prescription for a particular person.

S: If for instance there was a saying of the Buddha which went something like 'exert yourselves, never waste a minute, never be idle, always be doing something' - well then you would need to ask to whom did the Buddha say this. You might find other sayings where the Buddha was saying 'take it easy, don't force yourself, go slowly and steadily'. Then also you need to consider to whom the Buddha spoke. So whether a literalist approach is justified or not depends very much on what the Buddha is actually saying or supposed to be saying. Whether he is laying, as it were, down fundamental verities or whether he's giving practical advice to a particular person.

So it would seem that the literalist approach, to use that term, can't be ruled out altogether, at least with regard to some sayings, or certain classes of sayings. It would seem to be valid with regard to them.

Vessantara: The nearer the saying is to expressing the Unconditioned, the less you need to know the conditions in which it was said.

S: This is why it's especially true with regard to the Perfection of Wisdom teachings. Whether they originated in South India or North India what difference does it make, really?

Nagabodhi: In a way this must have been or still is one of the grey problems confronting anthologists who have to be quite careful. Because when you read something in an anthology most people, when they read something in an anthology, they're looking at what they read as one of the eternal truths of Buddhism, and I think this has happened in the West. There are a lot of anthologies and the anthologists got confused, I think because they've often been scholars.

S: Usually it has been a devotee of a certain type who has been responsible for encouraging the literalist approach. But I doubt whether this has ever been done in that sort of way within Buddhism. The Theravadins are quite literalistic in a way, but only in a way. (Pause)

For instance, “The historian of ideas and the interested inquirer note this claim and proceed to work within these terms of reference: to be a Christian, or Muslim, or a Buddhist, is to accept the canonical words of Jesus, or Muhammad, or Gotama as inspired, eternal truths.” Whatever may be the truth of the matter with regard to Christian or Muslim, it certainly doesn't apply to the Buddhist, not even to the Theravada Buddhist. Canonical words presumably means words which are found in the canon or the scriptures. But the Theravadins as well as the Mahayanists recognize a distinction of relative truth and absolute truth. Trevor Ling seems to be a bit influenced by this sort of current idea of the relativity of everything. There are no absolutes. So no doubt one should not absolute-ize what is only relative, but does that mean that there is no such thing as an absolute? That there are no absolute truths? Or what does one mean by an absolute truth in the spiritual context?

Manjuvajra: Isn't it true that there are no absolute truths in terms in doctrine. I've always thought of doctrines, even the ones that hold good through all time and in different places - even those doctrines have got an ulterior motive. In other words they are presented in order to make something happen to an individual, and it's only that thing that happens that can be referred to as the truth, not the tools of the trade.

S: Well even so you could refer to what happens as the experience of the truth and the tool could still be the truth. It's the true tool, the tool that really works, that really brings about that result.

Nagabodhi: To have said what you've just said implies an understanding on your part of a truth, that even teachings have to be changed. You're still sort of...

S: Yes, even if you say 'all teachings are relative', you're taking that as an absolute truth - that all teachings are relative.

Siddhiratna: I associate eternal truths as absolutes and ideals as well. And there's the New Zealand lecture which is the Ideal of Enlightenment where you talk of ideals like the Ideal Home and all the rest of it, but then there is the Ideal of Enlightenment not just as an ideal but as an experience or something which is actual or obtainable.

S: But what does one mean when one uses the term 'Absolute' usually? What is an absolute?

_____: Something that's permanent.

S: It usually includes permanence but it's more than that.

_____: I think it's something that's irrefutable.

Siddhiratna: Non divisible.

S: No, it's more like something that does not involve a reference to anything else beyond itself. Something for the sake of which other things are but which itself is not for the sake of anything else. Enlightenment is an absolute, in the sense that a ( ) is a means to Enlightenment so it's not an absolute. Meditation is a mean, Wisdom is a means, but what is Enlightenment a means to? Enlightenment is only a means to Enlightenment. There's no reference, no goal beyond itself. It's an absolute. You could of course say, well this is a way of looking at things - this is what I've sometimes said. That there's no sort of fixed point, no final point, but if one uses the term Enlightenment, not for any fixed point but to indicate the fact that any further development would proceed along the same lines, would be a further and higher range of the same spiral, then even in that sense Enlightenment is an absolute. It doesn't exist for the sake of anything else besides itself.
So one can't eliminate the absolute altogether. You can't have a pure and a simple relativism which is very much the modern way of thinking, but what you shouldn't do is to absolute-ize something which is not absolute. For instance you absolute-ize ethics, then you become a puritan. You should not absolute-ize Buddhism, maybe Trevor Ling does that a little bit.

Lokamitra: He absolutizes Buddhism and relativizes....

S: The Dharma! I think this whole question of the literalist approach has to be a bit more clearly sorted out. Does it mean that you can't have any absolute? This is very tendentious: “From such absolutist claims there follows all too easily the clash of rival 'absolutes' as well as the alienation of the more thoughtful”. You see, the thoughtful people are those who don't

have absolutes, who see the relativity of everything. This seems to be a bit of special pleading here. Certainly there are false absolutes, but does that mean that there is no such thing as an absolute anywhere? One could even say that one's statements are not absolute, one's expressions are not absolute, but in the sense that they are not to be taken completely literally or at their face value, but they point in the direction of something which we can only call absolute, which has a value in itself, in the sense that once we've realised that we shall not be looking for any further or higher value to realise. The absolute value is that value beyond which there is for us no value.

You could theoretically postulate an even higher but even that theoretically postulated higher value is included in your absolute value because you say you don't fully realise it, you don't fully experience it, but that is it as far as you are concerned.

So it's as though there needs to be an absolute value. If there's no absolute value there's no commitment. When you commit yourself you commit yourself on the basis of an assertion if you like of absolute values, something which is absolutely worthwhile, something which would not be a means to any other thing.

So it's not that - Trevor Ling says, "For he who, in the first instance, has come to regard the total teaching of the founder of his religion, contained in the canon of scripture, as the truth will also very easily apply such an evaluation to this or that particular saying which he finds in the canon; such sayings become invested with the quality of 'eternal truths', propositions which are universally valid in all circumstances and under all conditions." Well that rather begs the question, it sort of assumes that there can be no such truth. And of course there's no discussion of what is meant by truth which seriously affects the whole argument.

So it seems to me that Trevor Ling is not thinking really deeply enough. He's making play with certain concepts, certain ideas, without really examining them very thoroughly or questioning his own assumptions.

Lokamitra: Why is this, do you think?

S: I think this is symptomatic of the whole, what I call academic approach. This is what academics are doing, certainly in the field of comparative religion all the time. There's no notion of any other way of doing things, any other sort of approach.

Nagabodhi: You get the feeling that 'the historian of ideas and the interested inquirer' - they are the thoughtful ones and they note these claims. I had an image almost of justice with her scales. They are noting the claims and one day they'll work it out purely through thought, and that will be the absolute if there is such a thing. It seems that this idea of the more thoughtful and that the historian and the inquirer noting claims, ticking them off on a huge ledger.

S: What about also this, "there follows all too easily the clash of rival 'absolutes'", well in a sense there must be a clash of rival absolutes. You have to make up your mind.

_____: Are there rival absolutes?

Nagabodhi: God and Man.

S: You have to make up your mind what is the real absolute, as it were. You can't evade this. There's no clash really of rival absolutes because there's only one absolute, but as things are presented to you it appears in the form of a clash of rival absolutes and you're beginning to look. Even say within the context of Christianity, can the Catholic Church and say, Jehovah's

Witnesses both be right? You have to make up your mind. You can't sort of remain aloof and say well it's a bit of this and a bit of that, well that doesn't make you a Christian does it? Unless it's some other kind of Christian.

It's as though you won't take a risk. You're very cautious. You reduce everything to the relative. Because if anything is an absolute, if you see anything as an absolute, by virtue of the fact that you see it as an absolute it automatically has a claim upon you. So if you don't want to see anything as an absolute, or resist seeing anything as an absolute, it means you are resisting any claim being made upon you, which means you're not willing to commit yourself.

This is not to say that you shouldn't be very very careful that you don't absolutize the wrong things, and that your absolute really is absolute. But perhaps Trevor Ling's approach even to the concept of the absolute is a literalist approach! Do you see what I mean? Why should you regard the absolute in that sort of literalistic way? It sort of begs the whole question of what is meant by spiritual truth.

_____: Doesn't this really indicate that he hasn't really kind of looked beyond the doctrine. He hasn't tried them**.**

S: Yes, because no Buddhist school will say that doctrine is an end in itself. Every Buddhist school, even the Theravadins will say it points you in the direction of something and that something is an experience. There's no school of Buddhism that doesn't say that. Theravadins may tend to sort of literalise the texts of the Pali Canon, but if pressed, they will certainly admit that the function of the whole Canon, the function of the whole teaching, is to point you in the direction of an experience which goes beyond words. They'll all agree on that.

So a saying which is given absolute value is a saying which will point everybody under all conditions in a certain direction, in a direction of something which is of ultimate value. This is what the absolute truth or absolute value of the saying consists in. That it performs that function. It points you in the direction of something beyond which there is nothing, as it were. But even that it won't say literally. Even that it will use as a manner of speaking, not that there is a literal full-stop, not that there is literally somewhere where you settle down and say to yourself well here I am, now I've arrived. No Buddhist school thinks in these terms or absolutizes truth in this sort of way!

It's as though Trevor Ling feels that the Buddhists have never really thought about these things. The Buddhists were incredibly naive people who were taken in by all these little elementary traps, the literal understanding of words and all that kind of thing.

Nagabodhi: Well this must be connected with his rather one-sided view of the Mahayana?

S: Yes. because the Theravada is not exactly intellectually sophisticated usually, is it? Certainly not in modern times.

Nagabodhi: And If you deny in a way the validity of any other school other than the Theravada, in a way you're denying, or you're not seeing what you call the transcendental unity of all the different schools, which is the very existence of certain absolute principles that all schools are directed towards.

S: If one wanted to be paradoxical you could say of course that the absolute is not absolute, in the sense that the notion of absolute is not absolute. Because it is a notion put forward for certain practical purposes. But the notion doesn't work, it doesn't function, albeit for practical

purposes, unless it is an absolute. Perhaps he doesn't go deeply into the existential implications of things. It's all very much on the surface, it's very academic and very intellectual. Anyway let's go on to this second approach.

Text *"The second approach may be called the historical-critical. In this case the teaching of the Buddha is related to the historical situation in which it was delivered, so far as it is possible to reconstruct and understand that situation. Attention is paid not only to the substance and meaning of the words spoken, but also to the fact that they were spoken to certain hearers in a given, concrete situation. In order to know what weight is to be given to a particular saying it is necessary to remember that the words were not uttered into the empty air, but to a specific audience, The nature of the audience, their level of understanding, their preconceptions or prejudices, and so on, all need to be taken into account in assessing how profound or how ephemeral the words are. In following such a method, difficult though it may be to apply in all cases, one is enabled to see that some aspects of the teaching have permanent validity because they are relevant to some enduring feature of the human situation, whereas others will be understood as only having limited validity since they refer in a very particular way to special situations which existed in the teachers own day and which now know longer exist, or to beliefs which were current then but which are not held now. This second approach, like the first, may be adopted with equal appropriateness whether one is an historian of ideas, and enquirer, or a devotee."*

S: This seems in a way more acceptable, but even so there are limitations. I think if one isn't careful there is almost a suggestion, in the first place it isn't made clear that in the case say of the Buddha or someone like the Buddha, he is trying to communicate some thing which is new as far as the people that he is speaking to are concerned. But he has to use their language if he is to speak at all. Not only their language in the literal sense but even their language of ideas. But in a sense he is all the time doing violence to that language, because he is using that language to express, in that language, something which has never been expressed, something which has never been communicated or sought to have been communicated, before. So there's this sort of struggle between the medium and the message, if you like to put it that way. He doesn't bring this out, he doesn't seem aware of that sort of thing. So the tendency will be that if you say take into account the context, the historical circumstances, who the Buddha spoke to, the danger is that you reduce his meaning to the words that he actually uttered and you try to ascertain the meaning of the words that he uttered by ascertaining the meaning that they usually would have had for the people to whom have been speaking. But the Buddha might well, though using those words, be trying to say something quite different, and you've got to be a bit sensitive to those kind of overtones. (Pause)

And also there is the question of who is to determine whether some teachings have "permanent validity because they are relevant to some enduring feature of the human situation." Human situation in what sense, because there could well be teachings, sayings which relate to certain experiences in meditation. Academic scholars have got no experience of these things and might think oh well that's just concerned with experiences that they used to have in those days, nothing really relevant here to us nowadays etc., etc. Might miss the point completely.

But both these paragraphs seem just not to go nearly deeply enough. Certainly one has got to bear in mind who the Buddha was speaking to, but you've also got to bear in mind it's <u>The Buddha speaking</u>. Do you see what I mean?

End of Tape 1

Tape 2

Trevor Ling seems to forget it is the Buddha speaking and therefore in that case, no words available to him at that time would be adequate really for what he's trying to say. What he's trying to express is basically his own Enlightened state and he's to get people moving in that direction.

All right carry on to the next paragraph.

Text*"Severe limitations attend the literalist approach. These show themselves specially clearly when one is attempting to evaluate the message of a teacher such as the Buddha in relation to the teachings of other prominent figures in the history of ideas."*

S: You notice the Buddha is a prominent figure in the history of ideas.

_____: Are you saying that's right or....?

S: No, I'm saying it's wrong. He's not regarding the Buddha as the Buddha but as a prominent figure in the history of ideas, because he's speaking of relating the message or the teachings of the Buddha to the teachings of other prominent figures in the history of ideas. Well if you look at the Buddha just in that sort of way, at least from the Buddhist point of view, you've got it all wrong from the beginning.

Vessantara: If you're an academic, if you look at it in any other way you get laughed out of court.

S: Yes, indeed. Anyway carry on.

Text*"An extreme example will serve to highlight the difficulty. Karl Marx wrote a good deal concerning the alienation or estrangement (**Entfremdung**) which he saw as a feature of the human situation, but to search for a saying of the Buddha on this subject is to draw a blank, since Marx was dealing with industrial, capitalist society in nineteenth century Europe, and nothing of this sort existed in the India of the sixth century B.C. To attempt to relate the teachings of the Buddha to the teachings of Karl Marx purely in terms of propositions is likely to be an unprofitable exercise; it is like trying to get a telephone conversation going between two men who speak different languages, and one of whom cannot hear the other.*"

S: Do you think there's much point in saying this?

_____: No.

S: Does anybody ever try to compare the Buddhist teaching with those of Karl Marx?

_____: Trevor Ling.....( ).

S: It's not the sort of thing that really occurs to us to do.

_____: I tried it.

S: What did you make of it?

Siddhiratna: That they were very similar in fact. I think there was the vinaya, these different states of consciousness. I can't remember the word exactly. Jnana - it's in the Three Jewels. It's something like seed consciousness and then.....

S: Oh vijnana! The eight vijnanas.

Siddhiratna: ....and they seem to be quite closely linked in fact up to about the human level, and maybe sort of poles apart.

S: Well up to about the human level (Bhante laughs). That's where Buddhism starts, isn't it, on a human level. If you say Karl Marx doesn't get anywhere beyond that, then there's not really much common ground, is there.

_____: Do you think it's valid for him to introduce Marx's theory of estrangement here because later in the book he does draw a parallel between that and dukkha on the Buddhist path.

S: He is very much comparing....he is sort of taking this teaching of alienation and estrangement very much in a propositional sort of way. In other words his own approach to it seems to be literalistic which is exactly what he's criticising, because one might well ask, well why did Marx bring forward this thesis? What was behind that? Or one might say is that sort of experience just one specific instance, under certain circumstances of something of more general import, to which there is something sort of correspondent in the experience of people in India in the Sixth Century BC. Trevor Ling seems to just take Marx's teaching about alienation or estrangement in this sort of purely propositional bent, and say well there isn't anything like that in the Buddha's teaching. There's no teaching about alienation or estrangement.

Siddhiratna: Is that you understand Trevor Ling to be saying?

S: Yes.

Siddhiratna: I would have thought that there was quite a lot.....

S: Yes, but to search for a saying of the Buddha on this subject is to draw a blank. Well the Buddha doesn't use any terms which correspond to estrangement or alienation, but surely one mustn't be misled just by words. One could well say, well there was something very much like that, not that there was a term for such estrangement, but that there was an experience of dukkha, and estrangement is a particular kind of experience of dukkha. You don't have to take this statement in a sort of literalistic way. You say well it wasn't there in Sixth Century BC India.

Siddhiratna: The point is that (most Marxists would) locate the cause of the estrangement in fact to different bases.

S: The Buddha does speak in terms of estrangement, but what I am saying is that Trevor Ling is just taking the word estrangement, in a literalistic way. In other words he's own approach is literalistic with regards to Marx at least, even though a literalistic approach is what he is criticising.

He is saying the literalistic approach consists in taking propositions out of context and considering them by themselves. This is just what he does when he refers to Marx's teaching concerning alienation or estrangement. He takes it out of the total context of Marx's teaching and just takes it by itself, and then says well you don't find anything like this in the Buddha's teaching. Well you don't. You don't find that term, you don't find that particular way of looking at things. Surely one must probe more deeply into that and see what Marx was really getting at, and then see whether there isn't anything corresponding to that in the Buddha's teaching. Just to compare the actual formulations isn't enough. They may depend upon the

specific historical situation, but the deeper import of the formulation, presumably, does not, but that he hasn't investigated at all.

Nagabodhi: He does, to be fair to him, say that this is a limitation of the literalist approach to which he hasn't yet said that he's subscribed.
S: Well he doesn't subscribe to it ostensibly, but in fact he does by lifting this term alienation out of context [Many people speaking at once].....

_____: He's not doing it himself, he's saying this is what the literalists will do.

Manjuvajra: He says an extreme example will serve to highlight the difficulty of the literalist approach.

S: No, it's clear. He says "Karl Marx wrote a good deal concerning the alienation or estrangement which he saw as a feature of the human situation, but to search for a saying of the Buddha on this subject is to draw a blank". But the mere fact that he himself uses this sort of example and says that to search in the sense in the sense which we've been saying and draw a blank, he is doing that very thing to Marx's teaching itself.

Manjuvajra: Don't you think he's doing it in this case just to put himself in the position of an extreme literalist?

S: No, I don't think he realises that he's doing it. He criticises the person who tries to do this sort of thing, but in citing the example itself he does it.

Siddhiratna: Because he ends up by saying that funny analogy about languages on the telephone.

S: Yes, because it isn't a question of language, it's a question of import and meaning.

Vessantara: Doesn't he realise this when he says "The attempt to relate the teaching purely in terms of propositions is likely to be an unprofitable exercise."

S: Exactly, but he doesn't realise that he himself is doing this, when he takes this teaching of Marx in that sort of way and uses it for the sake of his comparison in that sort of way. (Pause)

_____: Are you saying that alienation is comparable with dukkha?

S: Perhaps it is but that's a separate point.

_____: In Marx alienation is a purely economic result?

S: In his early writings he speaks more in terms of human alienation, but his early writings aren't taken much notice of any more, not nowadays.

Vessantara: I understood that there was an underlying understanding, implied understanding, with Trevor Ling that there was a correspondence between estrangement and some comparable teaching of the Buddha.

S: Well he's made that clear elsewhere, but he's not really saying that here is he? "But to search for a saying of the Buddha on this subject is to draw a blank".

Vessantara: The search for an actual proposition of the Buddha put in those terms.

S: Yes. He only produces a proposition from Marx, so he treats Marx in a way in the sort of way that he says the Buddha shouldn't be treated. In other words he does that with regard to Marx what he says the Buddhists shouldn't do or others shouldn't do with regard to Buddhism. The fact that he can cite an example in this sort of way.

Vessantara: The whole things seems to be an example of what one shouldn't do.

S: I am saying that in viewing his example he does with regard to Karl Marx the very thing that he says you shouldn't do.

[People speaking at once]

_____: The reason he gives for it not working is because he does say Marx was writing for one society and the Buddha was speaking to another. He doesn't go into whether the actual approach itself ( ).

S: So in that sense he is doing what he says you shouldn't do. The point of his comparison is that the situations are different, not that you shouldn't use propositions in that sort of way. But in a way this is quite typical of his lack of in a way self-criticism, lack of awareness of what he's actually saying, and so has to question his own assumptions.

Is it really like "trying to get a telephone conversation going between two who speak different languages and one of whom cannot hear the other"? Is it really like that?

_____: Maybe Marx can't hear the Buddha.

S: Anyway carry on.

