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

[Tape 8]

There's nothing negative, but it's human beings just like horses and cows. They smell like horses and cows. (Laughter) They are contented, grossly content, like horses and cows, like well fed animals, where they happen to be well fed. Just like that. It's a really animal existence.

Ratnaguna: I'm still confused about the individual, how he becomes an individual. You say that it's a lot of practice combining?

S: Not necessarily a lot of practice combining. It could be two or three which are of decisive importance in any individual case.

Ratnaguna: Is there a point where the individual realises that he's individual, where someone realises that they are an individual.

S: I think that point would be when he realises that he's on his own, and that he is aware of others but they're not aware of him. I think, if there is any point of realisation, I'd say it was that.

Ratnaguna: Is that sort of absolute? Is he then an individual or is he still....

S: No, I wouldn't describe this as full individuality. There can be degrees of this sort of realisation even. You also might come to understand or come to see that you think differently from others, and that you'd see that they were not thinking as you were thinking, or rather you would see that you were not thinking as they were thinking, and you'd see this and understand it, but you'd also see that they couldn't understand why you were wanting to be different. They would be thinking that there's something wrong with you. Maybe you were ill, maybe you'd gone mad or maybe you were possessed by an evil spirit or maybe you were just being perverse, or maybe they just couldn't understand it. Well why is he different? Why does he want to do things in a different way? Why does he think differently from everybody else? They can't sort of see into his mind, as it were, but he can see, at least to some extent, into theirs. And he realises that they not only don't see what I see, but they don't see me, they don't see why I think and feel this. Maybe in the very early stages, this is very sort of dim and vague and embryonic and more like a feeling than a conscious thought, but it grows and develops and becomes more sort of clear and more conscious, more self-conscious. Just as in our own case when we grew up. There are all sorts of factors contributing to our realisation that we are, as it were, independent individuals. It may have been a very gradual sort of incrementation or process or it might have been quite sudden and dramatic and connected with very definite incidents and experiences.

Anyway, "The monarchy, the city and individualism" - maybe we need not say anything more than that, and in the afternoon we go onto "The Religious and Ideological Environment" which will probably more simple and straightforward.

S: "The Religious and Ideological Environment". I think here Trevor Ling will be giving us just a summary of what is sort of generally known. There probably won't be anything very controversial. We can try and get through it quite quickly and then when we come onto part three we'll be into the central portion of the book really. We can spend more time on that.

Text.*"A TIME OF RELIGIOUS CHANGE*

It was suggested at the outset that we merely prejudice our understanding of the Buddha's historical significance if we think of him as the founder of a religion in the customary modern

sense of the term. A more useful way of approaching the matter is to examine the nature of the early Buddhist community - its principles, its purposes, and its social implications - and then to consider whether it is not more appropriate to regard the Buddha as the founder, in effect, of something more approaching a type of civilization."

S: In other words it seems he isn't going to consider the Sangha as a spiritual community or pay any attention to the question of individuality in the true sense. Anyway we'll just note that and pass on.

Text *"We shall not, therefore, begin by regarding the Buddha as one who was consciously a religious reformer or innovator. It is possible that his role is better understood as that of the opponent or critic of religion, who had no intention of founding yet another example of what he criticized."*

S: There's no example or no instance of the Buddha criticizing any such thing as religion, even in inverted commas. He criticized certain practices, he criticized certain observances, certain beliefs, but one cannot really regard him as criticizing religion as such. In any case religion in that sense wasn't known at all in his day. So I don't think Trevor Ling can get around that by just putting religion in inverted commas. Anyway let's go on.

Text*"This is, of course, to assume that 'religions' may be seen as surviving elements of civilizations which tend to seek re-embodiment in some new, integrated system. This is, broadly, how the situation in the Buddha's day may be interpreted. The old Vedic society of the Aryans was in a state of dissolution as a consequence of the movement of Aryan peoples into a new geographical environment (that of the middle Gangetic plain), and as a result of their having settled into a new kind of economy, one which was predominantly agricultural rather than pastoral and nomadic. The brahman priests had merged as a distinct social class and were, consciously or unconsciously, engaged in redefining their own position in society, and the position of other classes in relation to their own. The reconstituted civilization which was centred on kingship. brahmanically consecrated and legitimized, was only just beginning to emerge. Religion, as a phenomenon of the transitional period of flux between one civilization and another, a vestigial remnant of the old which had not yet been re-integrated in a new, emerging culture, seems to have existed in the Buddha's day in a number of characteristic forms."*

S: So he seems to regard religion "as a phenomenon of the transitional period of flux between one civilization and another". What do you think of that? You see what he means, don't you? Where does he go wrong do you think, as regards Buddhism?

_____: Well Buddhism hasn't got anything to do with group values.

S: He misses out the spiritual community, he misses out the individual completely. It's a rather odd way of regarding religion. Is this a common sociological view these days?

_____: It sounds a bit like Toynbee's idea. Religions starting out as new sets of ideas which establish new civilizations.

S: But perhaps they do, but is that really their aim and object? That is the real point isn't it?

Siddhiratna: Is he actually saying that religion is as a phenomena of a transitional period. Does he mean that there wasn't any religion before and there probably won't be any religion after, once it becomes established?

S: Ah, yes. Religion as something sort of split off from the civilization. He began the book

by identifying religion really as civilization, and when the civilization sort of breaks down, then religion is just left occupying a few nooks and corners. So then a new sort of civilization arises which seems to be connected with the previous civilization and to be reconstituted on a higher level, and simply connected by the vestiges of religion which were left in between. This seems to be his view. But it isn't really very clear, but you get the general picture as he sees it. The Aryan society, the Aryan civilization has broken down. There are some vestiges of it surviving in the Buddha's day. The new civilization presumably inaugurated by the Buddha, hasn't yet emerged, but those vestiges of the old civilization exiting now as religion, are sort of taken up by the Buddha and sort of reshaped into a new civilization.

Siddhiratna: Can you infer from that then that his view is that civilizations cause religions, as it were. That without civilization there would be no religion.

S: Without a civilization there would be no religion. As the sort of underlying principles of the civilization sort of cease to control the civilization, the civilization becomes controlled by other principles and other factors, then the principles are just sort of relegated to private life. So you get a sort of intermediate period where vestiges of civilization exist in a non public form, in a private form predominantly, which is what he calls religion, and then after those principles have been suitable refurbished, apparently, religion goes public again and becomes another civilization. A sort of bigger and better civilization. That seems to be the way he sees things.

Siddhiratna: Presumably he sees it like that as well because of things which you associate with civilization like high learning, art and perhaps even commerce etc.

S: Yes. But he doesn't grasp firmly this idea of the development of the individual and this is the root of the whole difficulty. But anyway this is just his little introduction to the different kinds of religion existing in the Buddha's day. I think probably the confusions of that introductory paragraph don't affect his summary now of religious life in the time of the Buddha which now follows. So let's see what that says.

Text.*"With regard to these, and to the religious element in classical Hindu civilization it may be useful at this point to correct a fairly common Western misconception. One of its best-known exponents was Albert Schweitzer. He worked out a broad contrast between Eastern and Western religions, using as a basis for differentiation their respective attitudes to the empirical world. Western religion, declares Schweitzer, was, in general, world- and life-affirming, while Eastern religion was world- and life-negating. Like all generalizations of such magnitude, Schweitzer's is open to many objections and qualifications. For instance, there are and have been examples of Western belief and practice which are very good candidates for inclusion in Schweitzer's world- and life-negating category. It is true that there are and have been some minor systems of thought and practice in Asia, especially in India, which do virtually deny the reality of the life of the senses and the physical, historical world, and which do direct men's attention away from the realm of sensory existence, which is regarded as ultimately unreal, to a realm of pure bliss which is to be attained through the realization of the idea that this world and its life are illusion. But in the Buddha's time, however, such a world- and life-negating attitude was* ***not*** *a prominent characteristic of religious belief in India. It was not entirely unheard-of, however, and was found in embryonic form in a few places in the Upanishadic literature. The Upanishads can be described in the most general way as philosophical writings. Most of the principle Upanishads are regarded as products of the period between about 800 BC and the time of the Buddha. The name 'Upanishad' indicates teaching which is given to a few select initiates, those who are 'sitting round, near': that is, near to the teacher who is imparting his esoteric doctrines to them. This interpretation of the title is confirmed by the contents and the style; the language used is*

often cryptic, requiring the possession of some kind of key for its elucidation, one which is not now always available. The reason for its cryptic nature appears to have been that the teaching was given only to those whom the teacher regarded as sufficiently mature spiritually. unlike the later Sutra literature, the Upanishads are not systematic treatises;"

S: Sutra literature here means not the Buddhist sutras but the sutras in the sense of systematically arranged collections of aphorisms covering the whole of a certain subject.

Text*"...they contain a variety of ideas, some of which are in fact, in contradiction to one another. But certain central themes may be said to be common to all the Upanishadic literature. Of these the most outstanding is the idea that 'underlying the exterior world of change there is an unchangeable reality which is identical with that which underlies the essence in man.' This identity is obscured from the vast generality of men, each of whom follows the devices and desires of what he imagines to be his 'true' self: namely, the empirical ego, which is subject to all the conflicting impressions and impulses that make for confusion and turmoil rather than peace, Deceived as he is by the passing, illusory world of the physical senses, each man's 'true' welfare is, rather, the realization of the identity of his own inner, essential being (**atman**) with the world- soul (**brahman**). It was in connection with this teaching of the Upanishads that there developed a view of the material world as something to be rejected and renounced in the interests of the **atman** or true self. In any case, however, the Upanishads represent the attitude of an ╤lite few, and at the time of the Buddha such teaching was still largely esoteric." "*

S: It's very doubtful whether there's any reference to this sort of teaching in the whole of the Pali Canon. There are one or two places where some scholars believe there is some reference, but even those one or two places are disputed. Just carry on.

Text *"In order not to neglect anything which could conceivably be included under the heading of 'religion' at the time of the Buddha, it is appropriate to consider all phenomena which may possibly be relevant, even borderline candidates from the realm of the ideologies of the time. Three major areas can be identified: first, there was the sacrificial **cultus** of the hereditary priestly class, the brahmans; second, there was the vast range of popular cults and beliefs of the ordinary people, mostly villagers, who constituted the majority of the population; and third, there was the variety of ideas and practices expounded by various non-brahmanical teachers, who were known collectively as **shramanas."***

"THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM OF THE BRAHMANS

*The brahman or, properly, **brahmana** was so called because of his claim to be the specialist in dealing with **brahman,** the impersonal absolute which was held to be the source of the world and its life. The word **brahman** referred also to the sacred word, the chant, which was the essence of the sacrificial ceremony. The knowledge of this sacred chanting was confined strictly to the priestly class, its guardians and preservers. In brahman theory, the world had come into existence through a primeval sacrifice, and was maintained in existence by the further performance of sacrifices by the brahmans."* p 80-81

S: This is of course a quite common, primitive idea, that it is sacrifices which keep the world going, which keep the cosmos going. One encountered it for instance among the Aztecs. They slaughtered all the prisoners they captured in war, they sacrificed them and offered their hearts to the Aztec gods; and it was believed that the sun fed on the blood of these hearts and required a definite supply so that it could continue to exist and give light to the earth. So this

is a very sort of common primitive belief, that the rites which are carried out on earth keep the whole cosmos going, and therefore the priests become very important. Because without them to celebrate the rites - they're the experts in the rites - the whole of the cosmos may well come to a stop. So you've got this line of thought quite strongly in Vedic Hinduism in the Brahman cult.

Text *"Although brahmanistic theology envisaged a large number of deities, prominent among whom were Agni and Indra, even these were held to be subject to the power of the sacrifice, and thus, ultimately, to the controller of the sacrifice, the brahman priest. The stage of development which had been reached by the early Buddhist period was one in which, as S.N. Dasgupta puts it, 'sacrifice is not offered to a god with a view to propitiate him or to obtain from him welfare on earth or bliss in Heaven; these rewards are directly produced by the sacrifice itself through the correct performance of complicated and interconnected ceremonials which constitute the sacrifice.' Thus, in the time with which we are concerned, the sacrifice, which the brahman controlled, had come to be regarded 'as possessing a mystical potency superior even to the gods'."*

S: It was though the whole sacrifice, or the performance of the sacrifice, was regarded as a sort of machine which you sort of operated and the result came automatically. Even the gods weren't necessary, even though in a way the various hymns were directed to the gods, the sacrifice was a sort of self-working system. It wasn't the gods who brought about the results of the sacrifice, the performance of the sacrifice itself, by itself, brought about those results, and it was the brahmans who operated the sacrificial machine, as it were. So the brahmans came to be considered, from this point of view, virtually all powerful.

Vessantara: It seems a slightly odd development. Presumably if you're a brahman priest and you sacrifice to some particular end and that end doesn't come about, if you're sacrifice isn't dependant on some god acceding to the reason which you're sacrificing, then either there's no power in the sacrifice or you've somehow misperformed it.

S: Well the explanation would if the sacrifice seems to fail that it hadn't been done properly. It wasn't big enough. The king hadn't given enough cows. He hadn't been really generous or some trivial mistake had been made accidentally, and therefore the whole thing had been invalidated, therefore it's all got to be done again, and all the offerings made again etc. But by the time of the Buddha, the belief in the efficacy of this system had not only begun to break down, it had broken down very considerably. But this was the development before that. Right carry on then.

Text *"With this claim for the mystical supremacy of the sacrifice, in which the brahmans were specialists, went a corresponding claim for the social supremacy of the specialists themselves. The line of argument which the brahmans used was simple, and if the first claim were accepted, the second had to be, inevitably. The world, ran the argument, was kept in existence, and the important aims of human life were achieved, by the operation of the sacrifice; the brahmans were the sole possessors of the knowledge of how the sacrifice was to be performed, and it was their* ***dharma*** *or duty, and theirs only, to perform it. The second claim was that the brahmans, consequently, were the most essential class in society. By their due and wise control of* ***brahman*** *the sacred force, the world continues in existence."*

S: That's quite clear isn't it. From their religious importance follows their social supremacy. The cynic might say that the whole sacrificial system was invented simply for the benefit of the brahmans. That would be of course quite an over simplification. No doubt in the early stages, the brahmans themselves believed all this, just as much as other people. Maybe later on there were a few sort of cynical operators, but certainly not at the beginning. They believed as much as anybody else. All right, what followed then?

Text *"Both these claims were rejected by the Buddha, according to the early tradition of the Buddhists. The Buddha's attitude to the brahmanical sacrifice is evident in many of the early texts, and is set out in detail in a discourse known as the* ***Kutadanta Sutta****, which deals explicitly with this subject. It recounts a conversation which is supposed to have taken place between the Buddha and a brahman named Kutadanta or 'Sharp-tooth', who lived at a place called Khanumata, where he owned some land which had been presented to him by the king. T.W. Rhys Davids captures the spirit of the situation by rendering this brahman's title as 'the Very Reverend Sir Goldstick Sharptooth, lord of the manor of Khanumata'. In this rather ironical story he is 'represented as doing the very last thing any brahman of position, under similar circumstances, would think of doing. He goes to the Samana Gotama for advice...' This highly improbable action on the part of the brahman is a device which enables the storyteller to set forth the Buddhist attitude to sacrifice in the words of the Buddha to this imaginary brahman. In what the Buddha says to him there is no direct criticism of the brahmanical theory of sacrifice; only an indirect allusion to its practical aspects. Kutadanta asks the Buddha how a sacrifice should be performed, and in reply the Buddha tells an ironical story of a great sacrifice that had once been offered by the brahman chaplain of a very prosperous king. At that sacrifice neither were any oxen slain, neither goats, nor fowls, nor fatted pigs, nor were any kinds of living creatures put to death. No trees were cut down to be used as posts, no dabbha grasses mown to strew around the sacrificial spot. And the slaves and messengers and workmen there employed were driven neither by rods nor fear, nor carried on their work weeping with tears upon their faces... With ghee, and oil, and butter, and milk, and honey, and sugar only was that sacrifice accomplished. The irony consists in the fact that nothing could be more unlike a brahmanical sacrifice of the late Vedic period."*

S: There are many descriptions of these sacrifices in the Pali Buddhist literature.

Text *"The descriptive details are precisely the reverse of what would in fact have happened at a normal sacrifice. As Rhys Davids comments, all 'the muttering of mystic verses over each article used and over mangled and bleeding bodies of unhappy victims, verses on which all the magic efficacy of a sacrifice had been supposed to depend, is quietly ignored."*

S: You realise of course that most of these sacrifices, the bigger ones anyway, involved the slaughter of quite a large number of animals.