Text*"However, those who have by common convention been regarded as in some sense or other 'religious' teachers have this much in common, that they have all ultimately been concerned with a dimension to human existence other than the material and the temporal, a dimension which, in the interests of brevity, may be called the transcendental dimension. This applies to the Buddha, as to other so-called 'religious' teachers, even although, in his case, unlike most of the others, belief in the existence of a supreme divine being is not integral to his teaching. It is this transcendental dimension which invests the life of the human individual with a significance it would not otherwise have, and which it does not have in purely materialistic schemes of thought. 'There is , O monks,' the Buddha is reported to have said, 'that which is not-born, not-become, not-made, not-compounded. If that not-born, not-become, not-made, not-compounded were not there would be no release from this life of the born, the become, the made, the compounded. Another feature of the teaching of the Buddha which, in general terms, is shared with the other great systems which have come to be called religions is the importance given to proper moral conduct and moral attitudes on the part of the individual. This may be seen as the counterpart, at the level of human response, of the importance accorded to the transcendental dimension."*

S: Yes what he says here is on the whole correct. It is this transcendental dimension which invests the life of a human individual with a significance it would not otherwise have. I think one need not quarrel with that. Though it's difficult to see how it can be reconciled with "it was the human individual's awareness that his own dependence on the values of the collective life of the society to which he belonged, something which greatly transcended him," - You notice that the same word is used - "with his own short span of life, something to which he was indebted etc., etc..... One might say that that which totally sanctions the life of an individual is the sanctus, the sacred." But how that is related this isn't made at all clear is it? We can make it clear by saying yes, there is the group which sanctions the statistical

individual, but it is the transcendental itself which sanctions the true individual. But Trevor Ling doesn't seem to operate within that sort of distinction. So it doesn't really hang together very well, does it, though what he says in this paragraph is of course quite correct.

There seems to be a bit of a difficulty in trying to operate with concepts derived from other disciplines, in this case sociology, without first thinking out whether they really do apply and whether there's really any point in discussing Buddhism or the Dharma in those sort of terms. Those things are largely irrelevant. This is quite clear and straightforward because he's expressed it in the more or less traditional way with quotations from the scriptures, and if one asked him well this particular saying that you quote, is that absolute, is that absolutely true? Is one to take it literally, not to say literalistically? Anyway let's carry on.

Vessantara: The last sentence seems a little bit or the last part says, ".....the importance given to proper moral conduct and moral attitudes on the part of the individual. This may be seen as the counterpart, at the level of human response, of the importance accorded to the transcendental dimension." This seems to be a very limited view of what the transcendental is. It's expressed in terms of human response [two people speak at once]

S: ....say it's a stepping stone. It's a response in the sense that that's the first step that you take when you begin to respond, although there are many steps beyond. You could say that the real response is Wisdom, from the transcendental point of view, but you can't get to Wisdom directly or immediately.

_____: One could also say that once you've taken the transcendental as important, then the kind of moral conduct and moral attitudes will come along afterwards as a direct consequence that you've taken the transcendental.

S: Yes, it's not the counterpart in the sense as though the ethical has got equal value with the transcendental.

All right let's go on then.

Text*"After recognising these two common features, however, one begins to be more aware of the differences than of similarities. It is at this point that the historical-critical approach is particularly relevant. It has already been pointed out that the form and even the content of a particular saying may be due to the local historical factors which have to be known and understood if the saying is to be realistically evaluated. This principle, by which we recognise this or that* ***saying*** *to have been conditioned by the circumstances in which it was spoken and the audience to whom it was addressed, can be extended beyond the form and content of particular sayings."*

S: Yes, there's quite an important question and a lot of ambiguity. What do we mean by the saying? Is the saying just a form of words? If you don't believe that the Buddha was the Buddha, how can you be sensitive to any sort of shade of meaning within his sayings which is on that level an expression of his Buddhahood? So Trevor Ling seems to imply that once you know the meaning of the words, you know the way in which the words are used and you know they were used within the society at that time, and if you understand why that saying was given and to whom, then you fully and in what way, then you've fully understood the saying. You've left out the speaker. It's after all the Buddha speaking and trying to get across through that saying, something, at least in some cases, of a higher nature.

"It has already been pointed out that the form and even the content", which may be true in some cases, "of a particular saying may be due to the local historical factors which have to be known and understood if the saying is to be realistically evaluated." All of this is true, but

that evaluation, at least in the case of some sayings, is not going to exhaust the meaning content of the saying. You've got to refer it back to the speaker, which is after all the Buddha.

Right carry on then.

Text*"The possibility which has to be considered is this: that the form and content of the teaching **as a whole** may be the result of conditioning by local historical and geographical factors. It is to the exploring of this possibility, in so far as it relates to the religious teaching of the Buddha, that the first part of this book is devoted (chapters 2-4)."*

S: That's rather odd isn't it - "the form and content of the teaching as a whole may be the result of conditioning by local, historical and geographical factors" - what do you think he means by this? Is there nothing in the teaching which is not so conditioned? Is that the implication? What does he mean by the teaching as a whole. Does it mean the aggregation of all sayings, from all sources, or does it mean the whole system of the Dharma?

_____: It's almost as though he saying it's just like a kind of ethnic phenomena.

S: Yes almost, despite this sort of bow in the direction of the transcendental in the previous paragraph.

All right, carry on then.

Text*"It should perhaps be made clear at the outset that this is not a full-scale cultural history of Buddhism. It has a more limited, simple, two-fold aim: first, to show what were the historical conditions in India - environmental, economic, political, and social - out of which the Buddha emerged, and in terms of which his significance must be assessed; and second, to provide an account of the distinctly new phenomenon which resulted in due course from the Buddha's life and work, namely, Buddhist civilisation. This will be examined first in principle (chapters 6-8) and then in practice (chapters 9-12)."*

S: "First to show what were the historical conditions in India - environmental, economic, political and social" - that's fair enough. That may be quite helpful in some ways, but "out of which the Buddha emerged". We have to be very careful that you don't understand that to mean out of which the Buddha in his entirety was the product. " And in terms of which his significance must be assessed;". Totally assessed? Is his significance to be assessed only in those terms, only in terms of historical conditions in India. Is the appearance of the Buddha only of historical significance? In other words is there nothing in the Buddha which is trans-historical? It would seem to contradict what he's quoted before about the transcendental. If the Buddha is regarded as one who has realised that transcendental. "And second, to provide an account of the distinctively new phenomenon which resulted in due course from the Buddha's life and work, namely, Buddhist civilization." What about the spiritual community? The Buddha himself was the new phenomenon to begin with, wasn't he. But Trevor Ling doesn't seem to look at it like that. The new phenomenon is the New Man. The other New Men whom he attracts are a new form of spiritual community.

Then the question of Buddhist civilization comes in in the sense of those material conditions etc., which will best enable the greatest number of people to achieve that kind of experience - the experience of Enlightenment. But it's as though he seems to forget that Buddhist civilization is not an end in itself. Anyway we'll go into that in greater detail when we come to those particular chapters. Let's go on to the last paragraph.

Text*"Thus, in one sense of the word 'religion', denoting beliefs and practices connected with spirit beings, Buddhism was in origin not a religion, but a non-religious philosophy. In the*

*other, more sophisticated meaning of the word 'religion', which indicates awareness of that which is **sacred**, that which sanctions every individual existence, Buddhism in its Asian setting remains in certain respects what it was in origin, a way of attempting to restructure human consciousness and the common life of men in accordance with the nature of what it conceives to be the sacred reality."*

S: Ah, but whether this sacred reality derives from the group, or whether this sacred reality derives from the transcendental is left completely ambiguous!

Text*"There are signs that in the modern period this important dimension of Buddhist civilisation - the societal and political dimension - has been lost sight of, and that Buddhism is being reduced from a civilization to what the modern world understands by religion: that is, a system of 'spiritual' beliefs to be taken up by the minority in whatever country it happens to be who care for that sort of thing, a source of comfort to some, but in the last resort a private irrelevance, having little bearing on the real issues that shape human affairs. When Westerners have looked at Buddhism, too often they have seen only this, because this was all they were looking for. We shall examine this issue in general terms before we embark on our main purpose."*

S: Well that's very very interesting!

Nagabodhi: Quite extraordinary isn't it!

S: What do you think of this section in general - "Buddhism and Religion"?

Lokamitra: He seems to take it totally out of context. He's condemning the literalist approach but he's not.....

S: He's ( ) Buddhism out of the context of Buddhism really. Forgetting all about the Dharma, and he's forgetting that the Buddha was the Enlightened one.

_____: I'm not sure if this is a deficiency in the scope of the book or just in the way he treats the ideas he introduces.

S: What do you mean by the deficiency.

_____: Does he err by not raising other ideas or does he err by inaccuracies in the way he expands the ideas that are already here.

S: I think the main fault is ambiguity. It's very well shown up in his reference to the 'sacred reality' where it isn't left clear whether that sacred reality is the one deriving from the group that he was talking about in connection with Durkheim, or whether it derives from the transcendental, as in the case of a couple of paragraphs earlier.

It's as though he's started writing before he's really finished thinking, it seems to me. All right turn it the other way round and, as it were, we've found certain limitations, we've found certain faults with his whole attitude and presentation; in a sense what should he have said?

What emerges on the positive side from our criticism of him or what is implied by our criticism of him? Or some of the things anyway?

_____: He should have been a bit more balanced in drawing the dichotomy between the Dharma and secular life.

S: Yes, he seems first of all not to have been aware that the Buddha was the Buddha, and what it meant to be a Buddha, and what the Buddha as Buddha tried to do. And therefore what he was doing when he was trying to communicate something of the nature of his experience i.e. when he was teaching the Dharma, and in what way that Dharma, or teaching, is related to what he calls Buddhist civilization, and in what way that Buddhist civilization is related to the life of the person who is trying to practise the Dharma. This seems really quite clear and simple.

Vessantara: He's got everything but the Three Jewels.

S: Right, yes. There's no Buddha as Buddha, there's no Dharma. ...Well instead of the Buddha we've got this person who is of importance in the history of ideas; instead of the Dharma we've got Buddhism as a civilization apparently; and instead of the Sangha what have we got?

_____: The national group.

_____: The Buddhist state.

S: The Buddhist state. The Buddhist state could ideally be just the hub of spiritual community, as it was in Tibet to some extent, but Trevor Ling doesn't mean it like that.

_____: It seems to me he gone completely wrong, and when I first saw this I really couldn't understand why we were going to study it.

S: Right, yes.

_____: I couldn't.....

S: Some positive points will emerge, because there are some things he draws attention to that we do tend almost always to overlook. That's point number one. And point number two, by seeing his mistakes we shall be more clearly aware of where we ourselves stand, by way of contrast as it were. But no doubt we shall get quite frequently irritated by Doctor Ling in the course of the next ten days.

But anyway I hope it won't be only irritation. There are some quite positive things.

Lokamitra: Basically there is something there that is quite positive which is beginning to come through and which will come through later on in the book.

S: Certainly one has got a public dimension, which should be the public dimension of the spiritual life. He doesn't make that clear but there is the public dimension. It's undoubtedly true and it has been very much neglected by previous writers on Buddhism. We need to see that public dimension in a rather different perspective than he does, but that dimension is there, and he certainly performs a service in drawing attention to it, however mistaken he may be in certain respects.

_____: If we just accept that that's all he's done then we wouldn't be so misguided. If we can just read the book on a certain level, mindful of the fact that he's left out a lot of important aspects.

S: Even things have been quite distorted by him in some respects. But I think it would be very misleading for someone who didn't know anything about Buddhism, and who didn't see things say in the way that we try to see them. That could be very misleading indeed.

_____: Surely the last person you want to write about Buddhism is someone who's a professor of comparative religion.

S: Right, yes. This is the extraordinary thing about the modern world in a way. This sort of quest for objectivity. I think I have mentioned before that Vajrabodhi translated my "Three Jewels" into Finnish and tried to get it accepted by Finnish publishers there, and one firm rejected it on the grounds that it was written by a Buddhist, and they said they didn't want to publish something that wasn't objective, so in the end they published something by Alan Watts! But what is the point of view, that you can't really evaluate, judge or whatever the term may be, something like Buddhism if you happen to belong to it. You can't be objective. It's only the academics who can be objective and can weigh one thing against another and can have a comparative study and who can come up with the real truth about Buddhism, and tell you - the poor miserable Buddhist - what Buddhism is really all about.

Siddhiratna: Somehow they're neutral aren't they.

_____: Neuter-ed!

S: Yes, they think that they're neutral but they're really neutered. And after this rather sort of misleading term of the thoughtful person or the more thoughtful. You're supposed to align yourself with the more thoughtful because no one likes to be called thought-less and you sort of identify yourself with the more thoughtful and follow that sort of line, whatever is appropriate for the more thoughtful sort of person who doesn't absolutise, who has no absolutes, to whom everything is relative. Who therefore sits back in his armchair and doesn't commit himself.

_____: It seems to be a hangover from the scientific attitude which is the Gospel of Materialism, that they will want to rule out any possibility of anything other than the purely materialist.

S: It's the gust of a pseudo objectivity. In a way it's a scientific approach, the Buddhist approach. That may be all right for Buddhism as such but can there be a scientific approach to the Dharma. It's like applying a scientific approach to poetry. Anyway any further points about this whole introductory section? I think in some ways this is probably the most confused part of the book. He's somewhat clearer later on.

I must say I've been a little surprised even myself though I read this quite critically when I did read it, to find how confused he actually is when he goes into it in detail. One could write a very useful little critique just of this first section, "Buddhism and religion". He is clearly a very well meaning sort of person. He's just trying to clarify things, but he really does seem in some ways to make confusion (more confounded?).

Anyway let's leave it there for this morning.

Text*Religions and Civilizations*
MODERN RELIGIOUS PLURALISM
In a brief but highly significant article on the role of Buddhism as a religion in modern, traditionally non-Buddhist societies, Elizabeth Nottingham indicates a number of important points for any comparative, sociological study of Buddhism. One of these is the assimilation of Buddhism to the common pattern of 'religions' in urbanized societies. She observes that in contemporary situations in the United States and elsewhere, 'Buddhism has had to accommodate itself to an existence as ***one*** *religion among* ***a number*** *of other religions in a given country.' Introduced in the first place by Chinese and Japanese immigrants, Buddhism*

*is now making itself at home in the United States and 'is already taking its place as **one** of the many organised "religions" of America...While still remaining Buddhism it is beginning to take on forms of organization and congregational services modelled on the American pattern.' The same kind of process appears to be going on in parts of Europe and non-Buddhist Asia, especially in urban situations. In Malaysia, to take a random example, an organization for Buddhists, mainly residents of the capital, Kuala Lumpur, was founded in 1962, known as the Buddhist Missionary Society. The local achievements of the society include the development of a uniform system of worship in connection with regular religious services, a Sunday School attended be hundreds of adolescent boys and girls and school children, religious classes for youths and adults, sessions for the singing of Buddhist hymns and songs, services of blessing by monks for newly-wedded couples, after the civil ceremony, and the performance of the last religious rites. Growth in the numbers taking part in these activities since 1962 is said to have been remarkable. Equally remarkable to the Western observer is the degree of assimilation to the pattern of activities of urban religious groups, of all kinds, in the West. One important factor in the Malaysian case may be the number of Ceylonese Buddhist expatriates living there. Many of these are Middle-class people in professional occupations who have imported urban assumptions about the proper pattern for Buddhist activities from Ceylon. These assumptions appear to be largely due to accommodation to Christian concepts, encountered in Ceylon."*

S: I think we'd better read the whole of this section before we start discussing it. It's all inter-connected.

Text*"To take another example, Buddhism is represented in England by a number of local associations in cities, towns and universities in various parts of the country. While these groups vary to some extent in the kind of activities they engage in, and to a minor extent also in the social stratum from which their members are drawn, they share a tendency to see themselves as part of the spectrum of local religious sects and churches. Anyone who is familiar with institutionalised English Christianity will find much that is similar here, only with Buddhist terminology substituted. One Characteristic which this kind of Buddhism shares with conventional middle-class suburban Christian organizations is an extreme reluctance to become in, or even allow the discussion of, matters of a political nature.*

*Thus, the temptation grows to answer the question 'What is Buddhism' by conceding that, after all, it is merely one of the **religions**, that is, one of the organizations in the modern world which cater for men's private 'spiritual' needs, and which, competing for recruits, regard the number of those gained as a measure of the organization's success. To accept this as an adequate answer to the question 'What is Buddhism?' would, however, be to take a short-sighted and simplistic view; short-sighted because it would force Buddhism permanently into the perspective of the suburban religious situation of the West; and simplistic because it would ignore the implications which Buddhist values carry in the realms of politics, economics and social structure. It would be to underestimate the social-revolutionary potential of Buddhism if it were assumed that it is merely a message of private consolation, or spiritual uplift, and that its presuppositions, and the life-style which it implies, are ultimately indistinguishable from those of the suburban residents of London or Petaling-Jaya.*

This phenomenon of the recent growth of Buddhist groups in the urban middle-class sector of traditionally non-Buddhist societies may, however, represent a significant new cultural development. For it may be serving to channel what in the first instance are largely negative feelings of dissatisfaction with Western society, its norms and values. Aspirations towards an alternative type of society, dimly perceived and perhaps not consciously formulated, may be nourishing this growth of Buddhist groups in non-Buddhist countries, a growth which has been particularly noticeable, not only since the end of the Second World War, but in the last

decade. This is a possible explanation which will be considered again at the end of this book, when the nature of Buddhist civilization has been explored."

S: All right, what does one think of this then?

_____: In the first paragraph he says "Buddhism is now making itself at home in the United States and is already taking its place as one of the....." but that seems to contradict the kind of line that he's taking in the first chapter, because it's saying that even though it's been absorbed by another culture and takes on the forms of the other culture, it's still Buddhism.

S: He does say "While still remaining Buddhism it is beginning to take on forms of organisation and congregational services modelled on the American pattern".

[End of Side one Side two]

This ambiguity is probably connected with the fact that he hasn't made that distinction between Dharma and Buddhism. Instead he could have said "whilst still remaining the Dharma, it is beginning to take on forms of organisation and congregational services modelled on the American pattern". But as you say the first section or first chapter does almost suggest that Buddhist civilization is Buddhism.

Vessantara: He uses it in two sentences - civilization and also as a means of giving comfort to the individual as a religion in the more limited sense and that seems to be the sense in which he uses it here.

S: Yes, it's as though what he's said in the section as a whole is very largely true, but at the same time he seems to have got it wrong. First of all it is true that Buddhism has to some extent taken root in the States as it were, and there you do get something of the Dharma, but the socio-religious pattern is very much that of the United States. This is all very true and it's true also of the Buddhist Missionary Society in Kuala Lumpur. To what extent there's the Dharma there, that may be a matter of discussion, but that there is some trace of the Dharma, I think that need not be denied.

But then he comes on to England. What he says here about England I think is really true, leaving aside ourselves. "To take another example, Buddhism is represented in England by a number of local associations in cities, towns and universities in various parts of the country. While these groups vary to some extent in the kinds of activities they engage in, and to a minor extent also in the social stratum from which their members are drawn, they share a tendency to see themselves as part of the spectrum of local religious sects and churches." This is very true if you lead aside ourselves. This is the attitude of most of these Buddhist groups, and you get in most of these places and especially London, very occasionally, not so many now as there used to be, inter-faith celebrations. So you've got a Buddhist speaker, a Hindu speaker, a Sikh speaker and a Muslim speaker, and they all gather together on the same platform and they all say their little piece and they all happily fraternise, at least that's what they're supposed to do, afterwards over a cup of tea or coffee or whatever it is. This has been going on. It still goes on in some quarters. But "Anyone who's familiar with institutionalized English Christianity will find much that is similar here, only with Buddhist terminology substituted."

I think I've mentioned before that a few years ago I was co-opted onto a committee which was connected with teaching of religion in schools, and I had no reason to doubt what it might be, but I thought I'll go along and just see what it's really like and just have first hand experience. So there was a Hindu brahmin who was perhaps an American, there were two Muslims, a couple of Jews - Rabbis, and the Catholic priest and a couple of nuns came along

once, there was an Anglican; and they talked together about teaching religion in schools. I got the impression that all these people are on the same wavelength with the possible exception of the Catholic priest, slightly, to some extent. In the sense that they all seemed very much middle class professional people with much more in common than not in common. Even though they belonged to different religions which, technically, were almost at one another's throats, it seemed that they had very much more in common. They were dressed practically alike which I thought quite significant, most of them, and they just seemed like a sort of middle class professional group. You couldn't really feel that the Hindu was a Hindu, that the Christian was a Christian, and the Anglican was an Anglican - that didn't seem to matter. Their religious differences were submerged in this sort of almost well Guild-like approach. So I fully agree with what Trevor Ling says here.

"One characteristic which this kind of Buddhism shares with conventional middle class suburban Christian organizations is an extreme reluctance to become involved in, or even to allow discussion of, matters of a political nature". This for instance has always been the policy of the Buddhist Society. When I arrived at my first Buddhist Society Summer School in 1964 I was told that there were two things which Mr. Humphreys did not allow people to discuss at the Summer School. One was politics and the other was sex. After two Summer Schools I said a third should be added, that they weren't allowed to discuss religion! If you see what I mean. So this is true. What he says here about the Buddhist Movement in this country, leaving aside ourselves, I think is quite correct.