Text *"The narrative continues with an account of the surprising decision of the king who had ordered the sacrifice not to make a levy on the people of his realm to pay for it, but to use his own wealth. This, moreover, after the people had* ***asked*** *to be taxed for the purpose. 'Sufficient wealth have I, my friends, laid up, the produce of taxation that is just. Do you keep yours, and take away more with you!' Thereupon the people, baulked in their desire to be taxed, made voluntary contributions which were to pay for the performance of three other great sacrifices, as well as that offered by the king. The tale is, of course, entirely ludicrous, and one can imagine the delight with which the Buddha's contemporaries would have responded to its humour. What emerges as the point of the story is a critique of brahmanical sacrifice on the grounds of economic wastefulness, cruelty to animals, forced labour, with harsh treatment of the labourers, and oppressive taxation of the people in order to pay for it all. It is clear, too, that the supposed efficacy of the sacrifice is being quietly dismissed. By implication, this heightens the objection to the lavish expenditure, cruelty and social oppression."*

S: Any comment on that, or any query? (Pause) What sort of impression do you get about the Buddha's way of dealing with these things? Taking that sutta really to represent his attitude? (Pause) What about the irony for instance? (Pause)

_____: We take sort of various lighthearted `taking the mickey out '

S: Do you think it is lighthearted? (Pause)

Vessantara: He takes seriously the slaughter of all these animals, the suffering involved, but rather than attacking them head on, he undermines it.

S: Yes. It's almost as though he adopts the attitude that it isn't worth attacking, it's too low, too despicable even to be attacked.
A decent person should really not notice such things, but quietly put them aside with disgust almost. (Pause)

How efficacious do you think irony is in this sort of situation?
(Pause) The Buddha is quite famous for his irony. You can't imagine certain other teachers being ironical: You can't imagine Christ, for instance, being ironical, can you? You can't imagine Mohammed being ironical. Socrates was ironical, but he was hardly on that kind of level. What do you think the irony suggests or what does it tell you about the Buddha? Or even about the times in which he lived? Perhaps it's connected with the urbanity. But, you see, we don't usually think of irony as a very spiritual quality, or as very appropriate to a spiritual teacher, do we? (Pause)

But the Pali text, at least, represents the Buddha as being quite frequently ironical in this sort of way. Sometimes I personally detect irony where the translator has translated very seriously. As for instance in the case of the Buddha's last meal, where the translation makes the Buddha say very solemnly, "I do not see, O monks, anybody on earth or in heaven who could digest this food, save only the Tathagata etc. etc." To me, this seems to be ironical. As though the Buddha is saying ~This food is so indigestible that only a Buddha could digest it!' (Laughter) But he's not making a serious statement that - this food is such that only a Buddha can digest it - as it were. This, too, seems to be somewhat ironical. (Laughter) Apart from those passages where the Buddha's irony is quite unmistakeable; but it seems to me, that there are quite a number of other passages where there is a subtle irony that, sometimes, the translator or even the Buddhist tradition itself, generally misses. So, quite clearly, here he is being very ironical indeed.

_____: What do you think is the special value of it?

S: Well, this is what I'm just inquiring. What do you think? What does it show? What is irony?

Siddhiratna: Could you give another example of irony? What **exactly** is irony? What does the dictionary say about irony?

S: I don't remember. What **does** it say?

_____: Is it what you might call taking the piss out of you?

S: Oh no! no! It's more civilised than that! It's not just mocking. It's not mocking or teasing. It's not being sarcastic, also.

_____: A ready definition runs something like:`a mutually incompatible juxtaposition of two ideals, or ways of thought.'

S: Mm.Mm. Well, for instance, see what the Buddha does here:
He's supposed to have been asked by this Brahman, `What is the way in which a sacrifice should be performed?' And the Buddha recounts an old story about somebody's Brahman

chaplain who performed a sacrifice, and he describes it in such a way that it's clear that this sacrifice is just not like a sacrifice at all!

For instance, supposing you were asked by somebody, ` How should a football match be really held?' You just say, `Well it should be very nice and civilised people, and there should not be any loud talking, everybody should speak very quietly and gently, and all the people on the field should pass the ball in a very gentlemanly fashion.' And so on and so forth; and you describe it like that; well, that's just not a football match at all! It's so different. It ceases to seem to be that. But indirectly, you are criticising the real football match. You are criticising the loudness, the hooliganism, etc. etc. This is irony. (Pause) Irony is indirect. So there is no sort of frontal attack.

Vessantara: In a way the Buddha using irony, and say Christ not is a bit the same as the attitudes to Mara as opposed to Satan.

S: Yes, indeed!

Vessantara: You can laugh one out of court almost.

S: It's not that you aren't taking it very seriously: **you are taking it very seriously indeed**, but you are not sort of led astray by your own indignation. It's as though it's a way of dealing with something without placing yourself on the same level as that something. You don't denounce the evil like say an ancient Hebrew prophet. (Pause)

But will this ironical approach succeed with everybody? It probably won't, because sometime your irony may be quite lost on certain people. You sometimes **have** to be more direct, more blunt. But with the more sophisticated, with the more intelligent, you can be ironical. But you must be quite careful that your irony does not take on a negative tinge, or a negative edge, and become sort of sarcasm or mocking, or sneering, or anything of that sort. Irony is very serious: it is too serious to indulge in things of that sort. (Pause)

Anyway, this is the way in which the Buddha tended to deal with this sort of thing. He didn't denounce the cruelty to the animals, and so on and so forth, but he was just very ironical about the whole business and made it clear that he thoroughly disapproved. And a real sacrifice would be the exact opposite to the sort of sacrifice that the Brahmans were accustomed to.

_____: It really highlights all the sort of murky aspects
of it doesn't it? By doing it this way. It shows how horrible (unclear)

S: Yes. It also involves treating something which is bad as a sort of perversion of something which is good. I mean, the Buddha doesn't say that sacrifice is completely false or completely wrong: the whole **idea** of sacrifice or anything - he, as it were, accepts the idea of sacrifice, but says that this is the way in which sacrifice should really be performed. So he shows up the Brahmanical sacrifice in its true colours by contrasting it implicitly, with the ideal sacrifice which he describes; or what is, according to him, the ideal sacrifice; and leaves it to the Brahman himself, to draw the conclusions . Well, the customary Brahmanical sacrifice isn't in the **least** like this. So, instead of opposing something and criticising it directly, you show it up in its true colours by implicitly comparing it, or not even **yourself** comparing it, but almost obliging the person you're speaking to, to compare it for himself, with the **true** sacrifice or whatever that **you** are describing. (Pause)

So the benefit.....this is a more positive approach for those who are capable of understanding it. It isn't really negative. It is also positive; it gives you a positive ideal, but it involves at

least a sort of tactical acceptance of the principle of the other person, but you, as it were,go one better and show that you are doing what that person professed to, in the real, or even in the **right** way. In that way he realises, or comes to realise that he is doing it in the wrong way. This seems to have been very much the Buddha's method, very often, rather than direct criticism, which only too often leads to a reaction.
The Buddha says, "Well I accept all that you say about sacrifice, I accept the importance of sacrifice; but what is the **real** sacrifice?"
In much the same way the Buddha said, Well I accept the ideal of a Brahman, but who is the **real** Brahman? The Buddha is the real Brahman. The Arahant is the **real** Brahman. This was very much his attitude, and the attitude of Buddhism in India. **It didn't always work,** I would say, because it left a loophole for the Brahmans to come back, because you kept, as it were, the word `brahman'; but the general principle is: not to oppose directly, and to show up the inadequacies of something in a natural way by comparing it, in effect, with something else, supposedly of the same kind, which is obviously so much better. (Pause) So when that is quite contrary to all the expectations of the person to whom you are speaking, or who has asked you about something, then the irony comes in. (Pause) All right, let's go on.

Text.*"That there are, however, forms of 'sacrifice' which are worth making, in the Buddhist view, is made clear in the second part of the narrative. Kutadanta asks the Buddha, 'Is there, O Gotama, any other sacrifice less difficult and less troublesome, with more fruit and more advantage than this?' The Buddha replies that there is. In fact there are six other preferable forms of sacrifice, and these the Buddha describes to Kutadanta. The first five are all 'sacrifices' which are open to ordinary householders. Better than the offering of the brahmanical sacrifice is an offering of alms to wandering holy men (**shramanas**) The second form of sacrifice, which is open to all, and better than the first, is to build a dwelling place, a Vihara, for members of the Buddhist Order. Even better than this is the third kind of sacrifice, which is to go with a trusting heart to the Buddha as guide, and to the Doctrine which he teaches, and to the Order which he founded and in which the Doctrine is preserved. Such devotion is referred to in the regularly repeated formula which anyone making the humblest claim to be a Buddhist still uses, in private and in public: 'To the Buddha I go for refuge, to the Dhamma I go for refuge, to the Sangha I go for refuge.' Even better than this, however, is to take the five precepts of Buddhist morality upon oneself. When a man with trusting heart takes upon himself the precepts - abstinence from destroying life; abstinence from taking what has not been given; abstinence from evil conduct in respect of lusts; abstinence from lying words; abstinence from strong, intoxicating, maddening drinks, the root of carelessness - that is a sacrifice better than open largesse, better than perpetual alms, better than the gift of swelling places, better than accepting guidance. This is the fifth and highest form of 'sacrifice' for a householder, in the Buddhist view. Beyond this there is only the sixth and greatest sacrifice, namely to give up the household life and become a member of the Buddhist Order, the **Sangha."***

S: So this sort of approach, this sort of attitude, is quite clear, isn't it? You don't oppose directly, you try to offer something which is better, and better, and even better . Do you think this is a useful approach even today, say in this country dealing with people?

_____: Mm.

S: In what sort of way? Can you give any examples? (Long pause)

Nagabodhi: If you're dealing with political activists.

S: What would you say?

Nagabodhi: You can try presenting our approach of the Higher Evolution and the New

Society based on creating conditions for the individual to evolve and so on and so forth, you can kind of .....rather than just staying with a simplistic political analysis of the situation, - you can, in a way, embrace what that person probably wants but hopefully take it even beyond that. And show.....

S: Supposing someone said.....you mean :`I'm working for the new society'; then you would say, "Well, what **is** the `new society - the **real** `new society'? Well, this is what the **real** `new society' is like.

[End of Side One Side Two]

So do you think it very likely that that political activist would take very easily to what you had to say; and be convinced that that was **indeed** the real `new society'? Or do you think he'd be a tougher nut to crack?

Nagabodhi: It's a matter of .....he'd probably put up a resistance anyway, but if you merely say, ~Oh well, I don't agree with your way of doing it because I'm a Buddhist', (chuckling) that would be asking for trouble; but it's as though you go with him a bit - like in Judo, you use a person's weight.

S: Mm. I think the point is: that if you are able to, as it were, transpose his ideal to a higher key, as it were, do you think that that higher ideal would have sufficient attractive power in itself to draw him? Because this is what seems to be happening say in the Buddhist sutras: as soon as that higher ideal, that higher version, as it were, that truer version, is presented, the person, usually with very little resistance, is converted.

Nagabodhi : It would depend very much on your skill as a talker and...

S: : ...Also on your **conviction**.

_____: They were talking to Buddha, in the scriptures, which presumably made a difference.

S: : **Presumably.** Maybe not necessarily: some people argued quite vigorously even with the Buddha. I mean, they didn't know him as the Buddha to begin with : they knew him as the sramana Gotama, who had some ideas which were very different from theirs, and which they didn't accept and which they didn't respect. Sometimes they didn't even think very much of **him**, and addressed him in a very sort of very casual manner. They didn't sort of feel that they were talking with the Buddha.

Siddhiratna: I've got a feeling that with certain political activists -I'm not sure of the ( ) side of it - people interested in politics - that many people you talk to, are not really interested in politics and what politics can **do**, as it were, for humankind, but are more interested in rebellion, and revolution for the sake of violence, as it were, and perhaps this is because of the Welfare State and everything being so weak. There's no drama, no contrasts. And it's **that** that they are more interested in rather than aiming at a `New Society'.

S: The Buddha's approach presupposes quite a faith in human nature: that the person you are speaking to is sufficiently positive that when you present this higher ideal to him in a sort of powerful manner, he is sure to respond to that. He is sure at once to recognise Well this is in fact the real thing; this is the higher ideal; this is really what I wanted to do all along, but didn't really know it. You've got sufficient faith in human nature to believe this.

Siddhiratna: I don't think this is true .....

S: : (breaking in and speaking at the same time) ..This is probably not true any longer now.

_____: I think with most people: they don't ....when they are discussing something like that with you, they are going to hold on to their opinion anyway; they are not even open to taking on a different view.

S: Well, no doubt, in the Buddha's day there were many Brahmans who were not converted;who didn't agree with the Buddha. But one just has to present this ideal that one has as effectively as you can in the faith that at least a few people will respond to it. And present it as ... in certain instances at least, as the fulfilment of something that people are already, either searching for, or devoting themselves to, even, rather than as presenting it as a negation of what they are doing. See what I mean?

_____: Yes.

S: Present your idea as the **fulfilment** of what they are striving for, and if you can convince them about that, then that can be a very positive approach, and makes it much easier for them to get into whatever you are presenting them with.

Siddhiratna: I think where they usually don't go far enough is that they are mainly concerned with the material environment, and don't deal much with the nature of man himself.

S: But then you've got to go into that, presumably, - your presentation of the ideal will not just be a naive description of Utopia in Buddhist terms, but accompanied by a certain amount of cogent reasoning and analysis and so on which he would have to take serious note of.

Manjuvajra: I sometimes find it a kind of `purposeful misunderstanding' of what someone's saying : I mean, you know what they mean, but you pretend to sort of misunderstand it, to sort of extend it a little bit and that either completely frustrates them, or shakes them into seeing that's, maybe, how they **do** see it.

Nagabodhi: Socratic. That's Socrates' approach.

_____: Ah.

Nagabodhi: He used to get people to expound their views, and then say: `Forgive me, I'm really stupid, but does this mean such-and-such? And he'd just lead them round and round in circles until they just tied themselves up in knots, and then he maybe would give his own view.

S: Well, three principles seem to emerge here -First: Don't contradict people directly. If people have an ideal and are working for something however mistaken, however misleading, or misled it may be, don't contradict directly. Maybe there are certain occasions where you may have to do that, but as far as possible avoid that. Don't contradict directly. Don't just negate.And - Two: Present your ideal in positive terms . And - **Three:** Present your ideal as, in fact, a fulfilment of what they are trying to do. In that way you're much more likely to get a favourable reception, with many people. I'd say probably not always, because there are certain political activists, maybe the Marxists: if you put forward your point of view, your higher ideals as the fulfilment of theirs, they would regard this as typical sort of petty bourgeois intellectualist trickery - trying to mislead the good Marxist with this pseudo-idealistic rubbish - so on and so forth. But you have to work on **that** too.

But a positive approach always works better than a negative one, and if you present what you have to say as the sort of fulfilment of what somebody else is already believing, it establishes a certain amount of common ground.

I mean, there is a passage - a sort of phrase - that recurs several times in the Pali Canon, of which there was a very good article written some years ago by a friend of mine who translated many Pali texts, who translated Digha Nikaya also, and there's this little phrase where the Buddha goes to certain people and he says: "There are certain things we have in common but there are certain things we **don't** have in common. There are certain things we both believe, there are certain things we **don't** both believe - alright, setting aside those things which we do not agree in, and basing ourselves upon those things which we agree in let us see who practises better what we agree in - you or me." So you can very well say to the Marxist, `Well you believe in working for the good of humanity, so do we. You believe that people should be more happy, so do we. You believe that there must be a revolution, so do we. Alright, put aside the things that we differ about, who is going to do this, or who is going to realise this more effectively? Who **is,** in fact, realising it more effectively, you or me. Let's go into that. That could very well be your approach, couldn't it? Rather than saying, "You're all wrong. You've got it all wrong, I've got it right, I shall tell you." So establish some common ground, - this, in fact, is what the Buddha is doing - however tenuous it may be. (Pause)

Alright, let's go on to <u>"The Popular Cults and Beliefs."</u>

Text*"POPULAR CULTS AND BELIEFS*

The significance of such teaching on the subject of sacrifice has to be seen in the context of the times when it was first given. For, as we have said, the Vedic sacrificial system was something which concerned the specialist, the brahman priest, and the man who was, at the very least, fairly well-to-do and able to meet the cost of such sacrificial offerings. For the common people, the villager, the peasant, the craftsman and the tradesman, there was a great variety of popular magic to which they might have resort for comfort, guidance, peace of mind, protection from evil, and so on. A list of these magical practices is given in one of the discourses of the Buddha. They are described by the Buddha as 'low arts', and are of the kind practised by certain of the brahmans and ***shramanas*** *They included, apparently, such activities as palmistry and fortune-telling; determining lucky sites for houses by a knowledge of the spirits of the place and how to propitiate them; prophecies of various kinds, concerning such matters as rainfall, the nature of the harvest, pestilences, disturbances, famines and so on; divining, by the use of signs, omens and celestial portents; the provision of charms and spells; the obtaining of oracular answers from gods by various means; the interpretation of dreams; the propitiation of demons; and the offerings of oblations of various kinds, such as grain or butter, to Agni the god of fire, That such practices are forbidden to members of the Buddha's Order is emphasised in a number of places. 'You are not O* ***bhikkhus*** *to learn or to teach the low arts [literally "the brutish wisdom"] of divination, spells, omens, astrology, sacrifices to gods, witchcraft and quackery', the Buddha is reputed to have charged the members of the Order. On another occasion, in answer to the question of how a member of the Buddhist Order is to achieve perfection and be entirely unattached to any worldly thing, the Buddha lists the many requirements; one of these is as follows: 'Let him not use Atharva-Vedic spells, nor things foretell from dreams or signs or stars; let not my follower predict from cries, cure barrenness, nor practise quackery.'"*

S: That's pretty straightforward, isn't it? (Pause) Alright, let's go straight on.

Text.*"The account of these magical practices or 'low arts' given in the Buddhist texts agrees well with the picture of priestly magic practised mostly on behalf of the common people which is found in the brahmanical text compiled probably a little before the time of the Buddha, known as the* ***Atharva Veda****. This is the fourth of the Vedic collection of hymns, and the last to be accorded official recognition. It stands somewhat apart from the other three Vedic hymn-collections on account of the very much more popular, local, indigenous material which it contains, compared with the more Aryan and priestly-class concerns of the earlier collections, Nevertheless, it did eventually gain general recognition as a brahmanically composed text, and this fact is itself further evidence that some brahmans were engaged in this kind of popular magical activity, possibly having taken over the role of earlier, pre-Aryan, non-brahmanical priest; in return for the provision of priestly-magical services the brahmans would expect from the villager recognition of their authority, and of the Vedic tradition they represented."*

S: So the big-time Brahmans used to perform the elaborate sacrifices, for the kings and the nobles, and the small-time Brahmans, the less successful ones, perhaps, used to engage in magical practices for the sake of the ordinary people. All right. let's go straight on.

Text.*"For our purpose the* ***Atharva-Veda*** *is important as evidence of popular attitudes and practices with regard to such matters as sorcery and magic at the time of the Buddha. A mention of some of its contents will illustrate the point. By far the greater part of the text consists of charms. These include charms against various diseases, and disease-causing demons; the diseases range from fever in general, through coughs, headaches, jaundice, excessive bodily discharges, constipation and internal pain, to heart disease and leprosy. There are charms against snake-poison, charms to promote the growth of hair, or virility, or long life, or for general exemption from disease. Another section contains imprecations to be used against sorcerers, demons and enemies. Yet another is devoted to the needs of men and women - charms for such varied purposes as obtaining a husband, or a child, or to prevent miscarriage, or to obtain easy childbirth, charms by which a man may secure a woman's love, or arouse her passion, or allay jealousy, or deprive a rival of his virility. One whole section consists of charms pertaining to the needs of a king: for his success as a ruler, for victory in battle and so on. Yet another contains charms to ensure political and social harmony while other sections are devoted to domestic and mercantile affairs. There is, significantly for the status of the text as Vedic, a section devoted to prayers and imprecations on the interests of the brahmans. The collection ends with a group of hymns to various gods and goddesses, such as Mother Earth, Kama (the god of sexual love) and Kala (time personified as a deity)."*

S: That's pretty clear, isn't it? Let's push straight on then.

Text*"These, then, were the popular magical practices which had come within the sphere of interest of some brahman priests, sufficiently so for them to be regarded as at least marginally 'Vedic', once the Atharvan collection had gained recognition. It is interesting that the Buddha's attitude to these practices, in which brahmans had taken an interest, and which had thus passed, at least partially, under the aegis of the priests, was one of only moderate disapproval. His criticism of practices which were partly popular, partly priestly,was not so vigorous as his criticism of the brahmanical animal sacrifices, but it is clear enough that he wished to discourage the members of his own order from any interest in them."*

S: That's clear, too, I think, isn't it? Go on.

Text.*"More ambiguous is the Buddha's attitude to a popular priestly form of belief, namely, in Brahma, the supreme creator-deity. At a later period of Indian religious history, Brahma as Creator became the somewhat shadowy first figure in the Hindu theistic trinity, the other two great deities being Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer. But at the time of the Buddha, Brahma had recently emerged as the spirit of the universe (Brahman) conceived of as a personal god. In the priestly texts called the Brahmanas, which belong to a period some centuries before the time of the Buddha, the creator-deity, to whom sacrifice is offered, is known as Prajapati, In the Upanishadic literature, the supreme reality is represented as impersonal, and is referred to by the neuter noun brahman. But in the popular epic-poem, the Mahabharata, the composition of which can be dated a century or so after the time of the Buddha (that is, from about the third century BC onwards), we find that Brahma (masculine) appears as a divine personal being, the god of creation. The earlier creator-deity, Prajapati, had it seems, come to be identified with the impersonal world-soul (brahman) of the Upanishads, and been given the new name, Brahma. It is uncertain just how important belief in Brahma had become by the time of the Buddha, or what place this creator-god held in the religious ideas and practices of the people. Some have argued that Brahma was never a very important god in popular belief. This is the view of the Indian historian, R.C. Majumdar: 'Although Brahma is theoretically acknowledged to be the creator of man and even of gods he never occupies a prominent place in the actual religious devotion of the people. Vishnu and Shiva overshadow him from the very beginning...' On the other hand, it has been argued that the worship of Brahman, the creator-god, was in pre- Buddhist times very important and widespread, and that it only subsequently suffered eclipse, partly because of the rise in the rival cults of Vishnu and Shiva, and partly because of the spread of Buddhist and Jain belief and practice."*

S: Is that clear? (Pause) All right, go straight on.

Text.*"What is clear from the early Buddhist sources is that Brahma was, so far as the Buddha was concerned, a fairly prominent feature of the celestial scenery of the time, and a figure who, one should not take too seriously. The notion that Brahma is the prime being, and creator of all other beings was treated with somewhat less than respect by the Buddha. A story attributed to him, tells how in the course of time this world-system passes away. Then, after a further period, it begins to re-evolve, At an early stage in this process Brahma's 'palace' (that is, his abode, or place in the celestial set-up) happens to be vacant. It is, however, soon filled by some being or other who, until then, had been living in the superior 'World of Radiance' but who finds himself, his merit having been exhausted, descending to the lower realm and coming to rebirth as Brahma. Newly arrived, and feeling lonely there in Brahma's palace, he wishes that he had some companions. It so happens that some more beings whose merit has run out just at that moment also descend from the World of Radiance and appear in Brahma's realm, as though in response to his wish. At this, the one who was first reborn thinks to himself, I am Brahma, the Great Brahma, the Supreme One, the Mighty, the All- seeing. The Ruler, the Lord of all, the Maker, the Creator, the Chief of all, appointing to each his place, the Ancient of Days, the Father of all that are and are to be. These other beings are of my creation. And why is that so? A while ago I thought. 'Would that they might come!' And on my mental aspiration, behold the beings came. In a similar fashion the new arrivals conclude that the one who was there first must be their creator: 'This must be Brahma, the Great Brahma, the Supreme [etc.]. And we must have been created by him. And why? Because, as we see, it was he who was here first, and we came after that.' Finally, the Buddha suggests that when one of the beings in Brahma's realm, by reason of his poor stock of merit, suffers yet a further fall and arrives on earth, he reflects that while he is a fallen being, Brahma dwells for ever in his heaven: 'He by whom we were created, he is steadfast, immutable, eternal, of a nature that knows no change, and he will remain so for ever and ever.'"*

S: So what is the significance of all this? (Pause)

Manjuvajra: It's all to be seen in a much wider context.

S: Yes, that Brahma represents a state or a mode of being which was regarded by some people in India in the Buddha's day and before, as ultimate, as absolute, but the Buddha does not so regard it. The Buddha regards it as simply another facet, albeit a very noble one, of conditioned existence. In other words what is highest to those people who believe in Brahma is not the highest state or the highest mode of being to the Buddha. (Pause)

Siddhiratna: Was there anything like that in the West? That there would be an idea of god being the supreme creator. I've not read anything in gnosticism. Is there any sort of idea of god, in fact, being reborn from.....?

S: Almost. There are a number of gnostic systems - they are very, very complex - but in several of them you get the idea that the creator of the universe is not the Supreme Spirit, sometimes he doesn't even know the Supreme Spirit, but he is a very remote off-spring of the Supreme Spirit who has forgotten his origin and who starts creating the world - various reasons are given - various accounts are given - but the upshot of it all is that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is identified by the Gnostics, with this `fallen' figure who creates the universe, but not with the highest Spirit of all. And the Gnostics usually believe, - the Christian gnostics - that Christ came from the Highest Spirit and came, as it were, to rescue people from the dominion of the evil creator god of the Old Testament.

Siddhiratna: Which is Jehovah?

S: Yes. And to rescue them from bondage to his law. This is a very sort of over-simplified version. There are a number of different accounts, some of them - **very, very** complicated indeed. But this is the essence of the matter: that in orthodox Christianity the God, the Father in Heaven, of Christ, the creator of the Universe, Jehovah of the Old Testament, these are identified, but the Gnostics did not believe that at all. They strongly opposed this view, and they regarded the creation of the world as the work of this lower spirit; and they regarded the Jewish religion as originating from this lower spirit and as, therefore, having been completely superseded by the teaching of Christ which came from a very much higher source. That was roughly the position. In other words, God the Father was not the creator of the universe.

Siddhiratna: A refutation of the Old Testament then?

S: Yes. And also it enabled them to discard the Old Testament, which the early orthodox church did not really succeed in doing. (Pause)
Let's go straight on then.

Text*"One can safely assume that the Buddha was making light of contemporary belief in an eternal creator-god called Brahma. There would be no point in making fun of a belief which nobody held. In another of the discourses, Brahma, in the midst of his great retinue of subordinates, is represented as being asked a question by a member of the Buddhist Order: 'Where do the four great elements - earth, water, fire and wind - cease, leaving no trace behind?' In reply Brahma answers, 'I, brother, am the Great Brahma, the Supreme, the Mighty, the All seeing...the Ancient of Days, the Father of all that are and are to be!' 'But,' replies the Buddhist, 'I did not ask you whether you are indeed all that you now say. I asked you where the four great elements cease, leaving no trace behind.' The fact is, of course, that this is a question Brahma cannot answer. In order to save face, and not display his ignorance before all his retinue Brahma takes the Buddhist brother by the arm, leads him aside and says, in effect: 'I didn't wish to say so in front of them, for they think I know everything, but I*

don't know the answer. You really should not come to me with a question like that. You should ask the Buddha. I'm sure he will be able to tell you!' The attitude of deference towards the Buddha which is attributed to the god Brahma in this instance is shown elsewhere in Buddhist literature. The most famous example, perhaps, is the occasion when the Buddha, immediately after his Enlightenment, was pondering whether the ***dhamma****, or truth, to which he had won could possibly be made known to other men. Brahma, perceiving what the Buddha was thinking, lamented the possible great loss to the world that might ensue if the Buddha did not proclaim to men his* ***dhamma****. He then left the Brahma-realm and immediately manifested himself before the Buddha, and having saluted him with joined palms, said 'Lord, let the Lord teach* ***dhamma****; let the well-farer teach* ***dhamma****; there are beings with little dust in their eyes who, not hearing* ***dhamma*** *are decaying, but if they are learners of* ***dhamma*** *they will grow."*

S: So what does one gather, in effect, from all this? (Pause)
That the Buddha and his followers did not regard the view that Brahma was the creator and so on, as the ultimate view - as representing the last word on the matter. The Buddha knew better, the Buddha knew more, the Buddha saw further than that. It was, of course, the Buddhist view that the universe as such had no perceivable beginning in time . So the question of a creator from the Buddhist point of view wouldn't arise in any case.

Vessantara: Was this view of the universe held by other schools apart from the Buddhists, the view that the universe had no perceptible origins?

S: Apparently not. The view was later incorporated into the Vedanta by Shakaracarya - this is what he calls the `anadisamsara' the beginningless samsara; but it was originally a distinctively Buddhist view. The operative word is `perceptible' - that the universe has no **perceptible first point of origin.** Is that clear? In other word however far back you go in time, you never reach a point before which the universe did not exist. Just as in the same way that however far you go in any direction of space you never come to a point, as it were, where space ends and where, as it were, you look over the edge of space into non-space. Do you see that? So in the same way, however far back you go in time, you never come to a fullstop where time ends, and then before that point there was no time. There are various more sort of subtle versions, but usually the idea that there was an absolute first beginning as when god created the universe suggests or implies that there was a time, as it were, before there was any time. (Pause)

So the Buddhist view is that however far back in time you go, you will never come to a point at which the universe did not exist. So what does that really mean?

Lokamitra: You can't get release on this level, as it were.

S: Yes. It means **that.** (Pause) But it's also bound up with the question of the subject and the object. That subject and object are interdependent. You can't have a subject without an object, or object without subject. So, as long as you are in a realm of subjectivity you are in a world of objectivity too. So long as you have a mind perceiving the universe, the universe will be there for you to perceive. Or, so long as there is a mind there'll be a universe, so when you go back in time, to try to find the point of origin of the universe, you are going back with your mind. **You** are going back. So long as your mind is there, so long as **you** are there there will be a universe of some kind or other confronting you, so **you** - your mind- can never reach a point where the universe ceases to exist. To reach that point you must go above and beyond the mind. So the Buddha says you cannot find the beginning of the universe by `**going**' He says at the same time - "Within this six foot body there is the origin and there is the cessation of this universe". In other words, you can rise beyond conditioned existence, but you can't sort of find the end of the conditioned, or find the **beginning** of the conditioned - which is

the same thing - by simply going back and back, as it were, on the level of the conditioned. You see that?

Nagabodhi: Like you can't solve a problem on its own level?

S: : Yes. It's very much like that. (Pause)

So you go back with the mind, so, in as much as the mind is still with you, you see that which corresponds to the mind, i.e. a world, a universe . So there is no perceptible point of origin. There is a state in which the conditioned does not exist, but in that state there is no conditioned mind either.

Siddhiratna: What was that?

S: There is a state, so to speak, in which the conditioned, the samsara, the world, the universe, does not exist, but in that state there is no subject, as it were, to perceive that it does not exist. (Pause) So this is the traditional Buddhist view, this is the universal Buddhist view: that there's no creation. There's no point of origin, no first point of origin of the universe. If you try to think in terms of a first beginning, an ultimate origin of the universe, you are trying to do with the mind something which, by virtue of its very constitution, the mind cannot do. In order to do that, as it were, you must negate the mind, or **that** mind. You must transcend that mind, then there's no universe and no mind perceiving the universe. There's no subject and no object. No subject/object distinction. (Pause)

So it's quite clear from this that there's no place in Buddhism for a creator god. There's no place for any ultimate origin at all, of the universe. What to speak of by way of the creative act of a creator god. (Pause)

Nagabodhi: But is one in formulating this proposition making a kind of crossover from relative reality to absolute reality? The question is asked from the standpoint of relative reality, but the answer seems to come from the standpoint of absolute reality.

S: But it can be made **intelligible** from the standpoint of relative reality.

Nagabodhi: But then what it sounds like from the standpoint of relative reality is the sort of cliche - `It's all in the mind' - nothing's really real.

S: No. It's not that it's all in the mind - mind and universe are interdependent. You are not reducing the one to the other. (Pause)
If you want to put it in sort of commonsense terms, well, there **is** a mind perceiving, there **is** a universe `out there'; but with that mind you'll never be able to come to a state where there isn't a universe of some kind or other out there for you to perceive and experience. Can you even imagine that? Can you even think of that, if you try? Just try to think of you being here with nothing, as it were, in front of you. Well, people may be able to think of a big black void. Well, the big black void is confronting you then. (Pause) All right, let's go on.

Text*"The contemporary view of Brahma which is reflected in these and other references in the early Buddhist writings is that he was the Creator of the universe, the highest of all beings, union with whom, through prayer and sacrifice, was the highest possible good for men. It is a view which is gently and ironically set aside in the Buddhist sources. The god who was the product of brahmanism mixed with popular mythology is represented as by no means the supreme being that his devotees believed him to be, but as deluded, somewhat ignorant, slightly pompous but nevertheless benevolent, and on the whole well-intentioned - a slightly larger-than-life-size human being. In fact Brahma is, in the Buddhist view, a* ***type*** *of being,*

rather than a single unique being; there are many Brahmas; they inhabit the heavenly region known as the Brahma-world, and rebirth in this realm is quite favourably regarded, even though, in the cosmic hierarchy, it is considerably inferior to the supreme state of Nirvana, just as the Brahmas are in all things subordinate to the Buddha."