But anyway he still hasn't got it right as we see in the next paragraph - "It would be to underestimate the social-revolutionary potential of Buddhism if it were assumed that it is merely a message of private consolation, of spiritual uplift, and that its prepositions and the lifestyle which it implies, are ultimately indistinguishable from those of the suburban residents of London or Petaling-Jaya." I fully agree that the social-revolutionary potential of Buddhism or the Dharma is underestimated, but not by putting it up against or speaking of it in terms of merely a message of private consolation or spiritual uplift. It seems that he doesn't sort of sufficiently realise that Buddhism is addressed to the individual and it's concerned with the spiritual development of the individual, or of the spiritual community of individuals. However the question of its becoming social-revolutionary and realising its social revolutionary potential, only comes in when the question of creating facilities for individual to lead their individual spiritual lives comes in. He seems quite oblivious of that. In other words he seems oblivious to exactly <u>why</u> it should be social-revolutionary. You see what I mean?

<u>Nagabodhi:</u> He uses the intriguing term "Buddhist values" which maybe is a hint of something that he is aware of, in the sense that if there is something underlying the Buddhist values which lead to this political, economic and social involvement.

S: So why is it that these English Buddhists in these little groups fight shy of politics, don't see the social-revolutionary implications of Buddhism and so on, because it may be true that they haven't got beyond trying to get a bit of private consolation or spiritual uplift out of Buddhism, but that's quite a different thing from committing oneself to it as a path of individual spiritual self development. So it's that that he hasn't grasped. It's not a question of adding the social-revolutionary potential or dimension to one's need for private consolation or spiritual uplift. They're not thinking in terms of that private consolation or spiritual uplift in the way that he does. They're thinking in terms of the spiritual development of the individual, and when you get enough of these individuals coming together then the social-revolutionary potential will begin to be realised.

And before people sort of individually commit themselves to the spiritual path, to the Dharma, they are going to remain indistinguishable the suburban residents of London or

Petaling-Jaya. But it seems to me that Trevor Ling goes rather too rapidly to this social-revolutionary dimension, having no doubt quite rightly poured scorn on those who need private consolation and spiritual uplift, without pausing to consider that the Dharma is addressed to the individual and that what these English Buddhists need to do is not to add the social-revolutionary as it were to the private consolation and spiritual uplift, but to individually commit themselves to the Dharma in a much more radical manner, and this would automatically lead to changes of lifestyle and eventually to the beginnings of the social revolution.

So he's got it right to some extent hasn't he, but not altogether by any means.

Manjuvajra Would it be right to believe that these social-revolutionary aspects are really just a by-product of belief in the growth of the individual and their coming together?

S: Yes, I also think that one may well be able to see the need for external changes before one has developed to the point of actually needing the extra facilities that those changes would provide you with. You can either think in terms of changing yourself and then changing society or changing society so that you can change yourself. I don't think you should necessarily give exclusive emphasis to the first. (Pause)

Anyway he concludes this last paragraph that "the recent growth of Buddhist groups in the urban middle-class sector of traditionally non-Buddhist societies may, however, represent a significant new cultural development." They may channel dissatisfaction. Do you think this is true? Do you think for instance that the ordinary sort of person who goes along to say the Buddhist Society say for the Summer School is expressing some kind of dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs?

_____: Not that middle class type.

S: No. I never personally got that impression. No one I ever encountered when I was in contact with such people ever seemed to think in terms of any sort of social training and they seemed to regard any sort of social or political interest as a bit unspiritual and, in a way, seemed quite content with their middle-class sort of pattern of social and economic life, and quite happy just to come along to Buddhist occasions, classes or lectures once a week, once a month or once or twice a year. I didn't see personally any kinds of this sort of dissatisfaction.

Siddhiratna: What do you think was their motive in going along in the first place?

S: I think he's quite correct in saying that it's mostly private consolation and spiritual uplift. I think those two phrases really do describe much of the sort of interest that one encounters in those sort of circles. Recently I was thinking over for instance why it was that a few people say from the Buddhist Society had been in contact with the Friends decided in the end that they preferred the Buddhist Society. Well point one seems to be they didn't want to bring about any changes in their way of life, their life-style, and, two, they needed this private consolation and spiritual uplift.

Lokamitra: Do they get it? Do they get either of those?

S: I think they do in a way, in a deluded sort of way, at least they get a certain feeling of sort of religious security if you like.

_____: At least they've got a religion.

S: At least they've got a religion and they've got a group. Well you might say well why not

the nearest say Christian group, why not the nearest church, but some people just find Christianity intellectually quite unacceptable. That's not to say that they'd really understand Buddhism necessarily, but perhaps it's easier for them to fit Buddhism into their ideas of what other religions should be or something of that kind. A lot of people that I met in these sort of circles were weird sort of woolly people who weren't really Buddhists, who just went along to Buddhist meetings and classes and also went to the Theosophists and also went to (Vedantins) and the Sufis and so on. You couldn't regard them as exclusively committed to Buddhism by any means. The majority. And some in fact even took a pride in saying that they weren't Buddhists. This was a quite strong point with many of them - that they were not Buddhists. Not that they thought in terms of following the Dharma, no. They liked Buddhism but they were universal, which would be very much the attitude of many of them.

So this sort of attitude seems to be a sort of shield against commitment, a defence against commitment.

Nagabodhi: I wonder if it's even that. There seems to be with people that I've encountered a complete unawareness of what being a Buddhist means. I noticed this going to a part of a group that my father was involved in and they talk all the time in terms of the 'answers' - such and such teacher - oh I think he's got all the answers or could give the answers, and they see it all in terms of something which just can be plonked on them and that's what it's about. It can give them the answers. And it's not as you say a kind of reluctance to commit themselves, they just aren't aware and their consciousness of what to use the term religious activity is just doesn't invoke the notion of development. It's just not in the Christian conditioning and I think for individual who come into contact with the Friends and that constitutes quite a breakthrough when they realise that the spiritual life is something that they can do something about.

S: Very definitely when I was in contact with the Buddhist Society and the Hampstead Vihara people did regard Buddhism as something to be sort of pigeon-holed. That their lives had these various pigeon-holes and Buddhism was put into one of them. It wasn't allowed to disturb the overall structure. A few were vegetarian but very apologetically and were quite on the defensive about it, and people like Mr Humphreys, they might feel that to be a vegetarian was just rather eccentric and not really following the Middle Path, or else imposing your views on other people and things like that, if you said that you would prefer to serve just vegetarian food. That would have been difficult and rather egotistic.

Lokamitra: You do get that even amongst some yoga people, that you are kind of.... People accuse you of play acting and don't realise that you're sincere. Being pseudo.

_____: Do you think he misses the point entirely by shifting the emphasis onto the social-revolutionary potential of Buddhism?

S: I wouldn't say he misses the point but I wouldn't get to it prematurely. In fact he doesn't really get to it at all, because first of all he sees quite rightly that people involved in these little urban Buddhist groups in the west need merely a message of private consolation or spiritual uplift. He sees that quite clearly and he sees that that is a very limited approach. So then he seems to want to supplement that or complete that all at once with this social-revolutionary dimension. He suddenly sort of produces this but what's its logical connection with what's gone before as it were? I say that he's sort of got to this prematurely because he should have embarked, first of all, on a much more radical analysis of what Buddhism or the Dharma really is like. He seems unable to think of the Dharma as a means of individual spiritual development as distinct from Buddhism being simply a message of private consolation or spiritual uplift. Do you see what I mean? But if he'd gone more deeply into that, if he'd gone more deeply into the Dharma as means of spiritual development, and then

he considered what were the conditions that you need for spiritual development, what were the social conditions you need, then he would have found himself in the midst of this social-revolutionary dimension quite naturally as it were, instead of bringing it in almost on the outside and just sort of adding it onto Buddhism as a message of private consolation etc.

_____: He seems to have no idea about anything transcendental....

S: He's paid lip service to it earlier on but having done that he seems just to leave it.

_____: He felt that Buddhism doesn't make a great deal of sense any longer and he can't accept that it's simply a message of private consolation and so on. I think the only thing he can think of which is, as he might say, above the individual is the economic and social implications of it. I think he's just sort of latched onto that.

S: He can't really see it as the Dharma. He sees quite rightly that it isn't just a religion in the urban sense but he then is left with it simply as a different kind of civilization and culture and in the terms of the western context that amounts to something social-revolutionary. It's going to be seen in that sort of way.

"Aspirations towards an alternative type of society, dimly perceived and perhaps not consciously formulated, may be nourishing this growth of Buddhist groups in non-Buddhist countries". I'd say not at all, apart from ourselves and we're in a quite different kind of group anyway. But most of you haven't had any contact with these other British Buddhist groups, fortunately! But I have had and his strictures on them are quite justified. I quoted before the instance that shortly after my return from India in 1964 when I was living in Hampstead, Mr Humphreys came to see me several times and on one occasion he told me that I should consider myself to be the Buddhist equivalent of the Vicar of Hampstead. He seemed to regard that as a very sort of lofty ideal for me to aim at, the Buddhist equivalent of the Vicar of Hampstead. No doubt there was a Muslim equivalent of the Vicar of Hampstead and a Jewish equivalent etc., etc. That was very much the way of thinking and still is in great measure.

_____: He actually thought that. It wasn't a joke?

S: Oh yes! It wasn't a joke. It was dead serious! He was giving really good advice. You notice also I'd been carefully limited to Hampstead. I was given a mere parish as it were. So I told this to some of my friends and they said, 'yes and I suppose he's the Pope!' (Laughter) But just to go into this a little bit what do you think is the sort of if you like mental state of people who, within the context of middle class urban British society take up or at least take an interest in what appears to them to be an oriental religion like Buddhism? Do you think it's simply that it is available now and things aren't as they were in the past when you only knew Christianity. You could now as it were take your choice. You could sample this and sample that and you're predominantly getting private consolation and spiritual uplift. Do you think this is in fact what is happening or is there any other factor involved?

_____: I think there could be an attraction by the unknown.

S: By the unknown.

_____: Especially sort of eastern mysticism.

_____: I think there's an element of one-upmanship as well, social one-upmanship. If you can't get in on the Vicar's group then it's even better to become a Buddhist.

S: Perhaps there's an element of spiritual snobbery.. You certainly find with some such people. The higher teaching, the higher wisdom. I suppose this is where the universalism comes in. You can pride yourself on being very universal or very broad, not like these narrow-minded sectarian people who limit themselves to one religion. You are very broad. You see the truth in all, and this is very often adopted as a sort of attitude of almost spiritual snobbishness. I remember people saying in theosophy for instance, 'we've got a very broad view, we're not narrow minded'. People even said to me sometimes, 'well why do you limit yourself to Buddhism?'

_____: One thing that seems to happen to me and I think this happens to some extent also in the Friends, is that people have a genuine desire for spiritual growth and they see that Buddhism can do this whereas Christianity doesn't seem to provide the possibilities for this, some really radical change within one, but once they get into the group then any ideas of progress just stop or just vanish. Maybe they're not strong enough, maybe the conditioning's too much or maybe...

S: When you say the group what do you mean?

_____: The Buddhist Society or whatever it might be.

S: Yes, well they're not given any active encouragement. Because people in the Buddhist Society, Christmas Humphreys included, were saying things like 'Being a Buddhist doesn't mean that you're going to be any different from anybody else, and people were discouraged from thinking that they were going to be different from anybody else. This was Christmas Humphreys' avowed object, to make Buddhism respectable and accepted. So this is the way he went about it. Maybe it was necessary at one time, but certainly not now.

_____: I don't know that many people do go into Buddhism with an idea of growth. I've met a fair number of Buddhists of this type and the idea of growth is completely alien to them. They've never heard of it.

S: Then what do they make of Buddhism? Do they study it? Do they read the texts or do they think about it or what does it represent to them, if it doesn't represent a means of growth?

Nagabodhi: I think it is this spiritual uplift thing. People read all the Alan Watts and the Zen sayings because there's a kind of hunger that isn't satisfied in western religion or not easily. That element of Christianity isn't very accessible as the nice mind-blowing phrases and all that. I don't know whether it's got anything to do with what Jung called the kind of religious instinct, like there's a need that people have to kind of have their mind rocked a bit by nice.....

S: But just their mind. They sort of savour it all mentally, which is only too easy to do as we all know. But it never seems to reach any other level. It never seems to interfere with their ordinary life, with their job etc.

Nagabodhi: Well it seems to be a hunger for that kind of experience, maybe similar to why people take drugs or do things to.....

S: Well clearly they feel a need for something more or something different, but one can easily understand also how within the context of the conventional sort of Buddhist group, all that they get is bogged down. There's no sort of encouragement. There's no sort of way of putting anything into actual practice. If you remember say that within the context of the Buddhist Society again, Christmas Humphreys was regularly saying, not so many years ago, that people should never meditate for more than five minutes at a time - longer than that was

dangerous. I think he's changed his tune a little bit now but this is within the last ten years he's been saying these things. So whatever aspiration you might come along with, say to the Buddhist Society, or that sort of group, whatever sort of hunger you might have had for some higher state of consciousness, it wouldn't have got very much encouragement. You wouldn't have found any practical help or practical guidance in that sort of situation. In any case if you've still got your home, your family, your job, where's the time? Especially say if your wife wasn't very sympathetic. Well, at best you could get along once a week or once a month or, if you were lucky, make the annual Summer School for a few days. What could you do in that sort of way?

_____: Also the Society, the Buddhist Society particularly, didn't even allow people in that didn't fit in that kind of way of.....

S: Yes. It was only a few years ago that people of hair of more than a certain length were not allowed into the Society's premises and classes. Some of our own Friends have experienced this. I don't know whether it's still in force. I think they have relaxed a bit, but not completely.

Anyway perhaps the point is sufficiently made. So Trevor Ling is quite right I think in his general description of Buddhist groups in Britain, but he goes much too quickly onto this social-revolutionary dimension. Let's go on.

Text*"'GREAT RELIGIONS' AS RESIDUAL CIVILIZATIONS*
For Buddhism is, and has been for more than two thousand years, something very much more significant, socially, economically, and politically, than is allowed by the statement 'Buddhism is one of the religions'. So also were Judaism, Christianity (for at least 1200 years) and Islam (for 1300 years), although these also today find themselves being relegated to the league of those organizations which cater mainly for the private, 'spiritual' aspirations of individual citizens, whose lives are, at the same time, being moulded and determined in the public dimension by forces quite independent of the organised 'religions'. It was not always so. There was a time when at least the major representatives of what are today identified by the reductionist term 'religions' or even 'great religions' were considerably more than institutionalized systems of private comfort and salvation which have no business to concern themselves with 'politics'; but this is what they have become today in the eyes of the majority of their adherents, especially their lay adherents.

What all these 'great' systems have in common is that each in origin was a total view of the world and man's place in it, and a total prescription for the ordering of human affairs in all the various dimensions which in the modern world are separated and distinguished from one another as philosophy, politics, economics, ethics, law and so on. Such an undifferentiated view of things is characteristic of 'unsophisticated' tribal life. But when, for one reason or another, the structure of tribal life is upset, there eventually follows, perhaps after an interval of time and after the enforced mingling of originally separate tribal cultures, some attempt at reintegration, now in a wider context than before, and with considerably extended horizons. The old tribal integration would eventually be broken by the trauma which historical events were to bring about. The new integration is on the other side of the trauma; it recognizes the traumatic events, and goes beyond them. It is an integration which would not have been possible, or would have had no relevance, in the earlier situation."

S: Now what do you make of this. "For Buddhism is, and has been for more than two thousand years, something very much more significant, socially, economically and politically, than is allowed by the statement 'Buddhism is one of the religions'". Difficult to know where to start there isn't it. He seems to forget altogether or to leave out of consideration altogether the Dharma again. It's true that Buddhism is more than what is allowed by the statement

'Buddhism is one of the religions' in the sense in which he's defined religion already, but it doesn't follow that it's more-ness consists simply in something social, economic and political. The more-ness basically consists in the fact that the Dharma is addressed to the individual and is the means of his individual spiritual development leading to Enlightenment, but that dimension again Trevor Ling seems to leave altogether out of consideration.

" So also were Judaism, Christianity (for at least 1200 years) and Islam (for 1300 years), although these also today find themselves being relegated to the league of those organizations which cater mainly for the private 'spiritual' aspirations of individual citizens whose lives are at the same time being moulded and determined in the public dimension by forces quite independent of the organised 'religions'". Well this is of course very true. "It was not always so. There was a time when at least the major representatives of what are today identified by the reductionist term 'religions' or even 'great religions' were considerably more than institutionalized systems of private comfort and salvation which have no business to concern themselves with 'politics'". One could also question his sort of equation of say Christianity with Buddhism in this sort of respect. It is true that for at least 1200 as he says, there was such a thing as Christian civilization. Christianity was dominant. Christianity was to a great extent, the basis of western civilization and culture. Though to a lesser extent it now seems than used to be supposed. The high watermark being the early middle ages.

But I would say that there is some difference between a Christian civilization and a Buddhist civilization. A Buddhist civilization is one in which it's easier to practise the Dharma. But is a Christian civilization in the same way, one within which it's easier to be a Christian? It's one within which you're not given any choice. Do you see the difference. A Christian civilization is based upon the enforcement of Christian dogma. The prohibition of anything which is non-Christian. But you've never found anything like that in the case of Buddhist civilization. You've never in any Buddhist civilization had a situation in which a particular Buddhist doctrine or teaching was enforceable by law, and which you could be punished for not accepting that in the prescribed fashion or for being something other than a Buddhist. Do you get this difference?

So there's quite a different sort of basis for a Christian civilization and a Buddhist civilization. The Christian civilization is based on the belief that Christianity and only Christianity is true, and that to permit or to tolerate any other form of teaching would be an affront to God. So everything has to be based on Christianity. Only Christianity is tolerated. Only Christianity is established. But this certainly isn't so in the case of Buddhism. So there is this very important difference. So in the case of Buddhism, Buddhist civilizations grew up as people who were practising or trying to practise the Dharma or wanting to make it possible for as many people as possible to practise the Dharma, created wider and wider facilities for them to do so. Not facilities in the ordinary sense simply but in the sense of things like art and architecture and so on. Literature.

So it may be true that there was a civilization, there was a Christian civilization until a few hundred years ago, a Buddhist civilization and so on, but now we have only the residues of those, but still that overlooks the fact in the case of Buddhism well how did the Buddhist civilization arise. It arose out of the need to create facilities for the practise of the Dharma which were as wide as possible, to put the Dharma into operation on every level of existence.

"What all these great systems have in common is each in origin was a total view of the world and man's place in it, and a total prescription for the ordering of human affairs in all the various dimensions which in the modern world are separated and distinguished from one another as philosophy, politics, economic, ethics, law and so on." Is this true in the case of Buddhism? This would seem to be true more of ethnic religion than of what I'd call universal religion.

Nagabodhi: It's very much true of Judaism.

S: It's true of Judaism, it's true of Hinduism, but is it true of Buddhism?

Nagabodhi: It sort of implies that Enlightenment was a kind of complete sociological sort of insight into the running of society and....

S: The Buddha did not legislate. The Buddha didn't lay down any laws with regard to marriage, divorce and so on. He left that whole side of life completely aside. It seems that he tacitly accepted a great deal of Hindu social organization, using the word Hindu, though it's really inapplicable, but where it happened to conflict with some spiritual ideal, as in the case of the caste system, then he didn't hesitate to reject it. But if it didn't get in his way he didn't bother about it. He certainly didn't give a total prescription for the ordering of human affairs, in all the various dimension etc., etc. He certainly didn't do that. Ethnic religions do because they're sort of tribal in character, but universal religions don't. What about Christ? What about his teaching? What about the instance of Christianity? Did he legislate for social life? He said things like 'In the kingdom of heaven there's neither marriage nor giving in marriage' and 'let the dead bury their dead' and things like that, and he seems to have expected the end of the world quite shortly, and therefore didn't bother about organising society or legislating for society. If he had been asked about it he probably would have accepted most of the Jewish attitudes, on the whole, though he criticised or didn't observe certain things. They didn't observe the Sabbath apparently.

_____: He said render unto Caesar what.....

S: Yes, the things that are Caesar's. So it would seem that Trevor Ling is mixing up what I'd call universal religion and ethnic religion.

Siddhiratna: Do you think that he may also be talking about the Buddha's attitudes on the eight relationships and things like that and perhaps even the eightfold path?
S: Yes, well this is not....

Siddhiratna: Though you keep saying legislative.

S: This is not "a total prescription for the ordering of human affairs."

Siddhiratna: What does that mean?

S: For instance you've got things like the Laws of Manu. The Laws of Manu are an important Hindu work which governs Hindu society. It tells you about the different castes, what their occupations are, how they should behave towards one another, who can touch whom, who can take food from whom, who can marry whom. There's nothing like that in the Buddha's teachings.

[End of Tape Two]

[Tape Three]

The Buddha for instance said very general things like how the wife should behave towards the husband, how the husband should behave towards the wife - five little points on each side, but that isn't a total prescription.

_____: That's presumably because the relationships were there anyway.

S: Buddhism doesn't how many wives you should have, whether divorce is permissible or not, and if so how it should be conducted. Judaism gives very detailed rules for all these things, so does Islam come to that. So does Hinduism, but Buddhism doesn't and Christianity in the sense of the teaching of Christ certainly doesn't.

Siddhiratna: So when he says "'great' systems have in common that each in origin was a total view of the world....."etc., that we should actually take what he means by that and by total we mean every aspect of human life and affairs.

S: Yes.

Siddhiratna: Because otherwise I wonder if he doesn't more specifically mean a bit like we were talking about absolutes, that there are certain things we can say which should or should not be done given the Enlightened point of view.

S: No, I think the phrase 'total prescription' makes it quite clear, and if you see that this is in fact what say religions like Hinduism and Judaism do or what they are. They are total prescriptions.

Siddhiratna: For every eventuality.

S: We are not perhaps very familiar with that because we don't encounter it in our own experience, but this is what traditionally they are. But Buddhism is not that, and neither is Christianity that, not in its origins. So that's why I say he seems to mix up what I call the ethnic religion and what I call the universal religion. "Such an undifferentiated view of things is characteristic of unsophisticated tribal life." Well this is very true. "But when, for one reason or another, the structure of tribal life is upset, there eventually follows, perhaps after an interval of time and after the enforced mingling of originally separate tribal cultures, some attempt at reintegration, now in a wider context than before...etc." Again his perspective seems to be purely sociological. he doesn't seem to think in terms of the individual, the development of the individual or Enlightenment or the transcendental dimension at all.

This is why I said in one of my lectures that Buddhism did degenerate in some quarters into an ethnic religion when it became purely a group phenomenon, but for Buddhism this represents a degeneration. Except in so far as, when it becomes an ethnic religion, the ethnic religion represents a working out of the principles of the Dharma on different levels and in relation to different aspects of life. But if it becomes only a civilization, only something which is ethnic, well that is a degeneration because the Dharma as such is lost, the Dharma as the individual path to Enlightenment.

_____: This is to some extent the case in Ceylon now isn't it.

S: Yes, indeed.

_____: Where it's becoming bureaucratized.

S: Well this is what I've pointed out in my review of Rahula's 'Heritage of the Buddhist Bhikkhu'. So once again he's not altogether wrong but he's far from being completely right. Do you see this?

Vessantara: I'm not clear what point he's making when he's talking about the structure of tribal life being upset and then re-set up....

S: Well he seems to equate in principle tribal life with the religions as civilizations. Because in tribal life, as it is well known, everything is integrated. you don't have a separate science, a separate magic, a separate religion, a separate art, a separate society - they are all integrated, and you get the same sort of thing on a much grander scale in the case of the ethnic religions and what we might call the metaphysically based civilizations. But again - we shall come to this later on - he can't make up his mind whether the disruption of that tribal integrity, or that integrity of tribal culture, making possible the emergence of the individual is a good thing or a bad thing.

Siddhiratna: Does it make for the emergence of the individual?

S: Well yes in the sense that, when the old order breaks down, the individual no longer has a sort of cosy home in the tribe and the tribal culture, then he has to start thinking for himself, and that makes possible the emergence of individuality. You see this very clearly in the case of the development of Greek religion and philosophy.

Vessantara: What's he thinking of when he talks about the 'new integration on the other side of the trauma'? Why does he bring that in?

S: Well presumably a sort of higher cultural synthesis. He seems to think of Buddhism in this sort of way, that in the Buddha's day, as we shall see later on, the old tribal synthesis was breaking down, the small scale tribal synthesis, and what the Buddha did was to reintegrate on a higher level as it were, and produce therefore Buddhist civilization. It's as though the Buddha is simply a means of transition from the old sort of tribal unity and integrity which has broken down to a higher, in the sense of bigger and grander, one, which forms the new synthesis. And he sees that as simply the old tribal group writ large, rather than sees it as a spiritual community, which then as it were proceeds to give birth for the sake of wider facilities and so on, to the Buddhist civilization. Do you see the way he seems to be looking at things.

_____: A sort of conquest really of one tribal culture by another.

S: Well replacement at least, a replacement. So he seems to be thinking of Buddhist civilization, Buddhist culture and all the rest of it in terms of a group phenomenon. The old tribal unity has broken down. That created certain problems. Man feels uncomfortable and no longer at home anywhere, so a bigger, grander synthesis is provided out of all sorts of pre-existing elements, and that synthesis is the Buddhist civilization and culture. But in all this there is not a word about the individual and the development of the individual, not even in the case of the Buddha himself. The Buddha appears, despite what he said about the transcendental a few pages back, almost entirely as a cultural and sociological phenomenon. It may be that this is the sort of thing that happens, yes, that tribal societies break down, the old synthesis breaks down, a new one has to be created so you get a bigger and better tribal group and then everybody's happy again. But this has nothing to do, or very little to do, with the Dharma as such, though it has a certain relevance to the consideration of Buddhism.

All right, let's go on to Hindu civilization.

Text*"HINDU CIVILIZATION*

What is popularly known as Hinduism provides a good example of this. 'Hinduism' covers, in fact, a large family of cultural systems and theistic sects. The most important of these, historically and structurally, is the system properly known as brahmanism. Metaphysics, cult, ceremonial, social structure, ethical principles, political and economic prescriptions are

all to be found in brahmanism. In this case the 'crisis' which brought it into being appears to have been the encounter of the incoming Aryan civilisation with the culture that already existed in India when the Aryan immigrants arrived. It was probably a fairly protracted crisis, extending over several centuries, but the result was an integrated civilization in which everything had been considered and provided for by the brahmans, the socially predominant priestly class, who were the architects of the system. One of the most comprehensive treatises on the nature and structure of brahman civilization is the ***Treatise on Government (Arthasastra)*** *of Kautilya. Another is the* ***Law Code of Manu (Manava Sastra)****, a work composed by brahmans but ascribed to Manu, the mythical father and lawgiver of the human race."*

S: Yes, this is very correct so far. Let's go straight on. That seems to be pretty straightforward.

Text*"The word* ***artha*** *in the first of these treatises represents an important concept of the brahmanical view of the world. The three principle concerns of man are, in this view, in order of importance:* ***dharma*** *(righteousness or duty),* ***artha*** *(the public economy) and* ***kama*** *aesthetic pleasure). When these are properly regulates and wisely pursued it becomes possible for man to achieve* ***moksha****, the spiritual goal of life. Thus rules governing the public economy are an essential feature of brahman civilization, and so are rules governing the whole realm of aesthetic pleasures. Both of these, however, are subordinate to* ***dharma****, a word for which there is no single English equivalent. It indicates the eternal principle of being, that which is, and upholds all things. It also means the mode of life which is in harmony with this eternal principle. And it can mean, too, the specific code of conduct proper to each group, or to each individual according to the stage of life he has reached. It is in this context that one has to place such a treatise as the* ***Arthasastra****, the treatise on public wealth, welfare or economy."*

S: All this seems to be quite straightforward. He's just indicating the way in which an ethnic religion, as I would call it, like Hinduism, covers all aspects of life and proscribes for all aspects of life. But certainly Buddhism doesn't do that. All right carry on then.

Text*"The* ***Arthasastra*** *of Kautilya deals first with the life of the king: how he should discipline himself by restraining the organs of sense, the principles which should govern the appointment of his counsellors, and the conduct of the meetings of king and counsellors. It then goes on to describe in detail the rural economy, the development of villages and the regulation of their life with a view to the quiet and uninterrupted pursuit by the villagers of their proper occupations. It deals also with legal contracts, disputes, sexual offenses, marriage and heritance laws, property purchase and sale, personal assault, betting and gambling, and so on."*

S: Needless to say Buddhism doesn't consider any of these things except in so far as they become involved with ethical principles. For instance there are no heritance laws in Buddhism as such.

Text*"Other sections of the treatise deal with public finance, the civil service, defence, foreign policy and diplomacy. The emphasis, it will be seen, lies fairly heavily on legal, economic and political matters. The other treatise, the Law Code of Manu, is wider in its scope. It is more than a legal treatise; as Keith says, 'It is unquestionably rather to be compared with the great poem of Lucretius, beside which it ranks as the expression of a philosophy of life.' After a description of the creation of the universe, the text sets before us the brahmanical view of the hierarchy of living beings, of whom 'the most excellent are men, and of men [the most excellent] are brahmans'. The life of men is then covered in great detail, and regulations are laid down for every aspect of human affairs: sacramental initiation, student life, the life of the*

householder, marriage, types of occupation, duties of woman, rules for hermits and ascetics and rules concerning the king: how he should be honoured, how he should spend his time, when he should offer worship, and how he should conduct the public affairs of the kingdom. A considerable body of civil and criminal law is also included, covering such matters as recovery of debts, agreements in respect of sale and purchase, boundaries, defamation, assault, theft, violence, adultery, inheritance, and various other matters.

These two are not the only brahman treatises governing religious, political, economic and social life, but they are the best known, most important, and have been influential in the shaping of Hindu civilization. It is clear that what is described in these texts, and what was envisaged by the brahmans as their legitimate field of concern, is not adequately described as ***religion****, as that word is now commonly used, but* ***civilization****"*

S: So this may well be correct but then it applies only to what I call the ethnic religions. It doesn't apply to a teaching like that of Buddhism which I call, using the term religion, a universal religion. It doesn't really apply to Christianity as it originally was taught in the sense of the teaching of Christ himself.

So a lot of Trevor Ling's confusion seems to be due to the fact he doesn't distinguish between what I call ethnic religion and universal religion. Do you see this. Universal religion is addressed primarily to the individual, and is concerned with the growth of that individual, his spiritual development, his eventual attainment of Enlightenment. But the ethnic religion is concerned mainly with the regulation of social life. With the regulation of the affairs of the group and of the individual, that is to say the statistical individual, only as a member of that group, not as an individual, a true individual that is to say, by himself, on his own. Possibly connected with the group but not dependant on it emotionally, spiritually and so on.

So he is able to arrive at this conception of religion as civilization only by ignoring the distinction between ethnic religion and universal religion.

_____: This universal religion - can that refer to religions apart from Buddhism. How would it refer to them? Would it be in terms of experiencing god or....?

S: No. In the lecture I gave originally on this, I said that Buddhism and Christianity were both universal religions. Islam could be included to some extent. A universal religion essentially is a religion, again using that term, whose teachings are addressed to all men as men. That is to say addressed potentially at least to all individuals regardless of time and place. Buddhism is certainly so addressed, the Dharma is so addressed, so is Christianity though there seems to be a slight doubt about that, but no need to go into that at present. But Hinduism is certainly not addressed to all men. Judaism is certainly not addressed to all men. It's concerned with the ethnic group. Confucianism is not addressed to all men, Shinto is not addressed to all men. Very often in fact the ethnic religions try to keep other people out. They don't want to mix with other people.

So I define the universal religion as one that addresses its teaching to the individual as such, not to the individual, the statistical individual, as a member of a particular group, and whose range of appeal therefore is not limited to any particular country, any particular civilization, any particular period of history.

Nowadays of course all the ethnic religions are under some sort of attack die to the counter influence of secular modern civilization, technology and so on. So some of them, almost in self-defence, try to take on some of the features of universal religion and sort of justify themselves in that sort of way. If the public sphere is taken away from them, they can only survive at all by invading the private sphere which they didn't originally cater for.

_____: Is Taoism a universal religion?

S: I've regarded that as a rather ambiguous case in that particular lecture. I think it has certain universal features.

_____: It's only Christianity and Buddhism that can be regarded as universal.

S: I think Islam to some extent but it seems closer to the ethnic religions than either Buddhism or Christianity.

_____: It says here in the next paragraph that Islam can't be regarded as a religion in that sense.

Manjuvajra: Just one little point on page 30, (oh you've got different page numbers) second paragraph, half way through, he mentions dharma, and then defines it as the eternal principle of being, that which is and upholds all things. This is in a specific.....

S: Thus is in the Hindu context, but he does say something about especially duty.

Vessantara: The beginning of that paragraph where he's defining those three terms.

S: Yes "It indicates the eternal principle of being, that which *is* and upholds all things." Especially which upholds the social order, which upholds civilization. "It also means the mode of life which is in harmony with this eternal principle." Which in practice works out as your way of life as the member of a particular caste, "and it can mean too, the specific code of conduct proper to each group, or to each individual, according to the stage of life he has reached." So it is *dharma* in a very sort of specific Hindu rather than the Buddhist sense.

_____: Could the first two of those sentences be applied to dharma in the Buddhistic way?

S: Possibly they could be extended, possibly they could, yes. But the primary meaning, the meaning on which all the weight, all the emphasis is placed practically, is dharma as caste duty. There's the story I used to tell about the woman in South India, the low caste woman, who was converted to Christianity, but come Christmas she wouldn't go to the party organised by the missionary at the church because she'd have to eat with people of even lower caste than herself. So the minister when he came to know that she wasn't coming remonstrated with her and said 'but you're a Christian now'. So she said very indignantly, 'well that may be so but does it mean I've giving up my dharma?'. You see. So you see the sort of meaning that attaches to dharma. Your duty as a member of a particular caste, to behave in a certain way, eat with certain people, not eat with others, marry with certain people, not marry with others - other groups that is, not individuals. So in Hindu India you are essentially a member of a group. This is the point I've made again and again in some of the chapters of my *'Thousand Petalled Lotus'*. What is your caste? This question. You are not a human being, you are not an individual. You are essentially a member of a caste, so it must be know what caste you belong to. Then it's known what your duties are and what mine are in relation to you. But as individual to individual there is nothing between us.

All right let's go onto Islamic civilization.

Text *"ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION*

Islam provides an even better example. As D.S. Margolionth wrote, 'We are apt to think of

Islam as a religion, whereas the prophet probably thought of it rather as a nation.' Early Islam was a complete prescription for human life as it then existed in the Arabian peninsular. A document known as ***The Constitution of Medina****, together with the Quran, provided for every aspect of human needs in the early period - a view of the world and man's place in it, an account of man's destiny, the rules by which social relations and personal conduct were to be governed, how economic resources were to be used, what customs, ceremonies, festivals and so on, were to be followed. It was, in other words, the vision of a new civilization. At first it was believed that this vision was for the people of Arabia; then it came to be considered as one which had universal relevance, and which therefore could be applied to other situations outside Arabia. As Islam spread into the other lands of the Middle East, it was as a civilization that it spread and developed in the initial stages. Leadership in prayer and leadership in political control were alike the responsibility of the Prophet and, after him, of each* ***khalifa****, or successor of the Prophet. The community of Islam was, as* ***The Constitution of Medina*** *said, one community over against the rest of mankind; it was one in theology, in government, in economic life and in social* ***mores****. But when, in the course of time, political power and economic practice became independent issues, then 'Islam' was the residue: namely the theology, the ethic and the social customs. What was originally a civilization had now, by a process of reduction, become a 'religion'. In the case of Islam, however, the original vision has never been entirely lost, and even in the modern world there have been attempts to reconstitute Islam after the earlier fashion, as a nation-state based on a theology and an ethic. An example is the Republic of Pakistan - at least, this was the hope claimed by some of the Muslims of undivided India in 1947."*

S: Even in the case of Islam, you can't exclude this individual aspect, though it's less prominent than it is I think in Buddhism and Christianity. It's interesting that Trevor Ling says nothing here about the basic affirmation of Islam, which has got nothing to do with economics or social life or anything of that sort, and what is that basic affirmation?

_____: Something about submission.

S: Yes, submission. There's only one god and the greatest of all sins is to 'associate' as they call it another with god. So it's a strict monotheism and this surely came first, and you arrive at the nation because when a number of people all accept the fact that there is just one god and that the appropriate attitude is one of submission towards him, then you get something like what we would call a spiritual community, though it isn't so clearly expressed in the case of Islam, and in any case the monotheistic emphasis wouldn't be regarded as truly or at least not fully spiritual by Buddhism.

But the point I'm trying to make is that you didn't just go straight to a nation. What did Muhammad start (by thinking?) there was just one god. in other words he started off with something that was purely theological, metaphysical, call it what you like. This was his primary affirmation, that the other gods just didn't exist. It was wrong to worship any other gods. One should worship only the one god, the true god, which was Allah, and he gathered a few converts, he gathered a few disciples, and this was the basis, this was the nucleus of the Islamic community. So therefore today you can have plenty of people in Muslim countries who don't follow the Islamic way of life, don't really belong to Islamic civilization, but certainly consider themselves to be Muslims, because they believe in the one true god. They may not even do their five daily prayers. They may even drink wine which is prohibited for a Muslim, but they still consider themselves Muslims because they believe in the one true god and don't join others with him. So here also Trevor Ling seems to get on rather too quickly, via his quotation from Margolionth, to Islam as a nation. What made it a nation at the beginning?

Also of course in the case of Islam there is this question of forcible conversion and

intolerance of other faiths. So when you try to have a sort of Muslim state it means prohibiting everything which is non-Muslim, which is not quite the Buddhist way of doing things. The same even in the case Judaism. In Israel you just try and make it a sort of Jewish state by prohibiting non-Jewish things. Don't allow certain things to happen on the Sabbath and even non-Jews are not allowed to do certain things on the sabbath.

Right let's go on to Judaism then.

Text *"Judaism has had a similar history. Its earliest identifiable form is found in the tribal confederation, united by the common vision of the prophets, a vision of what human society should be, what were its sustaining values, what its norms of social and individual behaviour, what its proper political form. But when the confederation was politically disrupted, north from south, each half thereafter maintained a theologically diminished and politically distorted version of the original theocratic civilization. The two halves each adopted, instead of theocracy, the ancient Near Eastern pattern of government, which was that of a militarily maintained, city-based monarchy. Thus, Yahwistic civilization was in essence abandoned. The theological, social and ethical residue was preserved, however, in an uneasy coexistence and compromise with the urban monarchical system of government until at last, in the course of the political history of Palestine, the head of the Judaean state was overthrown by the empire of Babylon; and Judaism developed in its residual form as a civilization without political or economic dimensions, that is, as a 'religion'."*

S: This may be fairly accurate with regard to Judaism. You probably see already that Judaism and even Islam to some extent are very, as it were, ethnic. Hinduism too. As compared with Buddhism which appeals much more to the individual, or which in a sense appeals exclusively to the individual, or appeals to the group or the spiritual community only via the individual. But Trevor Ling seems to leave the individual in that sense completely out of the picture. Let's go onto Judaeo-Christian Civilization.

Text *"JUDAEO_CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION*
As in the case of Islam, so, too, in the history of Judaism there were attempts too reconstitute it as a totally integrated civilization, attempts to 'restore the kingdom to Israel'. This is not the place to examine them in detail. It may be noted, however, the early nature of the movement is now almost entirely unknown to us. Those early developments which took place in Palestine in a community of Aramean-speaking Jews are known to us only through a set of documents in Hellenistic Greek."

S: He's referring to the documents of the New Testament of course.

Text *"In these not only the original words of Hoshua (Hellenized as 'Jesus') of Nazareth have been translated int o foreign language, but the interpretation of the significance of the events themselves is given to us in terms of Hellenistic Jewish thought, much of it that of Saul (Paul) of Tarsus, a Jew of Roman citizenship, indebted to the Hellenes for a great part of his culture. It is evident from the evidence of these documents (known by Christians as The New Testament) that there were a number of partisan interpretations of the events which had taken place in Judaea in connection with Jesus, and that Paul's was one among others. Evidence from non-Christian sources concerning the movement is very scanty and tells us nothing more than Jesus was put to death by the Romans for sedition. S.G.F. Brandon, in his in his examination of the available evidence, comments 'on the irony of the fact that the execution of Jesus as a rebel against Rome is the most certain thing we know about him'. Professor Brandon goes on to examine the connection between Jesus and the Zealots. He points out that because the latter were rebels against an imperial power, they tended to have a poor press in the West, where they could too easily be assimilated with Russian, Irish or Indian revolutionaries, all groups who threatened the stability of Western capitalist, imperialist rule.*

Since the Second World War, however, with its change of sentiment towards 'resistance groups' there has, he notes, been some slight change of attitude to the Zealots among Western scholars. What is still hard for Christians, thinking of Jesus as the incarnate God is 'even to consider the possibility that Jesus might have had political views'. He points out that 'if theological considerations make it necessary to prejudge the historical situation and to decide that Jesus could not have involved himself in a contemporary political issue the judgement must accordingly be seen for what it is...Such an evaluation of Jesus may be deemed theologically necessity and sound, but it will surely concern another Jesus than he who lived in Judaea when Pontius Pilate was procurator, under whom he suffered crucifixion as a rebel against Rome.'"

S: It's not really very clear what he's trying to say here is it?

Manjuvajra: I think he's trying to make Jesus out to be a pre-Marxist revolutionary. (Laughter) All the beginning part of that paragraph just seems to be kind of setting it up for that very last.....

S: Yes, but another attempt to restore the kingdom to Israel, to reconstitute the disrupted Judaic civilization on another level, especially in opposition to the civilization of Rome which had been imposed by that time forcibly on the Jewish people.

_____: He seems to insist on seeing practically everything in social and political terms. Incapable of seeing other ways of looking at it.

S: All right let's go on and then discuss the whole thing.