S: It's as though the Buddha, and after him Buddhism, regards as relative, regards as conditioned, things or states or beings that, in his time, were regarded as absolute, as unconditioned. So the Buddha de-absolutises something which has been falsely absolutised. Whereas Brahma as creator doesn't exist at all. There is no creator. But Brahmas as beings existing on a higher level, within the realm of conditioned existence, these are admitted to exist. But however high their world or their realm, it's only another level of conditioned existence, and therefore **not** to be made the aim or object of human life. And Nirvana is even beyond.

Nagabodhi: It seems wrong for him to talk about the cosmic hierarchy.

S: Mm. It's as though Nirvana is part of that. As though Nirvana is included in the cosmic, which, by very definition it isn't - it's `lokuttara', which is sometimes translated as hyper-cosmic, or supra-cosmic. (Pause) All right, let's go straight on.

Text*"Just as tolerant on the whole is the Buddha's attitude towards belief in the many supernatural beings who were respected, venerated, propitiated or worshipped by the mass of the common people; such beliefs and practices have remained, throughout the centuries, major elements in the folk-lore of village India. Buddhist tolerance towards folk beliefs (shown by the Buddha himself and subsequently by Buddhist monks) may be seen to have had educative effects; it made easier a gradual and gently infusion of Buddhist notions, in such a way that the original folk-beliefs were, over a long period, imperceptibly transformed and made to nourish Buddhist attitudes and to serve Buddhist religious goals."*

S: That's clear, I think, isn't it? (Pause) All right go to the next paragraph.

Text*"Belief in evil spirits provides a good illustration of this process. There was at the time of the Buddha widespread belief in numerous demons, evil spirits, ogres, goblins and the like. These were thought of as acting capriciously and at random, and mostly in ways that were inimical to human welfare. They were often referred to as 'flesh-devourers', and this suggests that they were thought of as horrific beings, akin to beasts of prey, cannibals, or as agents of wasting diseases. They were frequently, though not always, creatures of the night, or of lonely places, who by their wild, weird or loud cries caused alarm or dread to humans who encountered them. They could in their malice assume all sorts of deceptive shapes and disguises in order to seduce men or lead them astray. According to popular belief, one of the ways they could be placated was by offering of sacrifices. Beliefs of this kind appear to have been tolerated by the Buddha, and it is this kind of imagery which is used in some of his discourses to the more unsophisticated of his hearers. Some of the members of the Order, monks and nuns, are recorded as using such popular notions to describe their own experiences, in the* ***Songs of the Brethren*** *and the* ***Songs of the Sisters****, for example. The Buddha, however, appears to have made a new contribution to the demonology of his day. Out of the notion of the commonplace hostile demon, in conjunction with one or two other major concepts, such as that of* ***Mrtyu*** *(Death, personified) and* ***Namuci****, another great demon hostile to human welfare, there emerges in the teaching of the Buddha, the figure of Mara, the Evil One, the supreme head of all the forces that militated against human well-being and holy living. Instead of the experiences of evil being regarded as happening at random, they now begin to be seen as all part of the total evil in human experience which is brought into focus as having a unitary character. That is to say, all human experience of evil is seen as having a common root and source, and as having common, shared effects. To put it*

in these terms, however, is already to have moved on into the realm of abstract thinking and analysis. And this is precisely how the Buddhist notion of Mara, the Evil One, was used - to serve as a bridge-concept, a transition from the popular demonology on the one hand, which saw only chaos and random evil attacks from demons, to the idea of a common moral root for the ills which all humanity suffers, on the other. The importance of the concept lay in its use in religious practice. Whereas a peasant woman who encountered something terrifying in the darkness of the night might exclaim: 'How terrible for me! There is a demon after me!' a Buddhist sister would in similar circumstances react by saying: 'Now who is this...? It is that foolish Mara!' (for Mara's power, as every Buddhist knew, had been conquered once for all by the Buddha). As the present writer has dealt with this subject at length elsewhere it will be sufficient at this point to quote briefly from that other source certain words which have a bearing on the Buddha's attitude to popular, unsophisticated beliefs: '[The teaching of the Buddha] does not close the frontier of thought where it touches animism and popular demonology; it allows it to remain open, but controls it from the Buddhist side, and for Buddhist purposes.'"

S: Do you think this sort of explanation is adequate? or correct ? (Pause)

Siddhiratna: Do you mean in the sense that because the Buddha's conquered Mara, he's conquered forever?

S: No. In the sense that the concept of `Mara' is also a `bridge' concept between popular demonology and the ethical and spiritual attitudes of Buddhism.

[**End of Tape 8 Tape 9]**

_____: By describing `Mara' as a concept you leave out any possibility of the archetypal significance .....

S: Yes. This is a very .....I mean, Trevor Ling's is a very sort of rationalistic approach, isn't it? This is why I'm asking if you think this is really adequate. (Pause)

Manjuvajra: It doesn't have the sort of emotive appeal it originally had.

S: No. It's true that the Buddhist sister, the `bhikkhuni, or the `bhikkhu' would say, "Oh, that is that foolish Mara!"But what are you really doing when you're not really scared by a demon, but then you identify what you might have thought previously was a demon, as Mara? (Pause)

_____: Rationalising your fear.

S: I think you are doing more than that.

_____: Recognising it.

S: Well, first of all you're recognising it .....

_____: ?

S: In a way, you're **refusing** to rationalise it. Supposing you hear a terrible shriek in the night and it makes you really afraid, well, to say that that is a demon, well that, surely, is a sort of rational explanation, though it happens to be the wrong one. So you don't say, "Here I am, I've just got this fear." That's the actual situation: - I've heard this terrible sound and I feel very afraid. **That** is the situation. So there's no point in saying it's all due to a demon. Why do

I feel afraid? This is `Mara'. This is the pull of the conditioned, as it were, in me, that makes me feel afraid. It's the feeling of fear itself that I must get rid of rather than an external demon that I must deal with or banish.

Do you see the line of thought? So `Mara' is, in a way, a sort of `bridge' concept, but not quite, perhaps, in the way that Trevor Ling intends. (Pause)

Siddhiratna: How is the concept of `Mara' more than this `bridge' concept, then? In what way is it **more**?

S: Well, Trevor Ling seems to use the `bridge' concept, or the concept of a `bridge' concept, in a rather sort of superficial way. When he quotes here - the Buddhist sister who in similar circumstances reacts by saying, `Who is this? It's that foolish Mara!' It wasn't really so simple as that. See what I mean? You might be left with this terrible feeling of fear. But instead of attributing that fear of a demon, you say well forget all about the demon, - there's no demon, I'm just feeling fear. What is fear? This, in a way, springs from the ego, you are afraid of losing your life, afraid of losing your identity. But, where is that coming from? Where is that ego coming from? It's a pull from something lower, from something darker, and it's that which we call `Mara'. So the fear means that `Mara' is here. It's `Mara' that I'm having to deal with - those forces within myself, as it were. Not with just a demon who has uttered a loud cry. It's a much more serious matter than that!

Siddhiratna: ...The demon, the loud cry is `Mara'?

S: No. No. That's the popular demonological explanation. So, you don't rationalise in **that** way!

Siddhiratna: No.

S: .....You conduct a deeper sort of self analysis; and that is the sort of use you make of the term `Mara'.

Siddhiratna: He's tossed it off too quickly there.

S: You're not being attacked from **outside,** you're being attacked from **inside**. It's not a demon outside, it's `Mara' inside you, which is attacking. The fact that you can feel that sort of irrational fear, **that** is `Mara. If you explain it as a demon, due to a demon - oh, there's a demon there,the demon has uttered a loud cry therefore you feel afraid: this is a pseudo-rational explanation. Really, it is an **irrational fear** not a rational fear. I mean, if there really is a demon there, you're feeling afraid because the demon might devour you, and if the demon **might** devour you, that's a quite rational fear. But actually there's **no demon there**. You've just heard this cry and you feel afraid. This is an irrational fear, and the irrationality, and your reacting to that irrationality, **that** is `Mara', and **that is what you've got to deal with;** not just a demon, who's just like a robber or bandit or someone like that, but just non-human. You see what I'm getting at? So the concept of `Mara' serves you as a sort of `bridge', in a way, to your own psychic depths. You didn't refer the fear to some external factor, which you called a demon, you realised it came from deep within you, from the nature of your whole ego structure, as it were. It's **that** that you have to deal with. (Pause) So, if the concept of `Mara' helped you to do that, then it was a very useful and practical concept. Not that you think of `Mara' as a demon `out there'; you think of `Mara' in a much more subtle way - thinking of `Mara' as a demon `out there': that's the old demonology.

But thinking of `Mara' in terms of something within you, which **causes** you to be afraid in this irrational way - **that is `Mara'.** I mean, if there really is a demon out there in the forest,

throwing a stone at you and howling, well, that's something objective, and you're quite right to be afraid of that, just as you're quite right to be afraid of a robber who might come and kill you. But just to hear a sound and then feel afraid - this is completely irrational. This is something you've got to resolve. That's `Mara' that you've got to deal with. (Pause)

So when the sister says, `That's `Mara'', she's not sort of thinking it's due to some external demon-like figure who is just trying to disturb me. That would be the demonological level, but she sees that there is some factor within herself which is causing her to experience that irrational fear. **That** is the `Mara' she has to deal with. So the concept of `Mara' provides a sort of bridge between the conscious mind and the unconscious mind which is the seat of the irrational fear. Trevor Ling doesn't seem to see it quite as deeply as that. Tis `Mara' seems to indicate the identification of some external factor; but it isn't really that at all. (Pause)

Nagabodhi: Would you say that `Mara's' power had been conquered once and for all by the Buddha, in a way, is confusing. He proved it could be done.

S: Yes, the Buddha proved it could be done: he showed what a human being could do! So that gives courage to his followers, to his disciples. (Pause)

Vessantara: It seems to smack very much of Christ making his sacrifice and defeating Satan once and for all.

S: Satan's power is vanquished as the hymn says. (Pause) The concept of `Mara' doesn't make you look outside. It makes you look inside.
All right, let's carry on with that.

Text*"So it can be seen that there is something of a contrast between the Buddha's attitude toward the brahmanical system of costly sacrifices on the one hand, and the popular beliefs and practices of the common people on the other, with a middle ground of moderate disapproval of popular magical practices, which had been adopted as 'Vedic' by some at least of the Brahman priests. There were, however, at that time others beside the Buddha who were opposed to or indifferent to the priestly sacrificial system. But this was not enough in itself to provide a guarantee of any further common ground among them; there were, in fact, considerable differences between these various other teachers and their schools, and to these we must now turn our attention."*

S: Mm. Why do you think the Buddha was, as it were, hard on `the brahmanical system of costly sacrifices', than he was on the popular beliefs and practices of the common people?

Nagabodhi: They were more harmless, the popular beliefs of the people. The sacrifices caused suffering.

Manjuvajra: The Brahmans maintained the group identity as well.

S: Mm. Yeah. (Pause) Also, the Brahmanical system represented a very systematic and a very strongly rationalised form of, well, wrong view. Whereas the popular beliefs of the villagers representing not much more than their spontaneous reaction to nature and some of their own experiences.

Siddhiratna: It could be harder to dislodge the beliefs that the.....

S: ... and also, the Brahmans themselves had a vested interest in the maintenance of that particular system. (Pause) If a villager offered some fruits or some cakes to a tree spirit, well, what did that really mean? He felt something special in the tree. He felt that there was

something there, and he just spontaneously offered those fruits and cakes. So that sort of attitude was something that could be quite easily absorbed within a general spiritual attitude. It might mean that if he became a monk he'd perhaps like meditating under certain trees. He'd feel quite at home there. He might not make any offerings any more, but he'd just have a strong feeling for those sort of trees, or trees in general. Maybe tend to spend his days there and to meditate there. It wouldn't probably, mean much more than that, that sort of adjustment. But if he was a Brahmanical priest and had been accustomed to earning large sums of money by performing very elaborate sacrifices for kings; sacrifices incurring a lot of slaughter and suffering for animals, and inconvenience to human beings, well, this clearly represented something that couldn't possibly be **subsumed** in the spiritual life, it had to be completely given up, and something quite different substituted in its place; even though you did describe **that** in terms of the `real' sacrifice, as it were. Actually it was something completely different. So, it's much easier to incorporate these quite simple popular beliefs and practices, than it is to deal with a very complex and highly developed and rationalised system in which certain individuals, or certain classes of individuals, have got a vested interest in the maintenance. So therefore the Buddha was actually much harder on the Brahmanical system than he was on the popular beliefs and customs, or what we would call superstitions. They didn't bother him very much.

Anything analogous today?

_____: Well, like the little ....the various little cults and fads that are going around. He couldn't just sort of leave those but the sort of gross ideas about materialism... .

S: If someone is a convinced materialist, well, this is something that has to be dealt with before he can think in terms of `Going for Refuge', but if he just likes to go off to go off to Glastonbury once a year, or something like that, well, because he just likes the feel of the place: that's something you need not bother very much about. That is a sort of rough parallel. Has anybody been to Glastonbury recently? (Pause)

_____: I'm being taken there in a few weeks.

S: You are being taken there? You see, that's what I mean.

_____: It's not got very strong vibes - Glastonbury.

_____: It has, according to the person who's taking me.

S: It depends what you mean by `strong'? (Pause) Anyway, we are virtually at the end of our time, and I think we'll leave `The Mendicant Philosophers' till tomorrow.

But what have you gathered so far about the Buddha's attitude to these contemporary beliefs, practices and so on?

Nagabodhi: He was an individual in relation to these various beliefs.

S: Yes. (Pause) I mean, he didn't even adopt a very sort of **wholesale** attitude, really. It was a quite discriminating attitude, condemning certain things quite unmistakably, though in a very deft sort of manner; other things not bothering too much about, maybe not being very happy about them or just not allowing his bhikkhus to have much to do with them; and with other popular practices, well, just leaving them, not bothering to say very much at all; even incorporating certain things and giving his own interpretation.

Siddhiratna: I think from what we've read today you may get the impression that the Buddha

was merely a reformer, in some ways, because Ling doesn't make it sufficiently apparent that there was a radical change occurring.

S: Yes. But this will come in later chapters. In chapter 3, which as I said was the main one that we have to get on to. (Pause) But do you begin to get more of a picture the sort of religious `milieu' in which the Buddha lived and taught? (Pause) There must have been quite a striking contrast between different levels of thought and culture at that time. There was the Buddha on the one side, as it were, and sometimes at least, his very simple village folk with their tree worship, and snake worship, stone worship, on the other. But the Buddha somehow managed to keep in contact with both extremes - with Nirvana on the one hand, and popular beliefs, cults and practices, on the other. (Pause) And there's no sort of `**wholesale**' attitude. You see what I mean? No blanket approval or blanket condemnation; a sort of very judicious, very discriminating; nothing reactive at all in the least. Looking at everything very much on its own merits; no fierce denunciations; no righteous indignation, not even on behalf of the animals that were sacrificed; but a very unmistakable indication of his own position and just where he stood, and what he approved of, and what he disapproved of. But where it didn't matter very much either way, he didn't bother either to agree or disagree; just left it aside.

_____: You said earlier, the Buddha came down rather hard on the practitioners of the ? arts. Is that not inconsistent.....?

S: But **how** did he come down rather hard? He just made it clear that he did not accept those things at all. He didn't fiercely denounce them; he didn't vituperate them; he didn't abuse them; as sometimes religious reformers have done. He just made it clear that he just disapproved, and gave his reasons. What I have in mind is a sort of passionate condemnation of something you regard as wrong: **this the Buddha never did**. He indicated his disapproval but he didn't allow himself to be swept away on a tide of righteous indignation, or anything of that sort. For instance, if you read in the Gospels, Christ's denunciation of the Pharisees, - "Ye generation of vipers...." that famous passage - There's nothing like that in the Buddhist scriptures. So, do you see any **significance** in this? (Pause) The Buddha certainly disapproved of certain things very strongly, but there wasn't this, what I call passionate condemnation. He didn't get a `kick' out of denouncing anything. I think that is what it really amounts to. He didn't get any subjective, psychological satisfaction out of denouncing something as unskilful, or as wrong, or as evil. You see the difference?