Text*"The historical evidence concerning the period in which Jesus lived clearly points to the existence of widespread political discontent among the Jews of what had, by then become a Roman province, and of various movements aimed at the overthrow of Roman power and the restoration of the Jewish theocratic ideal. Whether or not the movement associated with the name of Jesus of Nazareth was one such movement, aimed at the recovery of an integrated Jewish civilization, it is clear that by the time it had begun to win adherents in the Hellenistic world outside Palestine, it had lost any such total vision in leaving Judaea it very soon became non-political. Its apologists were eager to make this very clear to the Roman authorities, and later Christian theologians neither understood, nor had any interest in understanding, Jewish politics of the time of Jesus. Like later Islam, and Judaism after AD 70, the early Hellenistic Christian movement had the restricted range of a religion rather than of a civilization."*

S: That's rather interesting isn't it. That it had what he regards as restricted range of interests at that early stage. And of course the interpretation of the teaching of Christ himself being possibly a reintegration of the disrupted Jewish civilization at another level -this of course is purely speculative.

Text*"It is noteworthy in this case, however , that when Christianity had become combined with the state religion of Rome, in the time of the Emperor Constantine, it did take on the kind of characteristics which justify its being called from this time , and throughout the medieval period, a civilization. The old gods of Rome had lost their ability to legitimate the imperial power; but once the Roman political system had found for itself a new source of legitimation, in the Jewish-Christian idea of God, it was assured of continuity, in the form of the Roman church and the Roman Christian civilization to which it gave rise. The system lasted until, in the modern period, the theistic belief which had provided it with its sanctions began to be eroded by the rationalism of the emerging modern cities. After passing through the transitional stag which characterized it in its modern urban-rationalistic milieu, the stage of*

Protestantism, Christian civilization may now be said to have disappeared almost finally into the sands of modern Western secularism."

S: That's true no doubt. Anyway any comments on that. Judaeo-Christian civilization. It's just an attempt again to present religion, for want of a better term, in terms of civilization. Again the individual dimension seems to be left out entirely.

All right go onto "Modern societies and theistic belief"

Text*MODERN SOCIETIES AND THEISTIC BELIEF*

"Each of the 'major religions' which we have considered, <as they now exist>, may be seen as theological, ethical and ritual deposits left behind when the civilizations of which they were part lost their distinctive political and economic features."

S: Nothing of course is said about the continuing residue or continuing tradition in the case say of Islam and Christianity, of their universal appeal, their appeal to the individual, which they did have at least originally.

Text*"In each case the original vision on which the civilization was based had some form of theistic belief as its legitimation."*

S: It's as though the theistic belief legitimises the civilization, the function of the theistic belief being to legitimize the civilization rather than civilization being a basis for the expression or practice of the belief. Again we come back to Durkheim's conception don't we, of the sacred as that which sanctifies. That's its function.

[**End of Side Side Two]**

Text*"Islam was realized as a civilization because there were men who were persuaded that the God of whim Muhammad spoke was a living reality, the supreme being, whose commands could not be set aside. It was the work of persuading men of this which was in the first instance the prophet's great achievement,...."*

S: Well that was what he was basically saying, that was his great teaching.

Text*"...carried out as it was in the face of the opposition and scepticism of the Meccan merchants and their followers. Initially, the prophet's success must he attributed to the power of his personality, together, perhaps, with a predisposition on the part of some of his hearers to belief in a supreme, powerful and righteous being. Given such belief there could follow, detail by detail, the realization of the prophet's vision of a new structure for human society which would transcend tribal limits and individual self- interest. When the civilization thus created eventually list its political cohesion and its economic integrity, the theistic belief which had been its sanction remained as its central feature. As modernization advances, and Islamic life becomes by degrees more and more secularized, it is the element of belief in Allah which remains as the final distinctive feature. When a Muslim living in Britain is encouraged or forced by circumstances to conform more and more closely to the pattern of life of his workmates, and can perhaps no longer even observe properly the fast of Ramadan, then what finally marks him out as a Muslim is the distinctive nature of his belief in God, differing as it does from that of both Jew and Christian. This then, this surviving shred of the whole civilization... "*

S: (interrupting) Belief in God which is the main thing, the basic thing, the fundamental thing for Muslims, is referred to as a surviving shred of the whole civilization. If you've got

that presumably you could create everything again, even on the basis of what Trevor Ling himself says.

Nagabodhi: He seems to lack imagination. This thing of all it takes was for the prophet to have a bit of charisma and a few people with a predisposition to believe in a god, I mean what total kind of neglect of what that must have meant.

S: Meant to them, yes.

Nagabodhi: If you've read Kirkegaard's "Fear and Trembling" he really brings out what it must have meant at a time when there wasn't this idea sort of everywhere around you to suddenly have this conviction. He just completely lacks imagination.

S: Carry on then.

Text*"This then, this surviving shred of the whole civilization which once encompassed the life of his forefathers, is what in the end Islam may come to mean for him: one variety among others of belief in God. What was once a civilization has now become a man's 'religion' - as that word is frequently used and understood in the West today. Perhaps some ritual practices and ethical attitudes will be preserved, but their maintenance will be precarious, depending very largely on the continuance of belief in the God of Islam. In the case of the children of such a man, brought up in modern industrial Britain, when belief in Islam's God is no longer tenable, there would seem to be little justification for practices and attitudes which mark them off from their school fellows; such justification as there is will then consist almost entirely in the strength of the family's own tradition."*

S: He clearly regards a major belief like belief in god for the Muslim as just a part of civilization as it were.

Nagabodhi: The belief no longer tenable once one kind of.....

S: Yes, as though it's a sort of product of a certain kind of socio-economic...

Nagabodhi: Super set up isn't it. He considers it...

S: A function in the sense of a certain kind of society or civilization, situation.

Nagabodhi: The opiate of the people.

S: All right carry on to the concluding paragraph.

Text"*This situation is one which all the major religions of the West share now that they have been reduced to their present state of being little more then precariously held theistic beliefs with attendant ethical attitudes and a possible modicum of ritual practice. Their viability is thus limited; they will last as long as theistic belief can be maintained in a modern industrial society. This may, of course, be longer than the unbeliever expects, especially among politically, socially or culturally deprived or depressed classes of society for whom traditional theistic belief can be a major source of satisfaction and comfort."*

S: Again what he says as regards this sort of whittling down of traditional civilization is true. You are left with these little residues which are then regarded as religion, but again he leaves out of account altogether the question of the individual and his individual development which was of course never very clear in Christianity, certainly not in orthodox Christianity, but which is certainly clear enough in the case of Buddhism.

All right let's go on to the alternatives to theism and then we've finished this particular introduction.

Text*"ALTERNATIVES TO THEISM*

It is often assumed in the West that theistic belief is the only possible way in which a man or a civilization can be spiritually orientated. A major refutation of this assumption is provided by Buddhism. It is possible that Marxism may provide another but, as yet, it has not had as long a period as Buddhism in which to demonstrate its capacity in this direction. What they have in common is that they both begin from a vision of a new civilization... "

S: Yes, you notice they begin from the vision of a new civilization, but it's certainly not the case with Buddhism. It begins with the vision or the experience if you like of the new man, the Buddha, the Enlightened man. Then the question arises well how can one produce other Enlightened men, how can one make it more easy for other Enlightened beings to be produced?

Text*"What they have in common is that they both begin from a vision of a new civilization which will enable man to grow and develop into a quality of life beyond what he has known hitherto."*

S: This is of course very true but 'quality of life' seems to be a rather sort of inadequate way of speaking about presumably Enlightenment.

Text*"In neither case, however, does this vision need to be legitimated by reference to belief in a supreme divine being. The sanctions in both cases are philosophical rather than theological; in the case of Buddhism they are also to some extent derived from what, for brevity, may be called psychological experience."*

S: This word psychological really does beg the question doesn't it. The whole business is wide to misunderstanding. Enlightenment as a psychological experience. It keeps the whole thing on a very very much lower level than it should be. Right carry on then.

Text*"Thus one view of the relationship between religion and civilization is that religions make civilizations - or that they have done so in the past. Another view is that what are seen today as the 'great religions' - Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam - are vestigial remains of civilizations. Mere hummocks of what were once, so to speak, great mountain ranges, they now have a mild charm, standing out a little, as they do, from the flat alluvial expanse of secularism in which they are slowly being silted up."*

S: Well of course what we have in the case of Buddhism, this is not only the residues of Buddhist civilization fast disappearing in the midst of a modern secular world, but we still have the Dharma, and therefore still the possibility of recreating a civilization in accordance with that Dharma to make it more easy to practise the Dharma.

Nagabodhi: He says that 'one view of the relationship is that religions make civilizations', which is something he hasn't actually gone into - the first alternative.

S: No, this is what I'm saying, taking religions in the case of Buddhism as meaning Dharma. It's the Dharma that gives birth to civilizations in its attempt as it were to give birth to further Enlightened individuals. The civilization is the cradle of the Enlightened individual. So you want a proper cradle, so that the Enlightened individual may be produced or may find it somewhat more easy to produce himself. Right carry on then.

Text *"Perhaps, to continue the geological metaphor, they will be superseded by some upthrust of new rock from the depths. The first rumblings of this movement can already faintly be heard. Whether that will be so or not we cannot tell. What we can discern is the present shape of the so-called 'great religions', and their drastically reduced dimensions, compared with what once they were. In the process of erosion by which civilizations were reduced to religions, one of the severest stages was that which occurred about a century ago. It has been described by Louis Wirth: 'The atomistic point of view arising out of the biological and mechanistic tradition of the late nineteenth century led to the recognition of the individual organism as the solid reality constituting the unit of social life, and depreciation of "society" as a terminological construct or an irrelevant fiction.' The idea that human society is nothing more than the aggregate of the individual members of which it is composed is reflected in the nineteenth century view of religion as the wholly private affair of the individual, a view which is given concrete expression in the American 'secular' state, where what is public and official has to be kept from all contact with religion which is essentially the affair of the individual."*

S: You could in a sense say that the so called secular is just another religion. It's rather a case of one religion being enforced virtually, rather than another. Carry on and see what the conclusion is.

Text *"What the Buddha initiated, therefore, was not a religion - at least not in any sense that has meaning in the twentieth century. The same os true of the civilizations initiated by Moses, and Muhammad and perhaps Jesus, and the anonymous brahmans of ancient India who are represented by the name of Manu. What these all initiated were more than 'religions' in the reduced, individualistic sense of today. What exactly the Buddha did initiate it is the purpose of this book to explore. When its full scope has been examined, we may then decide how best it may be characterized. To do this will lead us to consider the characteristics of the Ashokan Kingdom of India in the third century BC, territorially and in other ways one of the greatest India has ever known; it will require us to look at the subsequent fate of Buddhist civilization in India, and to consider the long history of Buddhism in the island of Ceylon as it has existed now for twenty-two centuries."*

S: So clearly he's bent on regarding Buddhism as a civilization. The development of the individual, these considerations are left entirely out. It seems a little odd doesn't it.

Siddhiratna: Do you think this bit down on the bottom of page 38 about society being nothing but the aggregate of individual members, does that reflect his view somehow that.....

S: It's not clear really whether this reflects his view or not, but anyway he ends up with the view that the nineteenth century view of religion as the wholly private affair of the individual which of course is a view that he doesn't agree with.

Manjuvajra: He says that this idea of the human society as being nothing more than the aggregate of the individual members was one of the major tools or major ideas in the destruction of religion.

S: I don't quite see the connection. I suppose if society is made up of individuals, then individuals can have that private dimension which then becomes the domain of religion in the restricted sense. Perhaps this is what he means. In other words you can't have a universal religion as we would call it, unless you've got individuals. So long as you've only got society or the group well then you can only have ethnic religion or civilization, but as soon as you get individuals and society is recognised as made up of individuals, then what he regards very disparagingly as religion as a private affair then becomes possible. But what really becomes possible of course then is the development of the individual as such. When you begin to see

that the society is made up of individuals or potential individuals at least. In other words he seems to deny then that society is made up of individuals in any sense other than statistical individuals. Again I think this is connected with his very ambiguous attitude towards the whole concept of the individual. We'll see this in detail later on.

So in a way his weakness throughout this whole introduction seems to be that he does not see the dharma as dharma or does not see Buddhism as dharma. He does not think of the dharma in terms of the development of the individual, therefore he doesn't think in terms of the individual at all, and therefore sees Buddhism, religion, purely in ethnic terms, as civilizations.

In the Friends we operate with three concepts - the individual, the group and the spiritual community. He seems to operate only with the group. Do you see that? I take it most of you have heard the lecture I gave on the individual, the group and the spiritual community, but I refer to these sort of ideas from time to time elsewhere. But he seems to have no conception of the individual, certainly no conception of the spiritual community. He's quite unable to distinguish ethnic religion from universal religion. After all Buddhism started or the Dharma started with the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment which was something purely individual. It concerned at that time only that individual. This is where it started, and that individual spoke to other individuals. They spoke to others. You had a spiritual community before you had a Buddhist group, if you see what I mean. Perhaps you can say the Buddhist group started coming into existence when you got lay people in the old sense, who were sympathetic, appreciative and inclined to support, but who did not commit themselves. It would be rather like someone trying to write an article about the FWBO and ignoring the existence of the Order, and to account for the Friends, the FWBO, in purely sociological terms, but ignoring the Order and ignoring the fact that the whole thing came about because certain individuals, as individuals, have decided to commit themselves.

Anyway I've handled Trevor Ling rather roughly quite deliberately, just so that his own mental confusion enables us to see much more clearly, or maybe more clearly than we did before, this whole question of the individual, the group and the spiritual community, and how it's very important to operate with these three concepts. I'm rather surprised that Trevor Ling does think in such a confused way.

Anyway any query or comment on all that we've done today? We've come to the end of our time actually. What sort of general impression do you get?

_____: I get the feeling that he's made up his thesis beforehand and all this is just set up to justify his initial idea.

S: What do you think his thesis is?

_____: Well I think it's, from what he says later, very much almost an organisational thing. The monarch seems to come in from time to time and it seems to be in terms of a Buddhist organisation or state of some type.

S: The impression with which I am left, after we've gone through this whole chapter, is that my own way of thinking, putting things in terms of the individual, the group and the spiritual community, is infinitely clearer than all this. Also quite original within the context of western thought and much more faithful - I might even say completely faithful - to the dharma itself. It makes that all the more clear. I'm really amazed that anyone could have missed it. But why is this? Perhaps it is because Trevor Ling himself has never felt himself as an individual trying to evolve. I mean he has gone off to Ceylon and practised meditation, but presumably meditation as part of Buddhist civilization, rather than meditation as a means to

Enlightenment.

Manjuvajra: Within the context that he's described here, I can't see how meditation comes into that.

S: No. It seems totally irrelevant.

Manjuvajra: I should think he's probably wasting his time.

S: He probably would agree with Mrs Rhys-Davids who said they were just musing because they had nothing else to do during the day! (Laughter) He's clearly quite well meaning, but very limited and doesn't think very deeply, but his ears must be burning. I'm sorry to be so critical - I've nothing against Doctor Ling personally, he's personally quite an excellent person, but I really must disagree with what he says about Buddhism and what he doesn't say about the dharma.

Manjuvajra: How old is he?

S: He's not all that old, not more than 40 I would guess.

Manjuvajra: He strikes me as someone about mid-twenties who is looking for an ideology.

S: He may be less than 40, but he's certainly not far off I would say.

Nagabodhi: He strikes me as being somebody sort of way out of his depth, not just with Buddhism but also with the terms he's using.
S: With the spiritual life.

Nagabodhi: Well that on the one hand, but also his own academic framework, because although he's setting out the kind of front of sociological objectivity, my own experience of sociology, which I did briefly at university, this isn't sociology either. It just wouldn't stand as good sociology. His kind of reification of civilizations and societies is anathema.

S: And the quote from Durkheim.

Nagabodhi: Well he's all right.

S: He's all right but then he just sort of quotes him.

Nagabodhi: Yes. I just get the feeling he's very much out of his depth.

S: But he's fluent. He writes quickly and if you don't think about it too much, you think it's quite clear. It has a certain surface clarity. It's popular in a way.

Nagabodhi: It's professionalism.

S: In a way.

_____: It sounds a bit like a doctorate thesis.

S: I think he got his doctorate thesis for something else. I think that was 'Buddhism and the mythology of evil'.

_____: How would it stand if he changed to something like 'Aspects of Buddhist

civilization' or something like that. If he took the low road.

S: But still he has to make clear where Buddhist civilization comes in. He tries to equate Buddhism and the dharma with civilization, whereas actually Buddhist civilization is a means for the practise of the dharma by the individual. The individual comes first, then the dharma and then civilization. It seems to me that he regards the Buddha and the Dharma, though he hardly mentions the Dharma, as simply the instrument of transition from a relatively simple to a relatively complex tribe, tribal organisation, society, civilization and so on.

Vessantara: I get the feeling he's very well disposed towards Buddhism....

S: Indeed.....

Vessantara: .....but trying to put it over in terms which are going to be acceptable to other academics and other people who are almost trendy. He seems very concerned with Marxism. I've met some people who have tried to equate Buddhism and Marxism to some degree successfully.

S: He doesn't exactly equate them but he treats them in the same sort of way. He names them together in the same sort of context.

Vessantara: He says that Marxism being materialist is to some extent scientifically acceptable. If you can name that along with Buddhism in the same breath then you somehow validate Buddhism to a greater extent.

S: I get the impression that by going through this book and sorting out Doctor Ling to some extent, we shall clarify our own ideas and perhaps understand things much more definitely than we had done before. Understand more clearly and sharply the distinction of the group and the spiritual community, and where exactly the individual does come in. Because you see what happens, what sort of a mess you get into, what sort of intellectual confusion and what misrepresentations of Buddhism when you forget these concepts - the individual, the group and the spiritual community.

Manjuvajra: Do those have any basis in traditional Buddhist teachings?

S: The spiritual community certainly!

Manjuvajra: Yeah, but they've got a kind of western flavour.

S: Yes, I don't think you could say that there are these sort of three terms as a group of three terms, found in traditional Buddhist teaching, no. The Buddha makes it clear that he addresses his teaching to the individual. He says let any man come to me a reasonable man - I will teach him, I will explain, and so on. And he's concerned throughout the Pali scriptures with the development of each individual as an individual. He's not concerned with the group, except in the very general sort of way. I mean there are teachings about the...well for instance the Sigalovada Sutta - social relations, husband and wife, parent and children. That's only one sutta in the whole of the Pali Canon. For that one sutta on that particular topic there must be at least a hundred that deal with meditation!

Vessantara: Later on he claims that a large proportion of basic Buddhist suttas are to do with proscriptions for something more than the individual.

S: Whereas what the Buddha says about social life - we'll probably see this when we come onto that topic - and politics and so on, though he speaks about these things from time to

time, is very general and very broad, whereas when it comes to the spiritual life, if you take the Pali texts at their face value, he's very much more specific. He goes into much greater detail. You could even, if you wanted to exaggerate a bit you could say he says even more about nirvana than about politics! And he doesn't say all that much about nirvana as we know. But it's always there in the background as it were.

Manjuvajra: His political views are often quite sort of simplistic and a bit sort of homely.

S: Yes. Kings shouldn't misbehave and things like that.

Anyway we've made a fairly good start today and I think we have, I won't say sorted out Doctor Ling's confusion, but at least we've sort of threaded our way through them without getting confused ourselves, and perhaps you've seen how important it is to be clear about these things, to distinguish say the Dharma from Buddhism and to understand that the Dharma is addressed to the individual, and that Buddhism is not primarily a civilization at all, though it may have produced civilizations in the interests of the dharma and in the interests of individuals who were trying to evolve. Anyway let's leave it there for today and continue tomorrow morning.

Next Session

S: Before we actually start I'd like to read or to get somebody to read a letter I got. It's written in block capitals, as Americans nowadays do write.

_____: Can we just say that this is a letter that was sent from Ceylon.

S: From someone called bhikkhu Arkasa.

Vessantara:

September '76.

Venerable Sir, Mangalam.

An aerogramme is quite cramped space to write so let me get to the point. I'm writing on behalf of myself and a small group of other Americans and Europeans who are here and in robes. I'm a bhikkhu. Most of the others sramaneras. We've all been moving around India and Nepal for the last four or five years. Mostly the Buddhist circuit, Dharamsala, Himachal, Kathmandu, Bihar, Darjeeling etc., etc., etc. and in and out of Adyar and Arunachala..

S: Ah, one is Arunachala where Ramana Maharshi was. Adyar is the Theosophical Society headquarters.

Vessantara:

I think you know it. The Goenka trip for a while. Such fine exposure to the teachings and the so few teachers around. For us all it started romantically you know, Paul Brunton style, well as it should be. The whole trip is practically borne out. it really is down to dukkha, anitya, anatta (Laughter). So when it got to that and we all saw that the whole affair just bounced back on ourselves, individually, to work it out, just me and my cluttered up head, my inheritance, my ditthi, my ego. So now the work has begun again. Every minute a beginning, one way or another. All of us found ourselves out of contact and out of money. But it was sort of joyous kind of being broke. We had dharma and a practice to do. Over the years it

just developed into this dharma life, this self inquiry life, a satipathana kind of life. Really dharma bums to use a title. I mean there was no going back, not to the west, and certainly not back to former freak life. No way! (Laughter)

As far as going back west, well, not now, not yet. We can't chop this up in the middle. We're sort of sitting it out, meditating, watching ourselves, letting the fire cool out, letting the mind quiet down. But it must be natural, not lazy. But natural, not pushed it away, let it drop away. Let klesa fall off like a useless appendage. Let the ego wear itself out, sometimes humiliate itself in dharma's light. You know we found we got time, nothing to rush back to, instant Enlightenment - no, no, only when ripe, then the fruit drops. So we eat sleep, take care of daily affairs and meditate, sitting a lot, mindfulness other times. Good, really good, and damn painful at times. We're in this world and the encounter with it is often so clumsy, so negative. We blow it a lot too. Not always such pukka monks. Irritable, contradictory, stubborn, you know. Put yourself in a yoga or sadhana and it all comes up quicker. Lots of freaky bursts. Learning to feel them coming and get dharma mind on it, catching it sooner, learning to control it. We became monks mostly because we were here and wanted to uninterruptedly continue our practice. Theravada sangha is really good for that. I mean I think you know how deplorable the ranks of the sangha has gotten. Mostly just priests. It's just degenerated after 2500 years. That's the way it is. So that's the way it is.

We've been fortunate to be taken under the wing of Venerable Ananda Maitreya Maha Mayeka Theram, now 81. He's very unusual, eccentric and eclectic, still has his little finger into Theosophy, circa HPB and feels Ramana Maharshi was one of the 20th Century's best, along with Krishnamurti. For a high-ranking Theravadin monk in such a country, that at least pays lip service to pristine pure doctrine, he's just beautiful. The notable and famous scholar monks are so pompous, such a drag. I can rap doctrine all day with them. I mean how difficult can dharma be? And talk is just words. It is where their head are at that just doesn't click. Something's not right. I always get the feeling most of them haven't attained anything but a crammed head. They are so so prissy, and quick to get up tight. Such unpresentable people except when platitudes are in store.

Well sangha and acaryas turn my brothers off. Monks life is very interesting. We are lucky to be with Venerable Ananda Maitreya. He is authentic, a gem. So complaints aside, we live with one of his junior Theras who began his own meditation hermitage for those monks who really want to be monks. No ritual and no laying on trips. Just live here quietly, meditate, dye a robe, build a kuti, be mindful. We live high up on a hillside twelve miles from Kandi. The weather is cool. Theravada is so much more interesting and to the point, so naked, so uncluttered. It's like a breath of fresh air after two years of Vajrayana. That's for the doctrine at least. But Mahayana has a spirit that can be inspiring. Such a conflict for a westerner. Zen, so Zen. So it seems that a lot of discriminating synthesis is somehow necessary but without a confusion or crutches. Leave all schools behind and see reality for what it is. Easier said than done. We do have food, we do have shelter and lots of time to work on ourselves. We don't know about coming west in robes. We'd be conspicuous. Here not so much, but abroad, oh boy! Only way is if there was a facility to work with in. I know it has to start somewhere - a western bhikkhu sangha - but who's going to do it. We wonder about that sometimes. Just to be invisible and live dharma, to be ordinary with a dharma mind. Strange trip this. Fra Kantipala's here for a year. Frankly I can't be like that. He's English in body but kind of on the Thai bhikkhu trip, and somehow it's not authentic, also very touchy, prudish. I haven't seen a western monk yet that has seemed credible to me. It all looks like role-playing to me. Unnatural, posed, an anachronism sort of.

Like Lama Yeshe's Australian monks talking about yidams, or western bhikkhus talking in that soft, sublime voice of a would be suttastar arhant. Phew, something's wrong! Right movie, poor script (Laughter). Oh I don't know. Yes, not what others do and don't do, but

what I do should concern me. Thank you for giving me your time really. Being a monk is great. I beg my alms a lot. I've got a good comfortable old robe, my bowl feeds me. I must keep santosha in mind. (**S:** Contentment) *I'm generating up metta and karuna for everyone, for anyone I might have put down in my mind in this letter. Oh yes what's the point? We, us, six westerners, request your help and kindness. We have a one shelf library and some borrowed books. Can you send us some of the most straightforward things you have written. We have gone through "Survey of Buddhism", but that's quite old. We have been told that some of your more recent books are so fine. It would be a real dharma dana for us. We could also get a lot out of the FWBO Newsletters. I've never even seen one. Can you send a bunch of back issues as well as current ones. The Maha Bodhi Journal or the World Federation of Buddhists Review is so stiff! Middle Way gets devoured when we see a copy, rarely. We need inspiration, not quite desperately. We're getting beyond that, but barely. Tipitaka is beautiful but we need live stuff, a taste from other people who are practising dharma, not just Tisarana and Pancasila formulas. You know what we mean. Really we feel so alone in this. Actually we are. But frankly we're not rhinoceros yet.* (**S:** Referring to the wandering alone, the horn of the rhinoceros is single) *Just a group of wet behind the ears monks experimenting. Some people have said oh, he's not a monk any more, blah, blah, he's on his own trip, that's not the dharma way. Well my intuition tells me you're really doing something good. I feel something is very together with FWBO and I don't even know what FWBO is all about. I think it is good for these times. It feels real. It feels right. Please plug us in to what is going on there. We need to see dharma in the framework of our own culture, indigenously. You were a monk, and I know you were one who took the Kalama Sutta to heart. I know you went through all this conflict I'm putting out. I have absolutely no doubt whatsoever in the voracity of the dharma of Lord Buddha, but my dear kalyana mitta, this worldly existence is so full of shit that if I don't cry, I'm laughing at the absurdity of it all.*

I want the best for all my fellow beings, the sooner the better. I hope they will just begin to see and then get on with it. Thank you for being there.
Akasha Bhikkhu

Please accept my wholehearted respects. May you and your sangha cultivate and cultivate and cultivate.

_____: Lovely letter.

S: Maybe we should put it in *Shabda*. What do you think of that? It'll make a bit of a change, wouldn't it. Well wouldn't it, speak up.

_____: Yes, yes!

_____: Do you think it might be good for the next Newsletter which is on dana.

S: No, I think it had better not go in the Newsletter! So I'm hoping Nagabodhi can send them back issues and what else have we?

Nagabodhi: I can send them back issues of the Newsletters, Mitrata.

S: I'll send a copy of the *Thousand Petalled Lotus*. I've got a spare one.

Nagabodhi: Everything except *The Three Jewels*.

S: I wonder if anyone's got a spare copy of *The Three Jewels?*

Nagabodhi: It would be good. I was trying to get hold of one for paste up purposes and

found it difficult.

S: I've got a hard back if you want eventually for paste up. I have a spare copy of the paperback, one copy of the paperback but I really want to hang onto that if I possibly can. If you could get hold of a paperback of *The Three Jewels*, that would be very good.

Nagabodhi: Will you be writing to them?

S: I shall write as soon as I can. I don't know when that will be but I'll send off the *Thousand Petalled Lotus* even if I have to send it off with just a compliments slip and say I'll write later, but you do what you can.

[End of Tape 3 Tape 4]

S: I think that we're going to get letters of this sort more and more actually, as we become better and better known and especially as word gets round about Sukhavati. I think we're going to get these sort of SOS's from groups of western Buddhists, in and out of robes, who are sort of stranded in a sense, here and there all over Asia. But quite clearly they've no idea what sort of approach we have taken. How we've tried to solve some of these difficulties.

Anyway let's carry on with "Part 2: North India in the Sixth Century BC" As I said yesterday this is mainly practical material and we should get through it as quickly as we can and if there's anything that anyone doesn't understand we can just stop and talk about that and there may be a few points of general interest that we can discuss. (Pause) And there always is a quite useful resume of whatever is known, at present, about North India in the sixth century B.C. Mainly derived from Buddhist records. (Pause) Well, alright, let us start then.

Text:*"THE INDIAN 'MIDDLE COUNTRY'*

Gotama the Buddha was born at a time when the main centre of Indian civilization was located in the Ganges plain. Whether there were at that time other important centres of development elsewhere in India is an open question. Certainly less is known of the peninsula or the south for this period. The only other area of India for which historical evidence is available is the Indus valley."

S: Yes, there is this famous Indus Valley civilization, which goes back a couple of thousand years B.C. It seems to be connected with the civilizations of the Middle East; that is to say Babylonia, Sumeria.

Vessantara: Where abouts is the Indus Valley? Is it sort of north...?

S: This is north-west.There seems to have been trade connections between the Sumerian Empire and that part of India.

Text*"One of the indications that the Ganges valley had become the focal area of development is that in the literature which dates from this period, both brahmanical and Buddhist, it was termed 'the middle country' (**Madhyadesa,Skt; Majjhimadesa,Pali**)"*

S: There is by the way, a map right at the beginning. Maybe you should look at that. A map of Kosala. (Pause)

Text.*"The exact extent of the area to which this title was applied seems to have varied from one literary source to another but generally it designates the middle Gangetic plain. The Buddhist sources tend to regard the Majjhimadesa as extending farther to the east than do the*

brahmanical sources. For the Buddhists the eastern boundary was at a town called Kajangala, possibly the most easterly point reached by the Buddha in his travels. Kajangala was described by the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, Hsuan Tsang, as being 400 li to the east of Champa (modern Bhagalpur). This would locate it at the point where the Ganges, at the eastern edge of Bihar, makes a major change of course towards the south, to flow through Bengal. In the other direction the boundary of the Majjhimadesa was a little to the west of the modern city of Delhi, along the western watershed of the Yamuna river, the major tributary to the Ganges, which flows parallel with it through most of the northern part of the Gangetic plain."

S: Is that clear? (Pause) Carry on then.

Text.*"It was in this region, the 'middle' or 'central' country, comprising the Ganges valley from its upper reaches as far as the approaches to the delta, which was regarded as the most important area of India by all the ancient writers. Wherever brahmanical or Buddhist literature deals with geographical description, great attention is devoted to 'the central country' and much less to the other four regions - namely, northern, western, southern and eastern India. One does not have to seek very far for a reason for this, as B.C. Law pointed out: As with the brahmanical Aryans, so with the Buddhists, Middle Country was the cradle on which they staged the entire drama of their career, and it is to the description and information of this tract of land (by whatever name they called it) that they bestowed all their care and attention."*

S: I like this mixture of metaphors: "the cradle on which they staged the entire drama of their career" - this is the sort of thing you **mustn't** do if you contribute to the Newsletter.(Laughter)

Text*"Outside the pale of Madhyadesa there were countries that were always looked down upon by the inhabitants of the favoured region."*

S: Mm. I think that is quite clear, isn't it? Go on to "The heart of the Middle Country".

Text.*"THE HEART OF THE MIDDLE COUNTRY*

By the time of Gotama's birth in the sixth century B.C. however, it is possible to identify, even within the territory of the Middle Country, an inner heartland of the developing civilization. This heartland consisted approximately of the area comprised by the rival Kingdoms of Koshala and Magadha, to which further reference will be made in the next chapter. Roughly, the territory concerned was the Gangetic plain from just west of the modern city of Lucknow to Bhagalpur in the east. Another way of identifying it is to say that it consists of the south-eastern third of the modern state of Uttar Pradesh, a small part of Nepal, and the northern half of the state of Bihar."

S: If this isn't very clear - if you're not very familiar with Indian geography - think of the map of India: you know where Delhi is, you know where Calcutta is - very roughly: the middle Country will be in between these two points, with the River Ganges running through the middle, reaching not quite as far as Delhi on the one hand, to the West; and not quite as far as Calcutta or south-west Calcutta, on the east. It's that big chunk right in the middle.

Text.*"Apart from a relatively small proportion of upland - the southern slopes of the Himalayan foothills of central Nepal and some outliers of the Bihar hills on the neighbourhood of Gaya - the whole of this area of about 70,000 square miles consists of the broad, flat expanse of the middle Gangetic plain, which nowhere in this region rises above*

350 feet."

S: What's the area of Great Britain? Does anyone know? (Pause)

Manjuvajra: It's about a thousand miles long, and about three hundred miles wide.

Nagabodhi: It's about five hundred miles long?

Siddhiratna: No, a thousand miles long

_____: Eight to nine hundred.

(Pause) murmurs -

S: I think it's roughly a hundred thousand square miles. I think , roughly, a hundred thousand..... So this Middle Country is about three-quarters of the size of England and Wales. So maybe say it's about as big as England and Wales. Maybe it's a little bit smaller than that. That gives one some idea of the area involved, doesn't it? And this is the area which the Buddha covered personally: at least this area. Maybe he went occasionally just outside it, but this is the area he personally covered, walking everywhere on foot. It's quite a big area, isn't it? (Pause) And also it's interesting : it's virtually flat. It's a vast plain, with the Ganges running through the middle of it, with just a little bit of hilly area up towards the Himalayas, and a few hills down in the south-eastern corner, not far from Gaya - otherwise completely flat. And the ancient Indians did believe that "flat is beautiful" (Chuckling) They didn't believe that mountains were beautiful or grand or inspiring. They seemed to feel that mountains were just excrescences; just untidy, sort of heaps of rubble. So the Pure Land is described as being completely flat. Though that has, again, a metaphysical significance: it's the sort of undifferentiated surface of Reality, as it were. Anyway that's beside the point. (Pause) Let's carry on.

Text*"Along the entire northern edge of this plain are the steeply rising slopes of the Himalayan mountain range, whose peaks are the highest in the world; from plains level to a height of 20,000 feet is reached in a horizontal distance of about seventy miles. Issuing southwards from this mountain range are the many tributaries which flow south to join the Ganges. The Ganges river itself emerges from the mountains in the extreme north of Uttar Pradesh to flow 1300 miles south-eastwards through this great plain before turning southwards to enter the Bay of Bengal. From Kanpur, where the river has yet 900 miles to go before reaching the sea, its height above sea-level is only 360 feet, so low and level are the plains from here."*

S: That certainly makes it easy to walk about, doesn't it? All right, carry on.

Text.*"For four months of the year, from June to September, the monsoon pours heavy rain over the whole region; this is heaviest in the eastern part of the region, and over the forested slopes of the Himalayas along the northern boundary. Most of the great rivers which flow south-eastwards across the plain, eventually to join the Ganges, have their source in the Himalayas, and between them they carry down the vast volume of water which the monsoon discharges. Some of the larger rivers on the northern half of the plain, such as the Gandak and Kosi, cause great damage by flooding the countryside, changing their courses, and depositing sand and stones across the plain. Ninety per cent of the total yearly rainfall come in thee four months, with the result that during the remaining eight months many of the smaller rivers dwindle away almost to nothing. The Gumti, for instance, is more than two moles wide in the rainy season, but a mere two hundred feet in the hot season. The larger rivers, however, are fed from another source during the burning heat of the summer, from*

February to May; having their sources in the heights of the Himalayas they receive their water from the melting snows and glaciers. The Ganges never dwindles away in the hottest summer. Thus the plains which surround these larger rivers have a year- round supply of water, and agriculture can be maintained by irrigation. The soil of the Gangetic plain varies in quality, but in many places, especially where the Ganges unlike the devastating Gandek and Kosi rivers, deposits rich alluvium it is suitable for intensive agriculture; 'the alluvial silt which it spills over its banks year by year affords to the fields a top-dressing of inexhaustible fertility. It is therefore not surprising that throughout the history of the region its people have held sacred the source of such fertility and life."

S: That's all pretty clear and straightforward, isn't it: the sort of geographical picture you get of the area. And don't forget, the rainy season becomes very important later on because that's when the monks had to `hole up'; they couldn't wander about as during the other eight months of the year. And the rainy season became, in that way, a period of retreat. On we go then.

Text*"Between the four months of monsoon rain and the four months of burning sun and scorching wind comes the season of winter, from October to the end of January: a time of calm blue skies, when the days are warm, the nights cool and the mornings fresh and dewy. There may, however be a period of light winter rain in January. This is the time when the rabi (spring harvested) crops are grown, such as wheat and barley, and linseed and mustard for their oil."*

S: There's no need to linger on that. Is anyone not sure about anything or not clear? (Pause) OK, let's go on.

Text.*"A LAND OF ABUNDANT FOOD*

In the Buddha's day the situation was in some respects very much more favourable for agriculture than it is today. Much of the Gangetic plain was still forested, and land could be had for the clearing, where virgin soil was ready to produce abundant harvest. The Greek writers of the period describe the agriculture of the Ganges valley with great enthusiasm. Diodonis, who derived his knowledge of India from the work of Megasthenes, writes in this way: "In addition to cereals there grows...much pulse of different sorts, and rice also...as well as many other plants useful for food, of which most grow spontaneously...Since there is a double rainfall in the course of each year, one in the winter season, when the sowing of wheat takes place as in other countries, and the second at the time of the summer solstice which is the proper season for sowing rice and bosmorin as well as sesamum and millet, the inhabitants of India always gather in two harvests annually... The fruits, moreover, of spontaneous growth, and the esculent roots which grow on marshy places and are of varied sweetness, afford abundant sustenance for man. Fact is, almost all the plains in the country have a moisture which is alike genial whether it is derived from the river, or from the rains of the summer season which are wont to fall every year at a stated period with surprising regularity." A passage from Strabo tells the same story: "From the vapours arising from such vast rivers and from the Estesian winds, as Eratosthenes states, India is watered by the summer rains and the plains are overflowed. During these rains, accordingly, flax is sown and millet; also sesamum, rice and bosmorum, and in the winter time wheat, barley pulse and other esculent fruits unknown to us."

S: These Greek writers base themselves on Megasthenes. Megasthenes was the Greek ambassador at the court of Chandraguptamuria, who was the grandfather of Ashoka. He wrote about India in a work that has not survived, but other works based on it, or quoting from it, have survived. In that way, we know quite a bit of the India of that time. All right, let's go on.

_____ What's `bosmorum'?

S: I don't know. But that must be a Western term, possibly a Greek term. From the context, it just seems to be a grain of some kind.

Text*"Many of these fruits, then unknown to Europeans, were gathered by the people of India from the forests which at that time were far more extensive - fruits such as mango, jack-fruit, dat, coconut and banana. Throughout the Buddhist and brahmanical literature one is constantly reminded of the thick growth of forest which till covered the greater part of the plains in the sixth century BC. The wagons that carried merchandise from one town to another had to pass through dense and sometimes dangerous forests where wild creatures, human or sub-human lay in wait for the unprotected traveller. But the forests were also lovely with flowering trees, especially in the coo season and early summer. Buddhist literature frequently refers to the sound of the birds 'there, where the forest is in flower'. Banyan and bo-tree, palmyra, date palm, coconut, acacia, ebony and sal, all these and many other trees are mentioned in the contemporary literature as features of the everyday scene. When, in the pursuit of the spiritual life men wished to withdraw from the enclosed village area of houses and fields, it was into the all- encircling forest that they went. In a region so vast and with a population still relatively small there was plenty of space for all, whether they wished to cultivate the numerous crops the land would bear, or to withdraw into silence and solitude."*

S: We don't know, really, what the population of India was at that time, but no doubt it was quite small. We do know that at the time of the Mogul Empire,the population of India was about thirty million - in the whole of India, so it is very unlikely that there were more than, what?, ten million people, as a rough guess, in the whole of India at that time; maybe five million in this particular area. Maybe fewer than that. But at the very most, say five million, in the area of the size of England and Wales - <u>at the very most</u>. In other words, not unlike the population of Britain in the time of, say, Queen Elizabeth the First, when, in England still, a lot of the country was covered by forest. So that gives one some general idea.

<u>Nagabodhi</u>: Reading this just did something to my awareness of certain passages, when you hear about people leaving the village and going off into the jungle - into the woods - I realised I'd had a kind of mental image of people going off on this journey like getting a bus out of town to where the forest began (Laughter) rather than the fact that the forest began at the end of your garden....

S: Yes.

<u>Nagabodhi</u>: ...or that it was just <u>there</u>.

S: Or at the end of the fields...

<u>Nagabodhi</u>: yes, just staring you in the face all the time.

S: As it was in England during the Medieval period. (Pause) It wouldn't be very difficult to disappear into the forest and no one hears of you again. You couldn't be tracked; you couldn't be traced; your loving family couldn't find you out. Not much in the way of communication; no post, no newspaper, just merchants and wandering monks, as we call them now, carrying a bit of news from village to village as they walked through the forest.
Just think what Britain would be like now if there were only five million people - if the greater part of it was covered with forest. It could happen again I suppose. Just a few cities - no city larger than say,- I don't know what would be the proper comparison,- certainly no city larger than Norwich at the very most. Even somewhere like Swaffham or Fakenham would be quite a large town. Little villages, little settlements in the forest; little hermitages, colonies

of Brahmins performing the fire sacrifice, colonies of ascetics of various kinds, completely isolated. And you could, if you were so minded, live off things that grew wild: you could live off fruits, wild grains, - if there were very few of you living in the forest. You'd get all your fuel, nuts too, things like that. And, as you can see, lots of fruits. (Pause)

Or if you were a monk, you could live just on the outskirts of the forest, just within the forest, within walking distance of the village, and if the people were sympathetic, you could just go in every day , once or twice even, and just fill your bowl and withdraw into the forest to your hermitage; people need not even know where you went, where your hermitage was; you'd just appear out of the forest and just go on your alms round and then disappear - go back again. And no one would know where you were. I'm sure some people would find that quite attractive. And if you didn't feel like going in for a few days, well, there were always nuts and fruits to eat; you wouldn't even bother to go for alms for a few days. It sounds quite idyllic, doesn't it? (Pause) All right, let's carry on.