_____: Would his sort of disapproval of natural magic be just a consequence of his urbanity,.....?

S: Well, he seems not to have believed in it. He seems not to have believed that it worked. It seems to have been as simple as that. And that there was quite a bit of cheating, and imposture involved in it, and therefore bhikkhus, the monks who were supposed to be leading a higher life, and a more honest life and sincere life, just shouldn't have anything to do with it; because it really amounted to cheating people. This is what he seemed to believe.

_____: But so long as there wasn't any commercial gain to be had in it, he wasn't particularly worried?

S: Yes. What he especially didn't want was that the bhikkhus should earn a living in this sort of way. He was more especially against **that**. Because then you develop a vested interest. If you're earning your living by say palmistry you have to present palmistry as a real science, something that is really true, that really works. The Buddha seems not to have believed all this, or at least to have regarded it as true in such a sort of obscure way, or such a low level as just not to matter or count at all, especially as far as anyone who was engaged in personal development was concerned. (Pause) I think in the West, in the Christian west, we're not

much accustomed to this attitude of very strongly disagreeing with something, or thinking that something is unskilful and at the same time not violently denouncing it. Do you see what I mean? That all seems part of our Christian heritage: that you have to get all worked up about it, rather stemming perhaps from the Jewish attitude towards image worship, or idol worship - you get all upset, there's a sort of affront to God in it, and you've got to be very indignant and denounce it vigorously; but that certainly wasn't the Buddha's way. You see the sort of attitude I'm referring to? It's a very `black-and-white' attitude. It's a bit of a `Mary Whitehouse' attitude, without knocking the poor lady too much. She's been knocked a bit on retreats earlier on.

But what happens when you sort of morally condemn something, and do it very violently and vigorously?

_____: You encourage it.

S: You encourage it, in a way. You feed it and you also get a lot of subjective satisfaction out of your own sense of righteousness, at the same time, and the Buddha was just not into that kind of thing. So he appears very temperate, or very cool, though his views are quite unmistakable. This is why some Christians reading the Buddhist scriptures find the Buddha a bit lacking in fire, a bit lacking in character almost. You see what I mean? He's not passionate, he's not dramatic. Well how could he be from the Buddhist point of view, because he was the Buddha, he'd gone beyond all that. He doesn't let himself go, as it were. Well, there wasn't anything to let go . He doesn't turn on the Brahmans and really denounce them. Sometimes he uses quite strong language but you never have that sense of sort of passionate denunciation; or that he really hates the Brahmans, or anything like that. Far from it! But we have the tradition in the Christian West: if you disapprove of something, or you disagree with something, especially if it's something moral or something religious, it's hardly possible to keep your urbanity. You see what I mean? You have to almost sort of lose control, and that is considered justified. I mean if action has to be taken - sometimes you have to intervene quickly, but that's quite a different sort of thing.
You can't imagine a Buddhist getting up in his Buddhist pulpit, or whatever, and vigorously denouncing something - denouncing `Mara' and all his works; or denouncing the breaking of the precepts, and getting carried away by this. `All these wicked people who don't go along to the Buddhist temple every full-moon day.' You just don't get this kind of thing. There's a quite different atmosphere, a quite different climate.

You notice this with Buddhist monks in the East: even though they may know that people aren't very good Buddhists and they're not meditating, and they're not observing the precepts; they don't get upset, and they don't sort of show by their manner that they disapprove of them. They're friendly and they're welcoming, just as they are with everybody else and this is quite marked. They don't try to make them feel bad, or to make them feel that they're sinners or that they're wicked, or that they should be doing something else; or that they ought to be going along to the temple. The monks just never have these sort of attitudes. They are friendly regardless. And it all stems from this basic attitude of the Buddha's. If the monks get a chance, yes, they will talk about the Dharma, and they'll say `Why don't you come to the temple' next full-moon day, there'll be a nice discourse.' Some may say something like that - but `Why didn't you come last month. You ought to come every month, it's your duty!' No. They never talk in this sort of way, it's quite unknown. (Pause)

Again, it's the more urbane and friendly approach. Sure, they would prefer everybody to go along to the temple on the full-moon day, they probably think, yes that it's quite unskilful that he doesn't come along, he isn't a very good Buddhist; but condemnation and criticism is not the way. So they don't show any disapproval - they don't even <u>feel</u> any disapproval. Well, if he doesn't want to come, that's up to him, but we'd like him to come - let's ask him to come.

That's the sort of attitude. They don't try to make him feel guilty about not coming. So, as I said, this all stems as far as I can see, from the Buddha's own original sort of approach to these things; the Buddha's own sort of basic attitude. It's as though if you do skilful things, well, you're a good person, but if you do unskilful things even then you're not a bad person, you're just doing unskilful things. (Pause)

And there's the sort of scene you used to get in the Scottish kirk: of people who had broken certain commandments being publicly rebuked and made to do public penance and publicly denounced - this is absolutely unknown in the Buddhist East! They can't even imagine such things! But this is what we've had in the Christian West. So what a different sort of attitude, what a different sort of approach. Here the tendency is to hear if someone is wrong they're bad - even if they're morally wrong well they're bad, and should be disapproved of. And your attitude to those who do unskilful things should be a disapproving attitude, you should make them feel that they're wrong - make them feel that they're bad. But that's not the Buddhist view. Not that you confuse skilful and unskilful, no. But you don't adopt that sort of attitude towards those people whom you believe are doing unskilful things, because that is not going to help them, and it's not going to help you. You can certainly make your views known, make your views clear, but in an urbane and courteous manner. Just saying what you really do think, but not sort of taking it out of them, even if they have been very unskilful.

I remember this was one of the great complaints of the Christian missionaries in Kalimpong: they used to say to me that; `The trouble with these Nepalese is they don't even know when they've done wrong. They've no sense of sin! They don't feel ashamed of themselves when they've done something wrong' - that is wrong according to the missionaries. They used to say to me, `They just stand there and grin at you.' (Laughter) They would say, `Look! you've made that girl pregnant.' And (the man) would just say, `Well, yes.' `Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Haven't you done a very wicked thing? Aren't you really sinful?' It just didn't mean anything to him and he'd just shake his head, and grin again. `You shouldn't have done it.' He'd say, `Yes I shouldn't have done it. Quite true.' (Loud laughter) Yes, he fully agreed he shouldn't have done it, but he doesn't feel that he's wicked. He doesn't feel that he's a sinner all the same. He just feels he shouldn't have done it. But the poor missionary who was there said: 'I just can't get him to feel that he's commiteed a sin! He just doesn't seem to have any sense of sin!'

Therefore the Nepalese who had committed the mistake or whatever used to feel the missionary's denunciations were a bit un-understandable - `What is he getting so excited about?' `I've done something wrong, yes, but what's he, or what's she, shouting at me for? What are they denouncing me for?' That would be the sort of attitude. `Yes, I've done wrong; I shouldn't have done it, I'll try not to do it again, but that's that, that's the end of the matter, but I'm not a sinner, what is a sinner anyway?' They used to find it quite difficult to grasp the idea of your being a sinner.

So it's probably sometimes quite difficult for us to realise in this sort of instance the difference between the Buddhist attitude even on a very ordinary level, and the Western Christian attitude. If you miss your morning meditation you don't think oh, I shouldn't have missed it, I'll try not to miss it next time, you start feeling bad, you start feeling guilty, and you think that others are disapproving or they're looking at you with a slight frown. (chuckling) Especially if you've missed too many, you'll be denounced at the end of the week, or held up to public scorn, or your name might appear on the notice board, or something like that, almost. (Pause) This all seems to stem from the Buddha's own original attitude of no sort of vehement denunciation of what you regarded as something unskilful. But on the other hand you don't fail to distinguish skilful and unskilful. Skilful is skilful, unskilful is unskilful; but to denounce the unskilful in an angry sort of manner is itself unskilful!

There is this famous instance when some of the Buddha's bhikkhus reported to him that he'd been criticised, his teaching had been criticised by rival teachers, and they got very upset about it - the disciples, the Buddha's disciples - were very angry, so the Buddha said, "Well, have I taught you anger as a hindrance or not a hindrance?" So they said, "Well, as a hindrance." "So in that case why are you getting angry because someone abuses me and my teaching?" That was the Buddha's way of looking at it . "If people criticise me," he said, " Well examine it. If the criticism is justified, correct yourself. If the criticism is not justified put it aside. But what is the point of getting angry?" So he didn't encourage his disciples to be become angry when he and his teaching were attacked, or criticised. But, again, that is not, very often, the Western attitude. It's certainly not the traditional Western Christian attitude: that you ought to feel angry at false teachings; you ought to feel indignation when you see the abominations of the heathen; you ought to feel revolted, and you ought to denounce them: this is the common attitude.

Again, I remember talking with missionaries in India, and seeing some of their writings - they used to say things like, "These Hindus, they do absolute abominations, my dear! You should just see what they do! They go into these temples which are these awful dark places. These figures are devils, and they bow to the devils . They offer them things. They worship these devils." This is the way they used to talk, and they used to think themselves really bold if they'd stand outside the temple and say, "Down with these idols! Down with these abominations! They should be smashed up!" And so on. And in the days of the British Raj, sometimes they could even get a temple pulled down, or an image taken away. But they weren't allowed to do too much damage of that sort for fear of disturbing the population. And then they talk in terms of being persecuted by the Government, and the Government siding with the local people, and they're not allowed to witness to the truth of Christ, and so on. (Pause)

So if you ever hear Buddhism criticised or anything like that, or the Movement criticised, and your blood starts boiling (chuckling) you're not on the right path, as it were. You want to denounce somebody. You can make your views known, even pretty strongly and clearly but righteous indignation and passionate denunciation is quite out of place. So this was clearly the Buddha's attitude. This has affected the whole course of Buddhist history. The Buddha has put a personal stamp, in a way, on Buddhism in this sort of respect. Quite different to the stamp that Christianity has on the whole.

Anyway, maybe we had better leave it there, and go on to `The Mendicant Philosophers' tomorrow. I think that will be more exciting. And after that we'll go into the main part of the study, `The Buddhist Civilisation in Principle'.

S: All right, `The Mendicant Philosophers'.

Text*"THE MENDICANT PHILOSOPHERS*

It was mainly opposition to the brahmanical sacrificial and social system which the Buddha shared with other contemporary Indian teachers, or ***shramanas****."*

S: Shramanas, by the way, weren't necessarily teachers; some shramanas weren't.

Text..*"The term* ***shramana*** *refers mainly to non-brahmans, but among these 'non-conformist' mendicant philosophers there were some brahmans by birth who also rejected the authority of the Vedic scriptures and the caste system of their day. Each* ***shramana*** *with his disciples constituted what may be loosely referred to as a 'sect' and between them these sects covered a variety of views, or philosophical positions, from materialism to mysticism. There seems, however, to have been an earlier stage, when there was practically no sectarian organization, but only a large number of individual ascetic, homeless wanderers, known in a broad sense as* ***ajivakas****."*

S: *Ajivakas* means.....literally it means `those without a livelihood', but sometimes it is used in the sense of `those with a livelihood', their livelihood was depending on the alms of other people.

Text*"This later became the name of a particular sect, but in the earlier period, just before the time of the Buddha, the term can be applied to all who had adopted the* ***ajiva****, or 'special way of life which was the alternative to an ordinary trade'. This alternative way of life was embraced, says A.K. Warder, 'by many who wished to escape the need to work, or the responsibility of family life, not to speak of conscription, forced labour or slavery, and was a carefree existence very different from the life of strenuous asceticism, complicated discipline, and intensive study required of members of most of the organized sects afterwards'. This opting-out of the social and economic life of the time seems to have been the one feature common to men of otherwise widely varying viewpoints, all of whom, however, were sceptical or critical of the accepted religious philosophy of the brahmans. As individuals such men were known also as 'homeless ones', or* ***Parivrajakas****, men who had 'gone forth', a ritual which demonstrated the man's complete renunciation 'of the whole system of Vedic social practice and religious culture and all its signs and symbols'. All external signs or marks which a man possessed, indicating his householder's status, kinship and caste, he ceremonially removed, and the implements and symbols of the Vedic brahmanical sacrifice were consigned to the fire. By the time of the Buddha wandering, mendicant ascetics in considerable numbers were a familiar feature of the social scene."*

S: The parallel with our own times is very obvious, isn't it? Do you think there are any common factors, in the causation of this? There is the degree of social affluence which can support all these people, and the dissatisfaction with the existing, as it were, orthodox, in this case Vedic, religion and philosophy. It also presupposes a certainy development of individuality. Even though there is a sufficiency of food and clothing, enough to support one if one opts out, and even if one is no longer happy with the orthodox philosophy and religion, it **still** requires a measure of individuality to cut yourself off from family life and social obligations and so on. (Pause)

So it seems very much, as though conditions were right for the emergence of genuine individuals. All right, let's go on.

Text*"After a while, however, their originally anarchic way of life came to be modified in the direction of rudimentary forms of organization. One of the factors which aided this*

development was the need, which such homeless wanderers could not avoid, for some kind of temporary shelter during the period of the monsoon rains. At about the beginning or the middle of June the thunderclouds gather and torrential rain beats down for long periods at a time; river channels, which in the dry weather a few weeks earlier are 'broad expanses of sand with small streams trickling down the centre', become full rivers, broad and deep, rising every hour until they over-top their banks and inundate the surrounding countryside."

S: There was a news item on the radio this morning about Bihar in India, which is this very area - there have been very serious floods and 40,000 people are homeless. So the same picture exactly. Times haven't changed.

Text.*"Rivers everywhere throughout the Gangetic plain become wide, rapidly flowing torrents, which it is very difficult, if not impossible, to cross by ferry; so, since bridges are in most cases out of the question, and cross-country roads are either washed away or have become morasses of mud when any use is made of them, travelling is difficult and hazardous, as well as unpleasant. This state of affairs continues in most parts of northern and eastern India until the latter part of September. During this season of the year, therefore, the almsmen had to give up their wandering life for about three months and congregate in various temporary retreats from the rains - possibly caves or forest-shelters made specially for the purpose."*

S: That's quite clear, I think.

Text*"The other factor in the development of some degree of organization was the increasing power of the state. The monarchies of Koshala and Magadha, in particular, were extending their bounds and also intensifying the degree of control which was exercised over the lives of the people within their territories. If the wandering almsmen were not as a class to become the objects of the king's displeasure and hostility they would have to organize themselves, and then, as organized schools of 'philosophers', show that they had some contribution to make to the public good. It became necessary for them to find leaders who would be able, as Warder says, to 'confront the kings as powerful and respected heads of organized sects... and convince them of the importance and usefulness of the* ***Shramanas*** *in the new society (in comparison with other occupations)'."*

_____: This tends to suggest that sometimes the philosophies were just rationalisations of a way of life that the people took.

S: Not **necessarily**. It might have been. It doesn't necessarily follow. (Pause) Don't forget, this is Trevor Ling's quoting Warder. Trevor Ling's own sociological reading of the situation. One mustn't forget that. (Pause)

It is true that the shramanas on the whole, very often, especially perhaps after the time of the Buddha, tried to convince the people of their usefulness to the people, from even a social point of view - taking `social' in a wider context; especially say if you supported the shramanas, if you gave them dana, well, that was a good deed, and the result of that good deed would be a happy, possibly, heavenly rebirth for you. But the general impression we get from the Pali scriptures was that in the Buddha's day, at least, people were happy to support the shramanas anyway. They seem to have regarded it as quite natural that the wandering shramana, when he turned up, was a sort of guest, and in all tribal societies the guest, the stranger, had a special status. So, one must think more in terms of just someone wandering and turning up at some village, and they maybe haven't seen anyone for some weeks from outside; certainly not from so far away, so they are very pleased to see him. There's plenty of food around, plenty of corn, plenty of vegetables to feed him, to give him food for a night or two, to give him a place to sleep, and talk to him. This is the sort of thing they are quite

happy to do. They don't think of it `as supporting an ascetic', or `supporting him in his way of life'. They don't look at it quite like that. If you get hordes and droves of them, and every day dozens turn up and then serious inroads made on your supplies, that is another matter. But if it's just a question of the odd visitor passing through on his way, or his round, on his way maybe to some other place - and he's got a bit of news and something interesting, at least some news about a new teacher or a new point of view, or new ideas, well, you're only too happy to see him. He's also a carrier of news, not to say gossip, in the case of some of the shramanas. (Pause)

So, I think that certainly at first, there wasn't nearly such a great need for the shramanas to justify their existence to the public . As regards the king, again, we can't generalise too much. There's no doubt that the king would want to control everything, and there's certainly a parallel between the religious organisations, as we may call them for convenience sake, and the commercial ones. The different craftsmen and the different groups of businessmen, they had their guilds. So the king, and this was also true in Medieval and Tudor England, - the king didn't have to control the guild members individually. Do you see what I mean? The guild controlled its own members, and the king dealt with the leading men of the guild. If the king wanted money he just called the headman of the guild and would say, "Look, you people have got to raise so much money for me", and then he would argue and bargain with the king, and eventually they'd agree on a sum, maybe after consultation with the guild members; or maybe the king would even imprison or execute the leader of the guild just to threaten or terrorise all the others - This sort of thing went on in both India and in England . But the important point is that the king deals with the guild **collectively**, through its leading members, and the guild controls its own members, and to some extent makes them amenable to royal policy, while at the same time they stick up for their own interests.

So what is a corollary of this is that the king supports the constitution of the guild. The king upholds the guild in its control over its individual members. The king, as it were, approves the constitution of the guild. Do you see how it works?

Siddhiratna: By agreeing to deal with only the leader.

S: No, not just that - but, if they have for instance, a rule that every man who follows such and such a trade must belong to this guild - that he must pay such-and-such a percentage of his income into the guild funds, etc., etc.- the king gives this the force of law, so that if any guildsman becomes recalcitrant and refuses to pay the guild, the guild can then bring him before the king, and he, in a way, has broken the king's law by breaking the guild's law . You see the situation, so there are these corporations, these bodies, these guilds, which control their own members and the king controls them, and deals with them through their heads, and enforces their constitution. The same with regard to the castes: the castes also, are guilds, in a sense. So society is made up of groups: castes, guilds and so on, each of which controls its own members and the king has dealings with the leading men. You get the sort of idea? So it's the same with the religious bodies. This is not only a development during the Buddha's time, but was developing before - there were these different religious bodies like guilds, as it were, and the king upheld their constitution, and this was especially so later on when they had more developed constitutions, and in return, as it were, for enforcing their control over their own members, their leading men had to deal with the king and, in certain respects, make the body as a whole amenable to his wishes. For instance, supposing in medieval India the monastic order, the bhikkhu sangha, had its own constitution, its monastic law: so it controlled its own members, the king did not interfere in its internal affairs; just as he did not interfere with the internal affairs of the guilds. If, for instance, the guild wanted to punish a member, yes, it punished its member; if the monastic order wanted to punish its members, it punished its members, and if anybody who was a member of a guild, or a monastic order, refused to obey the laws of the guild or the order to which he belonged, he could be hauled before the king,

because the king has given the force of law to the constitutions of those bodies, but they had to pay a price, in a sense, which was that the guild as a whole or the religious corporation as a whole, **had to keep on good terms with the king**, and not go against any of his policies. So you see the sort of set-up?

Siddhiratna: Presumably that means that one guildsman could in fact appeal to the king, perhaps for a change in the constitution of a guild or something like that.

S: If he was individually, sufficiently powerful and influential maybe, yes. But I think, my impression is, that this tended not to happen. If he went over the heads of the whole guild to the king, he would make himself extremely unpopular with his fellow guild members. If he was a businessman and had to do business he'd need their co-operation; he'd think twice about taking the risk of going against them all and appealing directly to the king. And the king might regard it as an impertinence - `Why don't you go back and discuss it with your fellow guildsmen, instead of bothering me?' Well, he's given the guild its constitution and power over its members so he **doesn't** have to deal with each guild member individually. (Pause)

For instance, in the case of England - in the case of London - the Lord Mayor of course represented all the guilds. He was elected, as far as I remember, by the heads of all the guilds, and maybe some others too. That was the set-up. So he spoke for the wealth and riches of the City of London. That was why several Lord Mayors were imprisoned in the Tower of London; others were beheaded because they wouldn't agree to the wishes of the king; at the same time their guild members wouldn't let them back down. (Light laughter) Sometimes (chuckling) the post of Lord Mayor was a very risky one. It must have been much the same in India in the case of the heads of the guilds, or even the heads of the religious bodies. So there's some sense in what Warder says, *"If the wandering almsmen were not as a class, to become objects of the king's displeasure and hostility, they would have to organise themselves and then, as organised schools of `philosophers', show that they had some contribution to make to the public good. It became necessary for them to find leaders who would be able, as Warder says, to `confront the kings as powerful and respected heads of organised sects....and convince them of the importance and usefulness of the `Shramanas' in the new society ....*"

This is not altogether true,you find that the Buddha in confronting someone like Ajattasatru who says, "What is the visible fruit of the life of the shramana? " Just as in the same way the visible fruit, say, of the life and work of a carpenter is a bench - the visible fruit of the life and work of a potter is a pot. What is the visible result and fruit of the life of the shramana? So it's quite noticeable that the Buddha did not speak in terms of social usefulness. He speaks ultimately in terms of Nirvana, and that this is the visible result and fruit of the life of the shramana, that he experiences Nirvana. He doesn't attempt to justify in purely social terms at all, or in terms of public utility. So we mustn't imagine these `powerful and respected heads of organised sects' doing that sort of thing - simply convincing the king of `the importance and usefulness of the `shramanas' in the new society (in comparison with other occupations).'

This is a sort of danger that we are confronted by even nowadays, isn't it? That is to say trying to justify what you are doing in terms of public utility and social usefulness even though the significance of what you're doing goes far beyond that. In other words you have to justify the individual in terms of his usefulness to the group, which is really nonsense.! You see what I'm getting at? And this is the trap that many Christian clergymen have fallen into: trying to recommend Christianity by showing how socially useful it is, and trying to justify their own existences by engaging in social work; which may be very good in itself, but Christianity is not just about social work, if it is a universal religion. It's about the development of the individual . You see what I mean?

Siddhiratna: Isn't it the case that wherever Buddhist ideas go, there follows an educational process as well?

S: This is true, but you are not to justify Buddhism solely on the grounds that it provides you with an education, and provides you with culture, because these things are incidental.

Siddhiratna: They'd be aiming or pointing towards the enlightened mind.....

S: Yes. But you're not to justify them simply on their usefulness to the social group. If you say Buddhism is a very good religion, and you ought to tolerate it because it is so useful and because it provides education, because it gives culture; then in a way, you are betraying Buddhism. If you don't make it clear that the **fundamental, the real aim of Buddhism is something which has got nothing to do with all those things.!** (Pause)

It may incidentally produce or bring about those benefits, but it's real aim is about the development of the individual. So it isn't true as a matter of fact that the Buddha and the other teachers of his time - well certainly not the Buddha - tried to justify, or to make his teachings or way of life acceptable to the kings on account simply of its social utility. We don't find him doing that at all. He certainly pointed out that there were certain incidental benefits to society, but his main emphasis was not there at all. So we ourselves have to be careful in the same way. (Pause)

The powers that be are only too ready to harness one's efforts to the preservation of the status quo. I think it is one of the reasons why the Maharishi has been so successful, admittedly, on a rather low level, but he has been successful on that level because he has made it quite clear he has no intention whatever of disturbing the status quo. *Transcendental meditation* is geared to production. (Pause) It's geared to free enterprise almost. Of course one won't be tactless. One won't to introduce this idea that the group exists for the sake of the individual, not the individual for the sake of the group too prematurely or too clumsily; you've got to prepare the way, and get peoples' minds receptive to it . But you certainly mustn't beat about the bush in the end. Anybody ever come up against anything like that? (Pause) They expect you to justify one's whole way of life in terms of social utility?

Voices: Oh yes..... all the time.

S: Oh, in what sort of way?

Lokamitra: Well, almost anybody that you come across and you mention that you're a Buddhist, and they say well what good is that going to do? Cutting yourself off and things?

S: What good is that going to do you, or what good is that going to do for the world?

Lokamitra: The world. Because you're not going to look at what is good for you. You're meant to consider what's good for the world
S: The world in terms of the group.

Lokamitra: Yes.

S: In other words the group is considered to be an end in itself; a group as group, regardless of the individual interest of the individuals who make up the group.

Siddhiratna: Some people tend to talk in terms of the happiness of society. They never go very far in defining what happiness means.

S: It doesn't matter if everybody's miserable, so long as society is happy. (chuckles) It almost amounts to that. It doesn't matter if everybody's miserable now, so long as society is going to be happy in the future.

Vessantara: Do you see a threat to our existence with increasing social organisation? There could be pressure upon the Sangha to fall into line with.....

S: I think there could be. I don't mean any conscious, deliberate pressure exerted by somebody at the top; certainly not in this country. I think that is very unlikely for a long time to come, but as you get bigger, and as you get better known, as you have more in the way of material resources, you become as it were, more amenable to these sort of pressures, and you must watch out.

Nagabodhi: It also acts in a negative way, in that we find it difficult to raise funds because we **don't** do.....we aren't being seen to be socially useful.

S: We have to be very careful we don't compromise and start being socially useful just to get funds.

Siddhiratna: Is that what you meant by amenable?

S: No, I wasn't thinking of anything as extreme as that, but for instance, even having for certain purposes to present oneself as, or accept that one is classified as a religious organisation; even that means one is becoming **slightly** amenable, if you see what I mean.

_____: Apparently somebody was saying that there could be pressure on us at Sukhavati from the Borough Council to make our space available to the rest of the community because of the shortage of available space to hold public meetings.

S: There could be.

_____;..This is possibly symptomatic of ....

S: Mm. Yes. But I think the fact that we technically had a place of religious worship there would get us out. For instance, because we have a shrine which can be classified as a place of religious worship, we could say, `Well, it's against our religious beliefs that ordinary public meetings should be held in our shrine. They'd accept that, but then we'd have to say it's a place of religious worship, which would mean to them, something a bit different to what it means to us, so we've made ourselves a little bit amenable; we've brought ourselves within that sort of classification as a religion with a place of religious worship; whereas we might not see things quite in that way. So we have to be very, very careful, and I don't think, if we are functioning in the world at all, and have a sort of legal existence, I don't think we can escape being amenable to a very slight extent, but that has to be very much for **our** benefit and not represent a gradual sort of slipping into their way of thinking on our part. For instance, in New Zealand Akshobhya had himself registered as a minister of religion for the purpose of performing marriages, so any marriage that he performed, any Buddhist marriage, is a legal marriage. And I suggested to him when I was there that perhaps this wasn't a very wise step, because it brought us within the sort of existing legal framework, at least to that limited extent - that Buddhist marriages became legal marriages, and as far as I can see, if you have Buddhist marriages at all it's best to keep them quite free from any question of legality in the civil sense. You can then recognise your own Buddhist marriages, if you have them at all, and also, then, **not** recognise them, without having to go through the law courts - just by mutual agreement the understanding of the whole community and so on. So I thought that was, on his part, a slightly retrograde step, so we talked about it. Though, admittedly, the

situation in New Zealand is a bit more liberal, well certain respects than it is here. But **here** I'd certainly not wish anybody to ....any Order member to get himself or herself registered as a minister of religion for that sort of purpose. It would sort of entangle us with the law in a way that is not necessary at all. You see what I mean?

Siddhiratna: Is your sort of worry about being represented as a religion because that, in fact, in some way as say Tower Hamlets understand what is meant by `religion', means that you are curtailed in what you might be able to do?

S: Not so much that, but curtailed in our own thinking - we might start thinking of ourselves as a religion in the sense Trevor Ling has described at the beginning of the book: that we're a little group providing a sort of service, or providing consolation and all that sort of thing, and not tampering with the existing structure of society, but just sort of quietly conforming to it. It's almost the thin end of the wedge with that kind of thing. You see what I'm getting at? So we can't **completely** refuse to - I won't say conform - but be amenable, but it should be only on very specific measures for very specific purposes. For instance we get various advantages in registering the FWBO centres as charities. But that means that we come within the definition of a charity, which is, as far as I can remember, either religious or educational and cultural. So, in a way, we accept that others regard us in that sort of light, but we just have to remember that we **don't** regard ourselves quite in that sort of way. (Pause)

I think we should if anything, as we get stronger, aim at being more intransigent rather than more accommodating. I think the danger is that as you get bigger and have more dealings with the authorities you become more and more amenable in a more and more general sort of way. And you end up maybe with your own Member of Parliament who's just like all the other Members of Parliament in his outlook. So as we get bigger and more influential we should start being more difficult to deal with not more easy to deal with. (Pause) Though this sort of question isn't likely to arise just yet, but it may be that in the future we will need leaders who would be able to `confront kings as powerful and respected heads of organised sects', in our own interests, and to push our own point of view.

_____: Even that's a bit of a contradiction, isn't it?

S: Even that is a bit of a contradiction, but you do live in the world, and you can't escape that, unless the world is big enough and has enough forests and mountains for you to get away and **live** in the forests or in mountain caves and just forget all about the world. But I think that's unlikely in this country. (Pause)

Somebody mentioned Jitari's experience when he tried to get away into a cave. (Laughter) ...all the King's Men surrounded him. (Pause)

But there may be times when we have to sacrifice certain material interests for the sake of preserving what we really believe in, and not compromising, as in the case of the fund-raising. Maybe, if necessary, we have to say, `Well, we are raising the money. `Why?' So that people can go away to the country and do nothing and make no contribution to society at all. (Laughter) and just develop themselves.

Siddhiratna: I think it's a bit premature Bhante: but doesn't the Bodhisattva Ideal come in with being in a town deliberately so that you can push your ideas?

S: I think you have to be very careful not to present the Bodhisattva Ideal in those sort of terms.

Siddhiratna: I'm not really sure.....

S: .....the Bodhisattva isn't the sort of social worker writ large kind of thing, even though he may be doing very much the same sort of things, at least externally.; but his basic motivation is quite different because he's thinking in terms of Enlightenment. I think we do have to be very careful not to present a watered down version of the Bodhisattva Ideal: that he's just a sort of glorified do-gooder. (Pause)

_____: Or a missionary.

S: Or a missionary, yes. (Pause) Milarepa was a Bodhisattva too, till he became a Buddha, that is.

Manjuvajra: Don't we have to watch within the Movement itself as well that these group things don't start building up?

S: In what sense?

Manjuvajra: Um..... well, I've got comments written down here : `The group tries to apply everything to its own requirements, even considers that self development is only relevant if seen in terms of its final usefulness. I mean that could quite easily grow up within our own ranks.

S: In what sort of way?

Manjuvajra: Well, in that what a person is doing is seen only in terms of the overall for the Movement as a kind of group phenomena.

S: Ah, well then that means you have started regarding the spiritual community as a group.

Manjuvajra: Yes.

S: So it's **that** that one must guard against. And that is the basic error here then. (Pause)

Manjuvajra: That seems to me a continual danger.

S: Well until you gain Enlightenment all dangers are continual.
Siddhiratna: What would be the difference, say, between our Movement and the group?

S: Well, in as far as the Friends are concerned there are two things: there is a group which I call the positive group, which is The Friends itself as distinct from the Order. Then there is the Order which is purely a spiritual community; and it is through the positive group or groups, that the Order functions, as it were in the world - or individual Order members function in the world. I don't see, at present, that there's much danger of the sort of dangers that you're referring to - that may come about in the future - in the past the danger has been distinctly of the opposite kind. Also, again, one mustn't see one's own development in individualistic terms, rather than in individual terms. You see what I mean?

_____: No.

S: You might be asked to do something for the Movement, as it were, and your reaction might be, `Well, I don't want to do that.' But the fact that you don't want to do that, or **won't** do that, or **refuse** to do that, is not necessarily a sign of your being an individual, it's much more likely to be a manifestation of the fact that you don't want to be bothered, you don't care about other people, and **that** means that you're not really concerned about your own

development. So there's been, even within the Friends, and within the Order in the past - not nearly so much now - but certainly when I was around, in London, a lot of this individualism masquerading as individuality; and people seemed at that time, many of them, unable to distinguish between the two. And you showed what an individual you were by refusing to do anything for other people. So that isn't real individuality. It may be if you've been very much pressured in the past by other people, and by the group in whatsoever form, you may **need** to be given a sort of bit of rope in this direction - allowed to be a bit individualistic, but sooner or later, you have to get over that, as, of course, many of our Friends have got over it, after having an initial phase of that sort of individualism lasting maybe several years, even, in some cases. But a healthy individual who is really being an individual, and really developing as an individual will be happy to do things with and for other people, as an expression of his growing individuality, not as a sacrifice of it to the needs of the group, or anything like that. But, of course, obviously one must follow a Middle Way. (Pause) So there should be a sort of healthy interaction between your needs as an individual and the needs of the group. You can't separate the two completely. And, in a way, you can't develop as an individual entirely on your own and, as it were, ignoring the needs of other people, or the needs, as it were, of the group. (Pause)

Lokamitra: That's still not very clear to me. I can see the difference between something out of individualism and I know what refusing to do something through individualism is concerned with. But on the other hand the desire to do something with and for other people seems to me not very much different from the desire to do things with and for other people in a group sense.