Text. *"THE ARYANIZATION OF THE MIDDLE COUNTRY*

Some of the inhabitants of the Gangetic plain may originally have come from the north and east, from the lands we now call Burma and Tibet. At its eastern end there were, at the time of the Buddha, a people called the Anga, whose capital was Champa (near modern Bhagalpur)."

S: That's in modern Bihar.

Text. *"Their name, as indeed that of the Ganges itself, has been identified as Tibeto-Burman, or Sino-Burman. The findings of linguists and archaeologists are summarized as follows: 'Heine Geldern believes that the south-eastern Asiatics (Austronesians), already having considerable Mongoloid mixture, who had come down into Assam and Burma, migrated westwards into India and introduced the tanged adze between 2500 and 1500 BC before the Aryan invasion."*

S: What's a "tanged" adze? An adze is an axe, isn't it? What is a **"tanged"** adze? (Pause) Is it one that can be bound onto a handle? Or is it one with little grooves in it? I think it's one with little grooves in it, but I'm not sure. (Pause) A carpenter should know what a tanged adze is? Anyway, carry on, we can look it up in the dictionary.

Vessantara: Perhaps they don't have these modern tools at Sukhavati! (Laughter)

Text."Percy Smith recognises a Gangetic race in northern India before the Aryan invasion. He believes that a Himalayo-Polynesian race, allied to the Chinese and Tibetan formerly spread over the Gangetic basin from further India."

S: Where is "further India"? Has anyone come across that expression? "Further India" is Indonesia, Java and Sumatra, including even Malaysia, perhaps even Vietnam, as we call it now, - Cambodia, all that area is called "Further India", because subsequently, it came under the influence of Indian civilisation and culture. But especially Java and Sumatra, and Malaysia.

Text. *"What is generally regarded as certain is that there had, for some centuries before the time of the Buddha, been a considerable process of 'Aryanization' spreading south-eastwards from the Indus valley, down the Ganges plain. This may have been the consequence of an actual physical invasion by Aryan-speaking peoples from the north-west beyond India."*

S: In other words this movement comes from the opposite direction. You get the idea?

There was a movement from the northeast down into eastern India; before that, according to some, there is a movement upwards from "Further India" from the southeast; but then just before the time of the Buddha, a movement of `Aryanization' from the northwest; almost from the diametrically opposite corner.

Text.*"...which swept away the ancient city-civilization of the Indus valley, or it may have been part of a general cultural movement, like other cultural 'invasions' which have taken place over the same territory in the centuries since that time. The invasion of north India by Islam provides a clear example of the latter possibility. While there were, it is true, actual movements of Muslim invaders from the north-west, these were only a minority among the people whom they invaded. The spread of Islam (mainly from the eleventh century AD onwards) consisted largely in the adherence of large numbers of the original inhabitants of the territory to Islamic culture and Persian language. This kind of process may well have occurred in the course of the Aryanization of northern India which marked the centuries immediately before the time of the Buddha. In north India this period was, as Kosambi points out, one of transition from a pastoral, herd- keeping mode of life to one of cultivation of the soil. The land was at the 'crucial stage where soon the plough would produce much more than cattle' in the way of food supply. The stages by which this would have come about are fairly clearly traceable."*

S: You may remember that when we studied the first chapter of the Sutta Nipata , we find the Buddha meeting Dhaniya. You remember? And what was Dhaniya?

_____: a farmer

S: No, wasn't a farmer.

Lokamitra: He had cattle, didn't he?

S: He had cattle. He lived with his cattle on the banks of the River Mahi. So clearly, he was following this pastoral way of life. He was a sort of dairy herdsman, living off milk, butter, cheese, meat, with, perhaps, a minimum of cereals and vegetables and so on. On the other hand you find the Buddha meeting Bharadvaja, the Brahmin who was a farmer, who had land and who ploughed and sowed, and so on. Anyway, is that all clear? Does the total picture become a bit clearer now? So this movement of `Aryanization' was quite important. And, of course, along with `Aryanization' came ` Brahminisation' you could say - the Brahmins play a very important part in that - that process of `Aryanization'. All right, let's look at the next section -" Rice cultivation and population increase".

Text.*"RICE CULTIVATION AND THE POPULATION INCREASE*

The situation in the Buddha's time can be seen as one of increasingly extensive agriculture in the middle Gangetic plain. The cost of this increase in agriculture was extensive deforestation. Round each village settlement was an area of cultivated fields, beyond this some pasture, and then the forest. As the bounds of the cultivated fields were pushed outwards, the forested area retreated before the agriculturist's axe and fore. New fields were to be had for the clearing and some of the more enterprising were opening up new settlements. There was consequently a continually spreading area of cultivated field. Where cattle raising, associated with a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life, is the main occupation, there is not normally a high density of population. The increase in cultivation would, therefore, have entailed a sharp increase in the human population of the region. The land which was being brought under cultivation was pre-eminently suited to rice growing... "

S: Rice needs of course lots of water.

Text.*"...especially when advantage was taken of the all-the-year-round water supply from the Ganges in the development irrigation. It is known that at the time of the Buddha this was, in fact, being done. It was the rice of the Gangetic plain which became, and has remained, the major source of food supply in the eastern half of Uttar Pradesh, in Bihar and Bengal. The time spent in cultivating the land would have meant that less time and energy could be spent on herd-keeping. This, together with a decrease in the range of land available for herds, meant a gradual decline in the cattle population. In this way a change in the balance of the people's diet would have occurred, from one in which milk products and meat had a large place, to one in which the larger place was taken by rice and vegetables. It has been pointed out that the latter type of diet is a factor on further population increase. Rice, says Beaujeu-Garnier 'produces two to two-and-a half times more grain to the acre than wheat, two thirds more than barley, and one third more than maize. Moreover, it is a food of high value, especially when consumed in the husk.' In addition to this, whereas a high protein diet, such as that enjoyed be those whose diet consists in large measure of milk products and meat, appears to reduce fertility, a rice diet seems to have the opposite effect; rice provides 'women with diet which predisposes them to fertility; furthermore it can be consumed be very young infants either as a gruel or a pulp, enabling them to survive and thus to be weaned early so that the mother ready to conceive again'. The increase in human population, which had followed the beginning of the deforestation of the Ganges plain, would have resulted in a demand for yet more land to support the increasing numbers."*

S: This is all quite clear and straightforward, isn't it? Trevor Ling seems quite good in summarising information in this sort of way, and this account, as I said earlier, is quite up-to-date - based on all the research that's been done over, now, practically over a period of a hundred years. You notice he's much clearer when he's dealing with something like this, that, in a sense, he really knows something about, than when dealing in that rather confused way, which we saw yesterday, with things which he hasn't thought out very deeply. Here it's just a question of decanting information, and he seems really good at that. All right, let's go on then.

Text.*"By the time of the Buddha a steady growth in the density of population of the Gangetic plain was taking place, and, together with this, there was probably a decline in the number of cattle being reared. To this fact has to be added another, as we shall see later: that cattle were a consumable commodity, so to speak, since they were required in considerable numbers for the brahmanical sacrificial system. Moreover, these sacrifices would probably have increased in number, if only slightly, with the increase in human population. This would have been the case especially in times of threatened shortage of cattle or food, since the sacrifice was supposed to ensure prosperity. The growth of monarchy and the aggressiveness of kings would have supplied another reason for an increase in the number of sacrifices, since success in battle was also held to be secured through priestly offerings. Over the whole area under cultivation the density of population would have remained reasonably uniform, without any very great unevenness anywhere, as is usually the case in rice-growing regions. There would, however, have been a natural and proportionate increase in size of the larger settlements. Towns or cities were certainly to be found throughout the Gangetic plain in the Buddha's day. The six great cities, named in Buddhist texts, were Savatthi, Saketa, Kaushambi, Kashi (Varanasi), Rajagriha and Champa. Apart from these a number of other large towns of the area are known to us by name, such as Kapilavastu, Vesali, Mithila and Gaya. With the rise in population and a general steady growth in the size in the size of settlements, some of the small villages would have expanded into towns, wherever special factors were present to encourage such development, such as location at the junction of caravan routes, or near to river crossings, at places of religious importance, and at points of strategic military or political importance, wherever a stronghold had been established."*

S: Is that clear? Rice cultivation and population increase? All these things were going on the centuries before the Buddha. All right. "Development of Urban Life".

Text.*"DEVELOPMENT OF URBAN LIFE*

It is therefore possible to see that one of the features of life in this region in the sixth century BC was a steady growth in the numbers of people who were beginning to experience an urban way of life. They were then a small minority; but then, as now, they were a minority with a considerable social, cultural and political significance. The cities and towns were centres of industry and trade. Workers in the various industries were organized in guilds, and it is known from the brahmanical and Buddhist sources that these included guilds of wood-workers, iron-workers, leather- workers, painters, ivory-workers and others. These guilds appear from the sources to have been highly organized autonomous bodies, recognised by the state, and able to exercise control over their members."

S: Not unlike the London guilds in the medieval period and right down into the Tudor period and beyond.

Text."Most of the cities and large towns which have been mentioned by name were also political and administrative centres,in that they were capitals of kingdoms (Shravasti, Saketa, Kashi and Rajagriha are examples) or centres for the ruling assemblies of republics (as, for example, Vaishali). They would have become so owing to their strategic situation or the existence of resources for an industry, or both; these reasons together would also have encouraged their growth as centres of trade. Connecting the urban trade centres were established and recognized routes. For example, from Shravasti, the capital of the Kingdom of Koshala, there was a major route eastwards along the northern edge of the Gangetic plain. The route kept close to the Himalayan foothills because at that level the rivers flowing southwards and south-eastwards towards the Ganges could more easily be forded or ferried than lower down in their courses, where they increased in size. The towns which lay along the line of this eastward route received an added importance from the caravan traffic which passed through them and made use of their facilities as halts. Such a town was Kapilavastu, the home of Gotama, the Buddha-to-be, one of the five recognised halts on the route. This continued eastwards to the crossing of the river Gandak, then turned south-eastwards through Vesali, southwards across the Ganges at Pataligama, and thence to Rajagriha, the capital of the Magadhan Kingdom. From there another route led southwards to Gaya and beyond. In other directions, from Shravasti a route led southwards to the city of Ujjain and beyond, while yet another ran north-westwards to Hastinapura and the cities of the Punjab..... "

S: Hastinapura is presently Delhi.

Text.*"...including, most notably, the city of Taxila. There was a good deal of travel by river as well as by land routes, especially in the central part of the Gangetic plain, where the rivers were large enough to allow vessels of considerable size. They also provided a more convenient, safer, and sometimes quicker methods of transporting goods, especially heavier ones, than the overland caravan routes. Kaushambi, Varanasi, and Champa would have been busy river ports and trade centres."*

S: So you see the picture sort of building up, as it were? You get the impression of quite an organised life really at that time, over the whole of this territory. (Pause) All right let's go on then.

Text.*"The cities and towns of the Ganges plain thus began to develop a style of life which was in certain respects fairly distinct from that of the country villages. As centres of business and trade they drew in the wealth of the country, and they also became centres of learning*

and culture, attracting, too, what Atindranath Bose describes as 'parasite professions like stage- acting, dancing, singing, buffoonery, gambling, tavern-keeping, and prostitution. In contrast with the sophisticated and heterogeneous life of the towns is the style which the ***Arthasastra*** *considers proper for the villages; provision is made in that treatise of government for the work of agriculture to be protected from disruptive and diverting influences: No guilds of any kind other than local cooperative guilds shall find entrance into the villages of the Kingdom. Nor shall there be in villages buildings intended for sports and plays. Nor, with the intention of procuring money, free labour, commodities, grains and liquids in plenty, shall actors, dancers, singers, drummers, buffoons and bards make any disturbance to the work of the villagers."*

S: To the **work** of the villagers - that's the operative word. The villagers have got to work hard and produce food for themselves and the people in the towns.

Text.*"The existence of such a regulation, whether it was put into practice, or remained and ideal, is enough to indicate that there was felt to be a distinct difference between the relatively sophisticated life of the town, and that of the countryside. The villagers' awareness of this difference may have been the reason for their reluctance to visit the towns, observed by Migasthenes: 'husband men themselves with their wives and children live in the country and entirely avoid going into town'."*

S: You come across this sort of thing in Britain, during the medieval period and during the Tudor period, when the city, especially London, was the centre of, not only administration, but business and civilisation, and culture, the arts. And the country bumpkin, even the well-born country bumpkin, coming up to London to the court, to the city, was a sort of figure of fun for several centuries - he'd never seen anything like it! So this must have been very much the picture in India at that time - quite a contrast between the life of people living in the countryside: the life of people living in the cities. Perhaps there was something of this in England until even comparatively recently, until the introduction of radio and T.V. - rapid communication of all kinds. It was the trains that really, in a way brought England together and made the cities accessible to people living in the country.

_____: Even now you get a lot of people living in the country who've never been to town.

S: Who've been to the nearest market town, and that's about all.

Nagabodhi: You still feel sometimes in the country, in shops, just talking to people, a distrust of you because you're a townsman.

[End of side Side two]

S: I remember I had an aunt who used to come up to London from Norfolk, actually, once a year - three days every year - it was the event of the year - and she used to get all excited and flustered, - to come up to London was a really great experience. This is only, what? this is only forty years ago. And a hundred years ago? Even more so.

Nagabodhi: I know in France - this was certainly the case ten years ago, the number plate shows where you come from - if you've got a Paris number plate on your car, people will shout at you out in the country (Chuckling) and throw things at your car and generally, not want to have anything to with you. I remember a lot of scenes where this happened.

S: I remember my father telling me, that on one of his visits to his grandparents, that is to say my great grandparents in Norfolk, in a village - he was talking to his old grandfather, who was blind and about seventy years of age. And his grandfather was saying "What are you

doing my lad?" and so on, and my father who was then about fifteen or sixteen, said - so this must have been right at the beginning of this century - said, "Oh, I'm working now". And then the old chap said, "How far away is your workplace?" So my father said, "Six or seven miles." The old man said, "Oh, you have to walk that distance there and back every day!" No, my father said, I go by tram". He'd never heard of a tram. "What's that? What's a tram?" There were horse-drawn trams in those days, so my father described. So the old chap nodded, and then he said that's how you get to work OK. Then he said, "But suppose you're late. Suppose you miss that tram, then what do you do"? So my father said, "Well there's one comes along only a few minutes later, they run every few minutes". So the old man said, "Don't you go telling me those stories (chuckling). He raised his stick and he lashed out at my father. (Laughter) He thought he was having him on. So my father's grandmother came running in and said, "What are you saying to your grandfather. Why are you upsetting him"? The old chap was quite put out. He couldn't believe there were trams running every few minutes. He just couldn't imagine it. This was only, what?, the beginning of this century, so it was in the last seventy years. So think how it must have been in those days - the contrast, in India, between the life of the village and the life of the city. You still get it in many parts of India, and the vast majority of the people in the villages have never been to the big cities - the really big cities. Some haven't even been to a small city, to a nearest, well, market town. All right, carry on then.

Text.*"THE SIX CITIES OF THE MIDDLE COUNTRY*

Of the six great cities of the Gangetic plain at the time of the birth of Gotama, one had become particularly prominent: Shravasti, the capital of the Kingdom of Koshala. By the time of the Buddha's death, however it was beginning to lose this position of superiority as Rajagriha, some 270 miles to the south-east, grew in importance. Nevertheless, throughout the sixth century BC Shravasti was the great centre of life and activity."

S: That's of course up in the north-west, not all that far from Delhi.

Text.*"In the Jataka literature, cities such as Varanasi (Banares), capital of a kingdom which had by now been conquered and absorbed by Kishala, appear as places which had lost some of their former importance and had yielded in prestige to the large, lively and wealthy city of Shravasti. According to a tradition mentioned by the great Buddhist writer of the fifth century AD, Buddhaghosa, there were in the Buddha's day 57,000 families living in Shravasti."*

S: So you could say about half a million people there. That would probably be reasonable.

_____: Fifty-seven ? Oh!

S: Yes, fifty-seven thousand families - if you count ten people per family that gives you half a million.

Nagabodhi: You reckon families were that big in those days?

S: Well `family' means the father, the mother, one or two servants. So probably about you could say about half a million.

_____: He seemed to suggest earlier that the women were continually having children as well. .

S: Yes, but there was also a high infant mortality, as there is at present. Half your children die, or two-thirds; as in England until a hundred or so years ago. (Pause) All right, on we go.

Text.*"The city was both the capital of the Kingdom of Koshala and the leading centre of commercial activity. It lay on the caravan route from north-west to south-east where this passed between the foothills of the Himalayas and the difficult terrain to the south, where the rivers became broad and difficult to cross and where there were still tracts of dense tropical jungle and marsh. Moreover, Shravasti was at the junction of this trade route with another which led southwards to the city if Kaushambi and beyond it to the Deccan. So Shravasti, as an important junction of trade routes, had become famous for its rich merchants. One such was Anathapindika, who, at a very high price, purchased from Prince Jeta of Shravasti a pleasant piece of ground outside the city in order to give it to the Buddha and his monks as a residence and a retreat."*

S: You remember that Anathapindaka met the Buddha in Rajagriha, which was 270 miles from Shravasti. Apparently, he was on a business trip there, and met the Buddha. The Buddha was constantly travelling between Rajagriha and Shravasti - a distance of 270 miles. Rather like us travelling from what, London to.....

_____: Cornwall

S: Cornwall? Is it?

Manjuvajra: 280 to Cornwall.

S: That's about the distance then. So that gives one some idea, and that meant, of course, travelling on foot. The Buddha never rode in a chariot, or litter, or anything of that sort, he always walked. So it gives one quite a good idea of the sort of distances involved. One could go further west than Shravasti, and further east than Rajagriha - further south- but this was an ordinary trip to make. Merchants were constantly coming and going in connection with their business enterprises; and people like the Buddha and his disciples too - constantly travelling to and fro on foot.

How long do you think it would take to walk? If you're accustomed to walking you could do ten or twelve miles a day very comfortably.

Vessantara: About three weeks

S: About three weeks. Yes. And if you were in a hurry merchants could no doubt go by chariot - go on horseback - go in litters even. They could probably do it in a week, again very easily. Or even if they were really hard pressed, two or three days. And even the mendicants just going their ten or twelve miles a day could do it very comfortably in three weeks, even in **two** weeks without very much trouble - (Pause) - if it wasn't too hot. (pause)
So one begins to get an impression of the scale of things. So you have say two to three weeks if you are a wandering monk, and if you wanted to get from Rajagriha to Sravasti - two or three weeks on the road going from one little village to another, walking through the forests, coming across the occasional market town, and then you come into the big city, having been two or three weeks on the road. (Pause) All right, on we go.

Text.*"The explanation of the name Shravasti which is given in later Pali Buddhist literature is itself evidence of the city's prosperity: the name, it is said, was derived from the common saying of those days that this was a place where everything was obtainable."*

S: ..a sort of emporium.

Text*"This is interesting as historical evidence of the standard of living in Shravasti, although it is questionable as etymology. A modern explanation of the name of the city, and of the river*

*Ravati on whose bank it stood, connects them both with **Sharavati**, derived from the name of the sun-god, Savitri. The city lay along the south bank of the Ravati; it was crescent shaped, with the concave side facing the river. Its 'walls and watch towers' are mentioned in one of the Jatakas, and even today, 2,500 years later, the ruins of these solid brick walls are forty feet high and the remains of the western watch tower, on the river bank, are fifty feet high. The site's modern name is Saheth Maheth, a corruption of the original name, and it is in Ginda district, in Uttar Pradesh, about ten miles by road from the railway station of Balrampur."..*

S: There is a small Buddhist centre there at present.

Text.*"The ruins were identified by General Cunningham in the course of his archaeological survey of India; archaeological excavations were carried out in 1907-8 and in 1910-11, and today the place has become a well-frequented pilgrim centre. The original lay-out and character of the city can thus be fairly reliably reconstructed from both literary and archaeological evidence. Themajor routes entered the city through the principal gateways on the south-west, the south, and the south-east. The roads converged in an open square in the centre of the city. The larger and more important buildings were in the western half, while in the eastern half were streets and lanes where were the bazaars and houses of the common people. In this eastern half were gathered all kinds of specialized trades, each street- bazaar specializing in one commodity: in one street were the cooks, in another the garland-makers, in another the perfumers, and so on. One of the Jatakas mentions a group of about five hundred page-boys in the city, who were particularly adept at wrestling. Containing a royal court and the residences of opulent merchants, the city would have been the centre of attraction throughout the wide area served by the routes which converged here. It was undoubtedly the 'modern' city if the time, and had been so sufficiently long for this reputation to have been established by the time of the Buddha, even though it was by then nearing the end of its period of pre-eminence. The significance of these facts will be seen later, when we consider the special nature of the community founded by the Buddha."*

S: That's quite clear, isn't it? All right let's go straight on.