S: Yes, but then you've got the overall objective of Enlightenment for yourself and others.

Lokamitra: Yeah.

S: ....which the average social worker certainly doesn't have, and that makes all the difference. (Pause)

_____: It's not a self-denying sort of...um...doing things for other people - is that what you're getting at?

Lokamitra: (Pause) No. (Pause) I'm not very clear at the moment.

S: One could say, putting it positively, that doing things for other people is an expression of what you want to do. You **want** to do things for other people and you do feel that that is helping you to grow and to develop, as well as being helpful to them. It's not that you really see your interest and the interests of others as two mutually exclusive, virtually sort of contradictory things. (Pause) You **enjoy** doing things for others. (Pause) And you grow yourself at the same time. To be devoted exclusively to your own needs, even in the interests of your so-called individual development, is self-defeating: like the person who says, `No one must disturb me, no one must ever interrupt me, I've got to get on with my meditation, I've got to get on with my self-development; I don't want anybody to bother me; everything must be organised according to my needs, my requirements, so that I can get on with my individual development; mustn't do anything for anyone else because that will interfere with my development' - well, that person isn't going to develop! You see what I mean? You may, if you have had people sitting on you too heavily for too long, you **may** need to go through a bit of a phase not bothering much about other people, but sooner or later, if you do get into your own real self-development, your own self-development, with its ultimate spiritual objectives, will demand virtually that you get involved with other people and do things with and for them. You can't **really** sort of make an antithesis of the Arahant ideal of self-salvation and the Bodhisattva ideal of devotion to others: these aren't really an antithesis. (Pause)

And your individual development is not some sort of fragile, delicate, hothouse plant that has to be guarded against the cold winds of the world, or shielded from contact with other people and their needs. (Pause) But when I say `other people and their needs', I don't mean that you necessarily go out and start a new centre or anything like that, it can be quite simple, ordinary everyday things, not anything organisational, as it were, at all. (Pause) Like if somebody says to you, `Do you mind making me a cup of tea?' - `Oh no, I can't do that, I've got my meditation in five minutes.' (Chuckling) But we've had some of our Friends who've been like this in the past, haven't they?

You don't have to be precious about your self-development, or your individual development. (Pause) But anyway perhaps enough said on that topic.

Nagabodhi: Just on the topic we touched on a minute ago about groups and Siddhiratna asked the difference between a group and a Movement, something that we talked about a bit in connection with the *Newsletter*, I've noticed you using the term and people increasingly use the term `Movement', with a capital M ....

S: That's right.

Nagabodhi: ...It's as if it's becoming the kind of respectable collective word for what we are, and I'm not sure about it.

S: In my usage it means the Order plus the Friends plus our own distinctive way of looking at Buddhism. This is what it means to me.

Nagabodhi: But when I see it in the context of an article in the *Newsletter*, it seems to be read by people who **aren't** aware of it.

S: Well, we must be careful of that, yes. Or even put a footnote, or some kind of explanation.

_____: I was thinking about this last week, because I got into a conflict : I saw the Movement as something `out there', that I had to either sort of join, try to get involved in it, or not join. It seemed to be something separate from me. So I got thinking about it and what I came up with was that the Movement, really, is the kind of manifestation on a social level of the growth of the number of individuals, so you get the individuals growing, they then decide to come together just to do something.

S: Yes (speaking at same time) It is considering it in dynamic rather than static terms. And on the much higher spiritual level it's the bodhichitta in action, as it were, inverted commas, `collectively'.

Vessantara: I must say I've shared some of Nagabodhi's doubts about it. I think because of the associations that it conjures up of other Movements with a capital M, most of them not at all to do with individuals.

S: We cannot but use the terms that are current, just as in the Buddha's day all these little groups of ascetics, of shramanas, who gathered around certain individual leading shramanas were known as a 'sanghas'. But now, what does `sangha' mean to us? It means **`the sangha'** the spiritual community founded by the Buddha. So we forget about all those other little `sanghas' - they're only known to historians.

Vessantara: It's not a particularly current word, though, is it?

S: Which?

Vessantara: `Movement'.

S: It's not particularly current, though I wouldn't say it's not at all current.

Lokamitra: You could quite simply have something in the *Newsletter* - Sagaramati is preparing a dictionary of our terms. You could just have a page of a few of the terms, quite soon in fact. That would be quite useful. 'Retreat' too. I'm sure a lot of people haven't been on retreats who get our *Newsletter.*

S: Otherwise they come with fixed ideas and say,`Well this isn't like a retreat at all.'

Nagabodhi: We had an article on retreats. We've been slowly doing that for big things.

S: One new person that came on our retreat was quite surprised there was so much talking. He quite expected that, apart from the actual study or discussion, it would be silent all the time. He was quite surprised that retreats weren't a predominantly silent occasion. So this was his idea about a retreat, and perhaps quite a correct one. (laughter)

Nagabodhi: Another thing about it being a dynamic term. The term being used in this dynamic sense rather than static sense is almost an argument for using the word `movement', if at all, with a small `m' rather than a capital. One sort of refers to the movement that is taking place `A Movement' which exists.

S: No. **The** movement that exists. (Laughter)

S: Anyway, on to the `Ajivakas' now.

Lokamitra: Bhante, could I just come back to a point earlier on where we were talking about - and I know this question came up in my mind when we were talking about it - Quite often I find it very difficult when I'm meeting new people, they ask me what I do or what I am and maybe I sound Buddhist or something, they cannot in their terms, in the terms of the group, they cannot appreciate, they can only relate to that in terms of the group, which makes for a great number of difficulties; they just don't understand. What does one do in a situation like that?

S: Well, you can either sort of accommodate yourself to their understanding and say what you are on their terms, of course sticking to the facts. You can say, for instance, that you are the chairman of a charitable organisation and a full-time worker for that. That at once makes sense to them even though they don't know what that charitable organisation is. Then they might say, `How are you supported?' And you might say,`I just get my expenses met.' And then they might say, `Is that all? You don't get any salary?' And you say `No, because I think it worth while to work for this, for such and such reasons. Then you can begin to explain a little of the underlying philosophy, as it were.

But stick to the facts to begin with. Or you can say, `I'm a yoga teacher.' And they can understand that, because that makes you healthy and keeps you in trim and fit enough to continue going to the office every day',sort of thing;and then you can say, `Well yoga for me links up with meditation, and meditation links up with self-development, and this is what I'm really interested in. For me yoga is just a means to an end. But you've established that link, either by saying you are a chairman of a charitable organisation working fulltime for it, or by saying you're a yoga teacher; you've also stuck to the facts. And given yourself a lead into what you really believe in. You can't expect to be able to spill the beans immediately to

someone who has never heard about the Friends, or never thought in those sort of terms at all, even in a very general way.

But it comes back to, in a sense, what possibly Christ was getting at when he spoke in terms of the Sabbath being made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. You can even quote that to a Christian if you meet him. That the group exists for the individual, the institutions exist for the sake of the individual, for the sake of the development of the individual, the individual does not exist to service the group. Not that you make an absolutely hard and fast distinction between the interests of the group and the interests of the individual, but the group is made up of **potential** individuals who must be helped to develop to the next stage, as it were, which is what we call the stage of being an individual. This culminates in something that we call Enlightenment.
So therefore the group and the institutions of the group should be organised or re-organised, in such a way as to further the true **human** development of its members.

Or you could say that it's the function of the group to produce an individual, not that the group as such can produce an individual. To produce the person who, with proper advice and guidance, and his own effort, can become an individual. So the function of the group is to produce an individual. It is not the function of individuals to simply produce a group. The function of the individual is to produce the spiritual community. If the whole group can be transformed into a spiritual community, so much the better, but if there are only a few individuals then there'll be a small spiritual community consisting of a small number of individuals and a large group consisting of a large number of proto-individuals with a certain small area of overlap. Because by becoming individuals and members of the spiritual community, you don't cease to be members of the group. You can't help that, even if you're only members of the group indirectly through your organised religious body as it were.

The kings of course had another sort of interest in exerting a certain kind of control. We mustn't see it just negatively, because sometimes thieves and vagabonds and murderers would take refuge with religious bodies, so for instance the king would come to an agreement with the religious bodies that they would not receive anybody who was wanted by the king. They would not give refuge to any thief or murderer and so on. That's the sort of understanding that the king came to with them, or that they came to with the king. In return for that understanding the king would agree to protect them and uphold their institutions and protect them from interference by other bodies or other powerful individuals. So the king's or the government's surveillance of the religious bodies was also to some extent in the interests of society as a whole.

All right let's go on then.

Vessantara: Did the Buddha subscribe to this thing of not giving refuge to people who were wanted by the king?

_____: Angulimala?

Vessantara: Well he gave refuge to Angulimala and accepted him as a member of the Sangha.

S: You can't ordain somebody - this is a present rule - if he is in debt, and you can't ordain him if he is what is called *Rajapurisa*, which means literally 'King's man'. This is variously interpreted as those in the royal service or those wanted by the king and so on, or anyone on whom the king has a certain demand or claim is not to be ordained. But one could of course look at it differently. Supposing one was living under a state which was fundamentally unjust. For instance in Burma, during the British colonial period the Burmese Buddhist

monks regularly accepted into the order those who were wanted by the authorities for subversive activities. They seemed to waive the rule in this respect. Whether they strictly followed the Vinaya in this respect, well that is a matter of opinion but this is what they certainly did. They did ordain into the Order people who were in bad odour with the authorities, the British authorities, or were even wanted by them. But whether they were right in so doing or wrong, that can be discussed.

But as far as one can see on the whole the Indian kings were very reasonable where religious matters were concerned, but supposing one came up against a government that was completely non-religious or anti-religious, would one therefore have to disband or cease to function just because the government didn't like it? So there are limits to co-operation, limits to collaboration, but as far as I know, the Buddha never considered this eventuality, presumably because he was never confronted by it in actual practice. Supposing the Government ordered all the monks to get married for instance, in the interests of population increase, well are they to obey? etc., etc. Well this is a problem that the Christian church has been confronted by. It's confronted by in Russia for instance.

Lokamitra: Didn't this happen in Japan? The monks there encouraged to get married?

S: Yes, they were in a way. They weren't obliged to but they were certainly encouraged to by the Government towards the end of the last century and many of them did. And then again another thing that the Government did in Japan during the medieval period was to divide all the different sects of Buddhism into two to try to bring about rivalries between the different wings, and in that way to weaken the influence of the sects.

Siddhiratna: Presumably there is also a question of people like national servicemen.

S: Yes, for instance if you have an understanding with the king, one of the things that you can negotiate is that your regularly ordained members will not be liable to national service. Well the Indian kings all recognised this as regards members of religious orders. They were exempt from the call-up as it were. They couldn't be seized for military service, though a few bad kings did sometimes seize hold of monks in this sort of way. But if the king granted you that sort of concession, well then you had sometimes to grant the king certain things in return. So sometimes it was a very delicate and difficult question - how far you could go, how far you could just go in accommodating the king without infringing your own fundamental beliefs. Sometimes the leaders, the heads, the elders of the Sangha had to think very seriously indeed. The king might want your support for war, for instance, could you give that? The king might want you to bless his troops, could you do that? For instance I remember that when I was in Kalimpong on Indian Independence Day, representatives of different religions were regularly invited by the local authorities to attend the Independence Day celebrations and recite prayers for the Nation as it were, but the Government of India published a little book giving the passages from the various scriptures which each representative or each religion should recite on that sort of occasion, and it was just like a rounding up of the local witch doctors of various brands, just to do a bit of hocus pocus, so in the end I just refused to have anything to do with this, even though it was a little bit, not exactly risky, but not a very wise thing for me to do, being after all a foreigner there and seeming to be unco-operative where Indian Independence Day celebrations were concerned, but anyway in the end I just didn't accept the invitation and so they had to get somebody else.

But this is just a small sort of instance, but I got away with it quite easily, but much more problematic and dangerous issues could easily arise.

Well, yes another occasion did arise when China invaded India, in 1962. I had a visit from the local frontier inspector saying that a public meeting was being called in the town hall to

denounce the Chinese aggression and that Dhardo Rimpoche and I were to be the principal speakers and we were to denounce the Chinese aggression. But I was not convinced that the Chinese had committed aggression actually, but I was told, and this was almost an order by the frontier inspector to both of us, as the two best known Buddhists in Kalimpong, to denounce on behalf of the Buddhist community the aggression of the Chinese. This was the word, they were very particular, we must use the word aggression, because they were very scared that the border peoples, the Nepalese and so on, who were Mongoloid people, would be sympathetic to the invading Chinese and not support the Indians, you see, and they didn't even know at that time how far the chinese were going to go and they might even go right down to (Bagdo), there were rumours, or oven down to Calcutta. There were rumours like that, that they were going to invade the whole of Bengal.

So apparently, so the frontier inspector told me - he was a Bengali - the deputy commissioner who had his headquarters in Darjeeling, Kalimpong being only a sub-division, the deputy commissioner had phoned the Kalimpong sub-division, phoned the frontier inspector and said, 'why hasn't there been a spontaneous public meeting denouncing the aggression of the Chinese?' So the frontier inspector, who was of course in the police, organised that public meeting. The public left to themselves would not have organised it, I'm quite sure of that. So he had to organise it and when it was then the frontier inspector who organised it and he has a certain power over the Tibetans, because it's he who gives them their permits to go from Kalimpong to Darjeeling or Darjeeling to Calcutta or whatever, so when it was heard that he had organised it everybody turned up and Dhardo Rimpoche and I were the speakers.

So neither of us wanted to say exactly what we had been told to say but on the other hand we knew we had to say something. So we both followed an ironical line. There were other speakers but we were the two main ones and I said something like this, I said in 1950 the Chinese invaded Tibet and we were all very sorry to hear that, but of course in those days the Chinese were our friends, India and China were friends, so of course we weren't allowed to say anything about that- which was true, we'd been gagged - and anyone who spoke against the Chinese in Kalimpong in those days could be thrown out. So I said unfortunately at that time we were not able to say anything about the Chinese invading Tibet and what they'd done to Tibetan Buddhism, but anyway now it had come nearer home, very ironically, now of course the Chinese have come into India - I didn't use the word aggression or invasion, now the Chinese have come into India, so of course now we are allowed to say something against them. So I spoke only in this way and they weren't at all pleased but anyway I said not that I was unhappy about the Chinese coming into India but I said much more about my not being happy about them having come into Tibet before that, and I pointed out that had they not been allowed to come into Tibet, then of course the question of their coming into India wouldn't have arisen.

So in this way I said rather ironically and sort of disapproving of the Chinese coming into India, but making clear I disapproved all the more of their coming into Tibet which the Indians had connived at, and Dhardo Rimpoche spoke in much the same vein, he was also quite good at irony, so with this they had to be content. But you see the sort of pressure that was put upon us, and we risked being thrown out of Kalimpong, for not acceding to the wishes of the frontier inspector. I couldn't be touched without difficulty because I qualified as a permanent resident and Dhardo Rimpoche by that time had got Indian citizenship, so he was pretty safe, but we were the only two that probably could have got away with that. Saying that sort of thing, speaking in an ironical sort of way. So you see the sort of situation that you may have to encounter sometimes.

So onto the Ajivakas.