Text.*"Most of the characteristic features of Shravasti were found in the other great cities, except Rajagriha, which in certain respects was distinct from the rest. But Saketa, Kaushambi, Varanasi, and..."*

S: Varanasi. That's is the modern Benares, of course.

Text.*"...and Champa had much in common with one another, and with Shravasti, the greatest of them all. Each had as its original **raison d'etre** the fact of being both a political and a commercial centre. Each of the four had been the capital of a formerly independent kingdom, which, by the Buddha's time, had been absorbed by one or other of the two giants, Koshala and Magadha. These capital cities, which had by then lost their autonomy, had clearly been places of power and grandeur, and much of this would still have been apparent in the Buddha's day, in the impressive fortified walls and watch towers that each possessed, so massive that in some cases they still exist, like those of Shravasti, as substantial ruins even today."*

S: This is a quite familiar picture in a way because even in Britain: there were cities like Edinburgh and Winchester that were originally capitals of independent kingdoms, and so, even though today, they are, as it were, provincial cities there's still a sort of aura surrounding them , especially you could say, probably, in Edinburgh, because it was originally a seat of political power.

Text.*"Situated in each case on a large river, at the junction of important trade routes, they were also prominent commercial cities. Since river boats carried a good deal of traffic, both in passengers and commodities, the cities were important* ***entrepots*** *at the crossing of land and river routes. Their leading citizens were merchants and bankers, officials and princes from various places, who would trave about the city in horse-drawn chariots or by elephant. Within the wide extent of the city walls were contained, in addition to the houses of merchants and traders, a great variety of crafts and industries, 'perfumers, spice sellers, sugar-candy sellers, jewellers, tanners, garland-makers, carpenters, goldsmiths, weavers, washermen, etc. Like other large cities, ancient and modern, they had also the distinction of 'abounding in rogues'. In one respect Varanasi (Banaras) was distinguished from the others, in that it was, in the Buddha's day, not only a wealthy and prosperous place noted for its textiles and ironware, but also a great centre of learning, with educational institutions which were among the oldest in India. Then, as for many centuries since, it was the most prominent intellectual and religious centre, certainly of northern India. Its city hall had become a place used not so much for the transaction of public business as for public discussions of religious and philosophical questions. This intellectual pre-eminence of Banaras in the Buddha's day is a fact we shall refer to again in connection with the outline of the Buddha's public activity."*

S: Any points that need clarifying there? (Pause) All right, let's go straight on.

Text.*"Rather distinct in certain respects from these other cities was Rajagriha, the capital of the growing Magadhan kingdom. This was situated to the south of the Ganges, in what is now Bihar, where the river plain meets the first line of hills, outliers of the greater upland region of Chota Nagpur and central India. Rajagriha was one of the oldest cities of India, with a history reaching back long before the sixth century BC. The original site was a stronghold encircled by five low hills as a natural rampart, with walls and embankments filling the gaps between them. For this reason, the older name of the city was Giribbaja (mountain stronghold). A new city, just outside the northern hill was built by Bimbisara, the king of Magadha, who was an older contemporary of the Buddha. Bimbisara's action would appear to reflect both the expanding population of the city, which could no longer be contained in the original area, and the growing strength of the Magadhan kingdom; and it may indicate, too, a confidence that the security of the new city was assured against any possible attack, Northwards from Rajagriha the major trade route was the one that led to Shravasti and thence to the north-west of India. Southwards the route led to one of the major sources of Magadha's strength, the iron-bearing hills of what is today south Bihar. As the capital of an expanding kingdom Rajagriha attracted travellers of all kinds; provision is said to have been made for these to be accommodated in a large building in the centre of the city. One such traveller was the rich merchant Anathapindika, from the Koshalan capital, Shravasti, who, according to Buddhist tradition, first met the Buddha in Rajagrha. At night the outer gates were closed against possible enemy attack under cover of darkness, for in spite of the buoyancy of mood which led to the building of the new city, there was apparently still some fear of invasion from hostile neighbouring states. It is said that the sanitary conditions within the city left much to be desired because of the density of the population. The city was the venue for a famous festival which attracted crowds of people of all social classes from the whole area of Magadha and Anga. Nautch dances formed a prominent part of the public entertainment, which was held in the open air, together with popular music, singing and other amusements. Special arrangements were made for the provision of food for the crowds. At other tomes troupes of players, acrobats and musicians used to visit the city and provide entertainment for days at a time."*

S: Not all that different from the life of some of the cities of India even today; in the so-called more backward areas of India. (Pause) All right on we go.

Text.*"This brief summary of some of the available information about the six major cities of*

the Buddha's day is enough to indicate certain common features which they shared. The life of each of these cities was conditioned by two major factors: first, a junction of trade routes, and second, a royal court. Each of these cities had been the capital of a kingdom, even though some of them (Saketa, Kaushambi, Varanasi and Champa) had been absorbed into more powerful kingdoms and had become vice-royalties. The crucial factor in the growth of each of them had been the development of monarchy in north India, although important subsidiary factors, such as a tradition of learning, had aided the original growth. Ultimately it was the presence of a royal court which seems to have determined their prosperity; it was essential to the security of a kingdom that the royal capital was strong and secure; as the kingdom grew and prospered so did the life of the city. When the kingdom became weak or lost its independence so, eventually, did the city and in some cases the end of a kingdom meant the end of the life of the city. The one exception is Varanasi (Banaras) where, in spite of the loss of political sovereignty, the city has survived to modern times. This must very largely, though not entirely, be attributed to the special sanctity which Varanasi possesses for Hindus. In addition, it had a strong tradition of brahmanical learning and the natural local advantages of its site."

S: Even today there are hundreds of little schools and colleges of Sanskrit in Benares.

Text.*"Since there is an important connection between the character of early Buddhist civilization and the life of the north-Indian city, and also between the latter and the growth of monarchy, it is necessary at this point to give attention to the political conditions in north India in the sixth century BC."*

S: Is that clear so far? What we've done? It gives one quite a vivid little picture of the physical, economic and social environment in North India at about the times of the Buddha, so it's against this sort of background that one must see the Buddha's life and activity. From the historical point of view this account places that life and that activity very much in the historical context - social context- economic context - wider geographical context. (Pause)

_____: It seems as though the Indian subcontinent had reached this stage had reached this stage about, what.... one thousand five hundred years before the West.

S: Yes!

_____: Why didn't it —— why did it not develop in the same way as the west. Why is it that industrialisation had never occurred in India?

S: Ah. Well this is the sixty-four thousand dollar question, as regards to the history of Europe. Why did the Industrial revolution take place in Europe? It **could** have taken place in China, because they certainly had, say, by the fifteenth century, the sixteenth century, when you can see the beginnings of scientific interest in the West, which led to the Industrial Revolution, they had, by that time, just as much interest apparently, just as much knowledge of these things, as people had in the West; likewise in Turkey. So why was it the West went ahead with these things? Some historians and some thinkers attribute it, or suggest, rather, that it had some connection with Christianity, and the breakdown of Christianity. I don't know if any **clear** account has been given of this; but the suggestion is that there was some sort of imbalance in Christianity. The Western mind had been in a state of unbalance for many, many centuries, and that this had led to a wrong sort of attitude towards nature - an exploitive and appropriative sort of attitude, and a desire for power over nature and conquest of nature, and the eventually got out of hand. Some scholars trace this back to the Christian view of nature, as something, as it were alien, - man being completely different from nature. I don't know whether this is far-fetched or not. But the fact that the Industrial Revolution developed in the West, it just does seem to have its roots very deep down in Western thought and

culture, and no doubt Christianity played an important part in that, though probably the exact way in which it did so hasn't been fully explored as yet. But it may very well have something to do with the Christian attitude toward nature. And also to this importance placed on material things. (Pause)

I was, just recently, looking into a book which dealt with the Tudor period, and a lot of what Trevor Ling writes here about the ancient Indian cities and the Court and trade - he just seems to describe, very broadly, Tudor England. So you are very right in saying that India, at least the Middle Country, at this particular period, was in much the same position as England and Wales during the **Tudor** period. Even in the Tudor period there were the beginnings of technology - there were arms, there were cannons. But just leaving aside those things, well, what was there? - it's just like a description of London -London had its bazaars, little streets of goldsmiths - it had its guilds, it had its royal courts - it was a trade centre - it had its river: its river traffic - the greater part of the country covered with forests. It's as though, in the course of the last five hundred years, due to the Industrial Revolution, Europe has developed in a completely manner. Whether that really constitutes progress, or whether that is an aberration that will eventually have to be corrected - this is a very important question!

Because also, within the context of, say, ancient India - how could the city develop? The city, in a way, was parasitic on the countryside.The city could have a higher standard of living , couldn't it? - everything was available in the city, as in Shravasti; that was, in a sense, at the expense of people living in the countryside; in a way they had to be kept poor and made to devote themselves to agriculture, to keep the cities going. And why did the city collapse when the kingdom collapsed? Because it didn't have that area to draw upon. If the kingdom was conquered then its resources went to the other capital city. And this first capital city lost its importance and had no longer those tax-gathering powers; or perhaps to a very limited extent. So this is what happened via the Industrial Revolution, in this case of Europe - Europe became the city of the world until the rest of the world started keeping up. The rest of the world was like the countryside, exploited for its raw materials, and then, of course, the industrialised countries sent back these raw materials in manufactured form - sold them to the underdeveloped countries, as we call them now. What is happening now is the underdeveloped countries are catching up, so Europe is becoming, - America is becoming, - less and less, the city of the world , as it were. If you see what I mean? The so-called third world countries are in the position of the countryside, the village. Now this evening up process is beginning to take place, maybe Europe has taken, via its industrial competence more than its fair share - it's losing its markets isn't it? So therefore I think one has to look for a lowering of the standard of living in the West. Or at least, at the **very least**, no improvement in the standard of living vis-a-vis the so-called developing countries.

I think one has to accept this, and if one is thoughtful, accept it quite voluntarily and cheerfully. I think this is what the Western nations have to adjust themselves to. Do you see what I'm getting at? Because you can't have the whole world becoming a city unless you find other planets inhabited which you can exploit. The whole world **can't** become a city, as it were. So if the countryside starts asserting its rights , the cities have to, in a way, give way. So probably you are going to come to a state of affairs, which they've got to some extent in America - within that particular context - where you've got in a way neither country or city. You see what I mean? And this is not a very pleasant sort of possibility , a sort of diffused.. what do they call it.. not suburbia.. there's another term, not even suburbia.
They envisaged - this has already started happening in the States - sort of urban area which extends for 50, 100 miles, and may eventually cover the whole country. It's neither city in the old sense, nor is it countryside, much less still forest. So there is a sort of evening out process perhaps, going on. It's a relatively significant development.

Siddhiratna: What's the significance of the fact that urbanisation is stretching out 100 miles

into the..... Is it losing nature?

S: No. It's not that: it's not that the city stretches out, but that in stretching out it loses its character as a city. You don't get cities. Well, you can see this in the case of London: London is not just one city, it's not just one unified entity. You've lost that. You've got about ten or twelve cities, really.

_____: Los Angeles, even more so.

S: Yes. even, for instance, a place like Auckland which has got a much smaller population. It covers the same area as Greater London, with about a twelfth of the population. And there's no real city centre; just two or three big streets (Pause).

But anyway, this is, in a sense, in passing, but why Europe gave birth to the Industrial Revolution - this is probably due to something inherent in the Western mind, due to conditioning by Christianity, and so on, connected possibly with attitude towards nature, and a sort of Faustian attitude towards life, if you know what I mean. And this may have to be reversed, to some extent at least. We may have to undo, or dismantle, the sort of more extravagant manifestations of the Industrial Revolution. We may have to go back; may have to accept a lower standard of living. (Pause)

Nagabodhi: I think most of us here have! (Laughter)

S: Yes indeed, so in that way, in terms of civilisation, in sociological terms, we're of some significance.

Nagabodhi: Five years on the road back.

S: So this is, for instance, why I've been questioning lately, this attitude that Scandinavia is more advanced. This has popped up in my correspondence with Vajrabodhi and Bodhisri, and also propped up in Bodhisri's contribution to `Shabda' recently. Did you notice that? A reference to Scandinavia as more advanced. What does one mean when one says that Scandinavia is more advanced? Or, the Scandinavian countries are more advanced? They've gone farther on the road to ruin. This is what it really means. They've gone further than we have in this country **in a wrong direction**. For instance, Vajrabodhi used to say in letters to me - and Bodhisri sometimes did the same thing - that when they came to England they felt they were entering the Victorian period, especially in economic terms. Nothing sort of worked so well, nothing was so up-to-date; the technology wasn't completely up-to-date; all these old railway stations and no nice, new, modern railway stations; everything old-fashioned. I thought about this and I thought, well yes, this is true. It is quite a just criticism. In the Scandinavian countries, including Finland, everything is more up-to-date, more modern, more stream-lined, more mechanised, computerised, and so on, but there has been a terrible price paid in purely human terms. In England the situation is that, yes, we are behind industrially, we are behind technicologically, but there has been a greater conservation of purely human values. Bodhisri for instance, mentioned that when she came back to England, I don't think she appreciated the significance of this remark, but she felt much sort of safer. The pace of life seemed calmer and people much more friendly and relaxed, whereas in Helsinki at least, people are very tense, closed off; there was a problem of alcoholism - a very, very severe problem - alcoholism among middle-aged men - you see alcoholics on the streets, on the trams, on the buses, everywhere in Helsinki, on every street corner virtually you see a drunk - every restaurant, every teashop has to have a strong man on the door to keep out the drunks. **Every single one.** And also, Vajrabodhi told me, and I don't think this is an exaggeration, if, as you enter a teashop or restaurant, you are laughing, you won't be admitted - they think that you're drunk. A Finn never laughs unless he's drunk. (Laughter) So

is this progress? It's technicological advance, but is it progress in human terms?

From some of the references that I get in correspondence from Vajrabodhi and other Friends, and also references I see in general writings in the newspapers, you get the impression that somehow humanity is more advanced in Scandinavia in **human** terms, as though that's a further step in the evolutionary process almost. Well I think it's a blind alley that they've gone down, and they've gone further down that blind alley than we have in this country. We perhaps **started** it, because the Industrial revolution started in **Britain**. And that's something we've got to answer for.

Manjuvajra: When you think of the kind of archetypal industrialist I think of a kind of a man from the middle of England somewhere, - who really a bit of an explorer - he's out to kind of really make something work - he's a bit of an adventurer - in a way he seems to have quite a lot of positive qualities.

S: He's out to make money!

Manjuvajra: I don't know. I think those sort of people come along afterwards

Several voices at once.

Siddhiratna: .....a hero or a sort of explorer of some kind.....

S: Maybe you should distinguish between the inventor and the man who exploits the invention. They are not always the same person. (Pause)

_____: Yeah. Because also going with industrialism - when I think of the industrial West, I think of the American, fairly aggressive but very sharp type, the kind who can organise things and seems a bit sort of crisp in his activity. Whereas when I think of someone, an Indian, say, they always seem much easier.

S: That isn't true. They **seem** easier, but they're out for a fast rupee. The American is after a fast buck. Some of these Indian businessmen in Bombay and Calcutta are as shrewd and sharp and crooked, twisted, and twisting, as anyone in the West.

Siddhiratna: I think you can see that in this country among the Indian community.

Manjuvajra: In the same way?

S: In a much more good humoured way. They've got more aplomb and more `savoir faire'. They cut your throat with a sweeter smile, that's all it is really. They keep up the old Hari Ram, Hari Ram. (Laughter). But also there is this to consider, and Tawny has given it consideration in "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism", that the whole industrial development was somehow connected with Protestantism. It was the Protestant parts of Europe that gave birth to the Industrial Revolution; well Britain and Germany mainly.

Siddhiratna: What period in history was that, Bhante?

S: The Industrial Revolution?

Siddhiratna: The rise of Protestantism ?

S: Protestantism was from say, the middle of the sixteenth century right down to its heyday, well I don't know. It hasn't even ended really.

Siddhiratna: The fifteen hundreds then.

S: Mm. Yes.

_____: The Eighteenth century were the big battles.

S: The seventeenth century, well sixteenth and seventeenth. Luther was born in the fifteenth century, and lived over into the beginnings of the sixteenth. (Pause)
Don't forget Henry the Eighth wrote a pamphlet against him. In the Tudor period there were the beginnings of industrial revolution on a small scale.

Siddhiratna: The cancellation of strip farming, where people began to be dispossessed of their possessions on the land and forced into finding new work.

S: You notice also in this account, the iron mines of Magadha, well this is now where you've got these big industrial works in modern Bihar. They've got coal and they've got iron, and that's one of the big centres of their industrial development (Indian name), that's that area.

But to go back to what I was saying: I think, in a way, the Industrial Revolution was a mistake, it represents a loss of balance, within a total social context, or taking it in a total context. So I think, to some extent, we have to retrace our steps.

Siddhiratna: What do you mean by total context, total context of what?

S: The human life and the world. Because it meant that that development was possible only by the West - the industrialised nations treating the rest of the world as countryside, as it were - sources of raw materials and eager buyers of manufactured goods.

Siddhiratna: Yes, but I should imagine that part of the motive behind that is to do with profit and economic growth.

S: Yes, you get this vast accumulation of profits, vast accumulation of wealth, well, in Britain in the Victorian period .

Siddhiratna: But I should have thought that the Industrial revolution, or the technology that comes from that is good in the sense that it can serve humanity.

S: In a way, but if the whole world becomes industrialised the standard of living will go down. In fact, in a sense you could say the whole world cannot become industrialised, not in the sense that the West has been industrialised.

Siddhiratna: Why can't it become industrialised?

S: Well, just think what I said a little while ago.

Nagabodhi: Where would the raw materials come from? Where would the food come from?

S: Where would the **cheap** labour come from?

Nagabodhi: If everybody was living in the city who would make the food? Where would cheap labour come from?

Manjuvajra: But there is another side. I mean the modern industrial achievements are in

the field of plastics and synthetic products. I mean, they can be world-wide ( ) raw materials anyway.

Siddhiratna: Or in the sense of automation.

- several voices - words obscured.

Siddhiratna: Technology advances so far that it becomes unnecessary to employ human labour.

S: What about food?

Siddhiratna: Well I think that farming is an industrial activity now. It's not so much ..... (speaking at same time) words obscured ....

S: It certainly employs fewer people than before.
Siddhiratna: Yeah. I don't think you need that many people to supply the towns with food in fact.

S: At the same time you have this enormous increase of population. The global population is doubling every thirty years now.

Nagabodhi: But then, if you've got more work being done by less people - less people being needed on the land - you then get the problems of unemployment in the cities, and people with no direction in their life, no kind of relationship with what they're doing.

Siddhiratna: Well presumably that's where things like FWBO comes in.

S: Right. You can see, that in a way (laughter) the wanderers could be supported in the time of the Buddha just because there was a surplus of food and so on. And you can see from the life of the Buddha, that many of the people who became monks as we call them now, wandered and followed the Buddha, were young mean from well-to-do families, who didn't have to work apparently - young men from the cities; or groups of them sometimes, who didn't have to work, had nothing much to do, and found life dull and boring and not very inspiring, and found a new way of life, a new ideal, in the Buddha's movement. They had reached the limit of **material** development, so he offered them the next step, as it were, which was psychological and spiritual development. That seems to be very much the present `here and now' doesn't it?

Nagabodhi: But people in that time were less scarred by the experience.

S: Oh! very much less. Yes. Yes.

_____: The rate of increase of the standard of living is lower now than it has been for twenty/thirty years or so, but before this process really gets going, which you talk about: this sort of de-industrialisation or whatever it might be - ah.....

S: It's already started. Already the question is being raised in Britain whether we need to manufacture our own motor cars. This is actually being discussed, which would have been unthinkable a few years ago: whether we really need to make our own motor cars. For instance New Zealand doesn't make her own motor cars. (Pause)

_____: But surely that sort of thing will lead to more international division of labour, as it were, which may not necessarily ....uh.....it may mean we just concentrate on something

else.....

S: Yes.

_____:.....and may just increase the process even more.

S: Yes. The Soviet Union has tried to use the Eastern European countries as sort of, well, `client' states , and tried very hard to prevent them from developing their industries, and to keep them predominantly agricultural, just as the *Arthasastra* says that the countryside should be kept, exactly the same thing. Because that means that the Soviet Union, other factors being equal of course, has a higher standard of living, but at the expense of the Eastern European countries. And, of course, they are resisting this. They don't want to be just `breadbaskets' for the Soviet Union.

END OF TAPE 4