Text *"THE AJIVAKAS*

*So, out of what was possibly in the beginning a very broad category of homeless wanderers, 'drop-outs', or men of the 'alternative life' (**ajivakas**), there developed a number of separate and distinct philosophical schools, committed to various different viewpoints. One of the best known of these inherited the name **Ajivakas** as a special designation; the school so named adhered to the teaching of a man named Makkhali Gosala, who was one of the most prominent of the earlier leaders in the process of systematization. The doctrines of the Ajivakas may, however, have been taught somewhat earlier by two other wandering philosophers whose names have been preserved, Purana Kassapa and Pakudha Kaccayana, and then have been co-ordinated or further developed by Gosala. These doctrines are known to us mainly from the criticisms of them which are found in Buddhist and Jain literature. The Ajivakas appear to have denied the notion of **karma**, namely, that a man's lot in his present existence is held to be the consequence of actions performed in previous existences and that his actions on this existence will determine his condition in future existences. The Buddhist understanding of the doctrine of **karma** carries with it the implication that a man can affect his own destiny for better or worse by his moral choices, and by the performance of morally wholesome or unwholesome acts. This principle the Ajivakas rejected. In their view, it seems, the supposed choice of action had no real effect whatever on men's condition of life, here or hereafter. All that happened within the universe took place within a totally closed causal system in which all events were completely and unalterably determined by cosmic principles over which there was no control. The doctrine that men do not act in any real sense seems to have been the contribution of Purana; what appears as the act of a man, who is the supposed actor, is no act at all, and there is therefore no question of choice of action and, therefore, no moral choice.*

The teaching of Purana Kassapa is represented in the Buddhist Pali canon in the following terms:

"To him who acts, O king, or causes another to act, to him who mutilates or causes another to mutilate, to him who punishes or causes another to punish, to him who causes grief or torment, to him who trembles or causes others to tremble, to him who kills a living creature, who takes what is not given, who breaks into houses, who commits dacoity, or robbery, or highway robbery, or commits adultery, or who speaks lies, to him thus acting there is no guilt. If with a discus with an edge sharp as a razor he should make all living creatures on the earth one heap, one mass of flesh, there would be no guilt thence resulting, no increase of guilt would ensue. Were he to go along the south bank of the Ganges striking and slaying, mutilating and having men mutilated, oppressing and having men oppressed, there would be no guilt thence resulting, no increase of guilt would ensue. Were he to go along the north bank of the Ganges giving alms or causing them to be offered, there would be no merit thence resulting, no increase of merit. In generosity, in self-mastery, in control of the senses, in speaking truth, there is neither merit nor increase of merit."(31)

Nevertheless, the Ajivakas practised an ascetic life. This fact they explained as being due, like everything else, to the wholly impersonal mechanism by which the universe operates. One of the inevitable stages in human destiny was the practice of asceticism. Every individual's destiny was unalterably fixed; men must pass through innumerable different kinds of existences, and last of all the ascetic life of the Ajivaka wanderer. Then came final peace. The whole process had an unimaginably long duration; the number of years for its completion was reckoned as 'thirty million million million multiplied by the number of the grains of sand in the bed of the River Ganges'.(32) The Ajivaka doctrine would appear to be that 'all beings, all lives, all existent things, all living substances attain, and must attain, perfection in course of time.'(33) There is a fixed, orderly mode of progression through which all beings must pass, and through this transformation and constant change all, in the end, reach perfection. In the Ajivaka scheme it was laid down that there were fixed numbers of beings in

the categories of existence at any one time: there were, for instance, fourteen hundred thousands of species of being, six classes of men, forty-nine hundred kinds of occupation, forty-nine hundred Ajivakas, and forty-nine hundred (other) homeless wanderers.(34) By such arguments the Ajivakas would assert the necessity of their mode of existence to any inquiring monarch. Such questioning of ***shramana*** *teachers and ascetics by Ajatashatru, the King of Magadha, who was contemporary with the Buddha, is described in the Pali* ***sutta*** *entitled 'The Fruits of the Life of a Recluse'.(35) The king takes the line that since every other known occupation is profitable to society generally, as well as to the man who practises it, it is appropriate to ask what contribution is made by the life of the* ***shramana.*** *The attempted justification by the leader of the Ajivakas of their position does not appear to have impressed King Ajatashatru greatly: 'I neither applauded nor blamed what he said,' recalls the king, 'and though dissatisfied I gave utterance to no expression of dissatisfaction, and neither accepting nor rejecting that answer of his, I arose from my seat and departed thence.'(36) One has to bear in mind, of course, that this is the Buddhist version of the matter."*

S: So what sort of a point of view then do the Ajivakas represent or did they represent? Do you think there is anything analogous in modern thought?

Vessantara: I suppose it's the idea that evolution is just a continual ongoing process in which you are carried along.....

S: That progress is inevitable. That the historical process is identical with the evolutionary process which is identical with progress, so that you are just carried along as it were.

Nagabodhi: It's a curious blend of nihilism on the one hand with that kind of determinism which you don't usually get in the West. You either get a kind of empty nihilism.....

S: It's a species of historicism isn't it. Probably you could even say that it's not unlike Marxism in a way, or not unlike any teaching that stresses the inevitability of progress, and that the progress passes through certain fixed predetermined stages. Marxism also teaches this in a way, doesn't it. If anything the Ajivaka teaching is more complex.

Lokamitra: The Ajivaka teaching does refer to the individual though, doesn't it, rather than the group.

S: But the individuals inevitably pass through different modes of life in a descending scale right up to Nirvana without there being any need for them to do anything about it, and that this process takes an inconceivably long period of time to be completed. So there's no point in performing good actions or refraining from bad ones, you'll be carried along anyway. But they justified their asceticism by saying well they are people who have been through all these previous stages and now they're just in their last phase. It's all inevitable, they don't claim that there's any particular merit in it. No doubt they were people who just felt the urge to drop out and wander and they explained it in this sort of way.

So it is a species of determinism, a species of fatalism, but with a sort of evolutionary background, even a religious background, and involving asceticism. It means in a way seeing the Higher Evolution in terms of the lower, or regarding the Higher Evolution simply as an extension of the lower which means actually that you don't have any real conception of the individual. So it's a quite interesting teaching. There is a book, by the way, on the Ajivakas. I forget the name of the author, I haven't yet read it but I've dipped into it, but all the available information about them has been collected in this volume. It gives a general account of who and what they were, published not so many years ago.

All right any further points about the Ajivakas? From the Buddha's point of view of course

they negated the possibility of any spiritual life.

Manjuvajra: Would they just include people who effectively felt that they wanted to be there?

S: Presumably. The sort of natural drop outs in a way. You get a parallel to this in modern times among the people who believe in the New Age. The New Age comes inevitably. This is really quite strong in some circles isn't it, that the New Age has dawned, it's sort of proven astrologically and the whole of humanity is going to be swept up to some higher phase of evolution, and you along with it. You don't have to do anything, the New Age has come. This is very much the Ajivaka point of view. People like that are Ajivakas really, if you want to classify them in these sort of terms.

Manjuvajra: Would the Ajivakas have said that everybody goes through these same stages all at the same time or...

S: Oh no. At any given moment you'll find certain people all in the same stage. They didn't even necessarily speak in terms of stages, but that a number of different life forms that you had to go through, you had to exhaust all these different life forms and you did exhaust all these different life forms before you finally attained liberation or Nirvana. But the way in which they enumerate them suggests that they may be regarded as an ascending scale, or as constituting and ascending scale and therefore that it was seen in sort of evolutionary terms. You seem to end up with the highest, i.e. with the ascetic way of life itself. After that it's Nirvana. The ascetic way of life is the last of the different forms of life which you exhaust, and you've completed then your life in every different form. After that you've exhausted all the mundane possibilities and then it's only Nirvana.

Vessantara: A bit like the idea that you can exhaust your negative states of mind by diving into them and going through them.

S: One by one. So people who believe in the inevitability of the New Age are very much of this sort of way of thought, and again it precludes all personal initiative, personal striving. You believe the New Age has dawned and you're being carried along with that. You don't have to do very much about it. Have you actually encountered people like this.

Lokamitra: Occasionally you get them at the festivals, people from ( ) great masters who are.....

S: There's quite a bit of this sort of literature isn't there? New Age literature.

Lokamitra: We get a lot of things in the post. Something every week probably.

_____: These people who have just dropped out, practising hedonism, are they like the other side of the coin. They give up the asceticism....

S: Well maybe the asceticism was determined to some extent by the nature of Indian society, and in the same way the contemporary hedonism of those who drop out is conditioned by contemporary attitudes of society.

_____: Well it's not as if they entirely drop out.

S: Well there are all sorts who share this New Age mentality. Some drop out and some don't. Some remain comfortably at home and believe the New Age has come, but the common feature is this inevitability of the New Age, and that when that happens everybody will be

changed, everybody will become different as it were automatically. They sometimes speak of it as the Aquarian Age, don't they.

Siddhiratna: These people seem to talk in terms of evolution rather than a fixed time or date, which I should have thought that the Age of Aquarius was about.

S: The Age of Aquarius seems to apply to everybody at the same time, yes, whereas here it's a question of a number of different people being in different stages at the same time. But the common feature is the inevitability of the process, and also their timescale is much larger.

_____: It seems to be a lot groups and sub-groups in the Christian sort of spectrum, who subscribe to that belief that it is a spontaneous higher evolution.

S: I think within the Christian context the background is millenarial, that is the inevitability of the last judgement and the second coming of Christ and the thousand year reign of saints and all that kind of thing. That's going to come, as it were, whether you like it or not. Some of course believe that it has come a few times, on a certain date, maybe the date of birth of their founder or the date on which he had a certain revelation, but again the common feature is this inevitability. Do you think there's any sort of psychological basis to this?

Lokamitra: I'm not quite sure it is but it seems definitely.....

_____: It's quite an archetypal thing really, the myth of the Golden Age, sometimes it's meant to be in the past, sometimes in the future.

S: And also perhaps a feeling of helplessness, that you can't do anything yourself. All changes are external changes. You are just sort of swept along by the current. You just ride the crest of the wave.

Lokamitra: It's often by people who have experienced some sort of bliss or something - you get it with the hippies with LSD for example, and others perhaps through some kind of mystical or semi-mystical religious experience of something, so they see that there is something better, but they have no.....

S: It is something which has to be given, not something that can be achieved.

Lokamitra: They can't see that they have a part to play in that.

S: Yes, they see it as a process to which they are subordinate or in which they play a passive part or from which they simply benefit.

Nagabodhi: But from another point of view you can understand the standpoint of amorality, in the absence of a belief in a god or some kind of system, you can understand that, but psychologically I would imagine that people would be scared of the vacuum, of their being no end to it. That psychologically there's a necessity to create a kind of myth of an end to it all, whether it's an individual end or a collective end. It makes sense of everything.

S: Well from that point of view it's a sort of refusal to face up to life ultimately, the present, or to reality, so you just fantasise as it were, everything becoming lovely. Do you think this sort of way of thinking is on the increase, say in a place like London or do you think it is fading away or beginning to fade away?

Manjuvajra: It's fading away in the country, I mean in Cornwall when I first went down there there was a big movement of the sort of New Age types but that's all sort of disappeared

now and they've settled down into quiet country life.

Nagabodhi: It seems to be I think a negative manifestation of it. Certainly you notice in films a sort of very apocalyptic sort of films around, so it's as if there's some bright new age coming but there is the end coming! The unhappy ending, the disaster when the hero and everyone gets killed or everything is upset at the end. It's quite a common feature these days in popular entertainment.

_____: The more positive has recently been revived by the Maharishi who declared this year as the dawning of the Age of Enlightenment.

S: Oh! What does he mean by that?

_____: He's got this sort of pseudo-scientific explanation whereby I think it's one person in one hundred is sufficient within a population, if that one person is meditating, to raise the whole level of consciousness, so he says that when we have one person in one hundred throughout the world, it will just magically produce a raising of the level of consciousness. He sees this as the sort of entering into a new phase of evolution.

S: Well you could say that there is some truth in that, because if one person in every hundred did meditate, well certainly there would be a result, and that might even be perceptible on the collective scale, but this would be as the result of the individual effort of all those people, so it isn't a sort of new age phenomenon in this sort of ( ), but if the Maharishi gives the impression that this is going to come about automatically. He is going to have more people meditating, well then it does become a bit like a new age ideology. If he just tried to urge more and more people to meditate well then that's a different thing.

_____: Do you think that if sufficient people did become individuals then this could in fact effect something like a new age or a new level of evolution.

S: I think it could, yes, very much so, but it would be dependent on the individual efforts of all of them. It wouldn't be anything that came about automatically because of the position of the stars or because the time had come or anything of that sort. Otherwise you get the impression that people would suddenly find themselves meditating in a blissful state of Enlightenment or near Enlightenment just because the Age of Aquarius had come or the new age had dawned or something like that. If the Maharishi is trying to give this sort of impression then of course he's clearly wrong, but if he's simply pointing out that if more people meditate individually, then that will bring about changes which will manifest even in the collective life of humanity, then he's perfectly right.

_____: I think he is probably saying the second because his movement seems to be based on the scientific, rational proof of meditation.

Vessantara: I'm just thinking that there seem to be a lot of the apocalyptic visions that are around seem to be pretty bad ones on the whole. I meet a lot of people who quote Nostradamus and various other prophecies about horrors that are going to happen around the end of the century. Maybe they're issuing in the New Age afterwards with whatever's left.

S: There is this point that within the Christian context, every thousand year period from the birth of Christ is supposed to be a very dangerous time, but if we think in terms of the year 2000, well 2000, well it's 2000 years after Christ, but why should we think in terms of 2000 years after Christ? We're just accepting the sort of conventional Western Christian chronology. In the same way you found that at the end of the first thousand years of Christianity, 1000 AD, there was the same sort of beliefs and rumours and predictions and

maybe Nostradamus was rather influenced by this way of thinking too. Maybe a lot of people in the West are, so therefore there's a tendency to think in terms of the year 2000 as being very critical and possibly disastrous and so on, but that means nothing to a Confucianist or a Buddhist or a Muslim, or to a Communist.

_____: The ecological movement is one at the forefront of that apocalyptic.....

Siddhiratna: I think the ( ) are more about that style as well, aren't they.

S: I think there is certainly an objective danger of humanity exhausting certain natural resources or bringing about certain irreversible changes in the natural environment, and I think ecologists are perfectly right to warn people about this and try to do something about it, but you feel that very often their warnings take on sort of apocalyptic overtones which have got nothing to do with the scientific facts of the case, and the objective rational need to think about these matters.

Siddhiratna: ..... a scare or something.

S: Yes.

Vessantara: Isn't that quite a natural thing. If say the Trades Union Congress was urging the Government to bring in these fast breeder reactors and you're an environmentalist, you know that the atomic waste produced from these things has a half life of ten million years, which means it's got to be stored for that long, it seems very understandable that you should almost just in the face of such incomprehension and lack of consideration for what's going to happen, want to put your case very strongly.

S: Well that's a different thing. You can still put a case very strongly and be completely rational, but there is so much sort of inter-communication going on nowadays between different disciplines and different areas of thought, that I think the ecologists sometimes pick up from the purely apocalyptic people, some of their attitudes and feelings and sort of transfuse them into their supposedly scientific predictions and warnings. Or you might get certain individuals belonging to both camps, and sort of mixing the two.

Anyway let's go on to the Jains.

Text: *"THE JAINS*

A somewhat similar position was maintained by the Jains. Mahavira, the leader of the Jain community at the time of the Buddha, appears to have been associated originally with Gosala, the leader of the Ajivakas. Which of the two was the 'pupil' seems uncertain; possibly each was indebted to the other in certain respects. The tradition is that they were associates for six years and then parted company. They met again, sixteen years later, only to disagree with one another. The major point on which the Jains differed from the Ajivakas was with regard to the freedom of the will. In opposition to the Ajivakas they asserted that every living being (human and non-human) was a transmigrating soul, and that by choosing morally wholesome actions it was possible for the soul to wear out its bad ***karma*** *and eventually, after sustained moral improvement of this sort, to gain release altogether from the mortal realm into the highest heaven, a pure, eternal, non-material state of being. Like the Ajivakas, the Jains practised very severe austerities, but in their case as a means of neutralizing bad* ***karma*** *and of their own free choice.(37) They laid great emphasis also on the necessity to avoid the acquisition of further bad* ***karma*** *through violent deeds, and they therefore made it a principle to avoid taking life in any form."*

S: That's a pretty clear account of the Jains, isn't it. There are still Jains in India. There aren't very many of them, maybe a couple of million only, principally in Western and Central India. All right go on to the Materialists then.

Text; *"THE MATERIALISTS*

A completely different philosophical position was maintained by the school of shramanas known as Lokayatas, or materialists. Their name indicates that their principal concern was with ***loka*** *the material, common, or natural* ***world*** *In the light of a long list of references to the Lokayatas in Indian literature from the time of the Buddha to the fourteenth century, T.W. Rhys Davids came to the conclusion that*

"the best working hypothesis ... seems to be that about 500 BC the word Lokayata was used in a complimentary way as the name of a branch of Brahman learning, and probably meant ***Nature-lore*** *- wise sayings, riddles, rhymes, and theories handed down by tradition as to cosmogony, the elements, the stars, the weather, scraps of astronomy, of elementary physics, even of anatomy, and knowledge of the nature of precious stones, and of birds and beasts and plants."(38)*

*On the basis of this rudimentary, folk-loristic view of the natural world there appears to have developed a theory of life whose principal exponent at the time of the Buddha was a man named Ajita of the hair-blanket (****kesa-kambalin****). In his own words, as they are represented in the Buddhist source,*

"A human being is built up of the four elements [earth, air, fire and water]. When he dies the earthy in him returns and relapses to the earth, the fluid to the water, the heat to the fire, the windy to the air, and his faculties pass into space [by the 'faculties' are meant the five senses, and the mind]. The four bearers ... take his dead body away; till they reach the burning-ground men utter forth eulogies, but there his bones are bleached, and his offerings end in ashes ... Fools and wise alike, on the dissolution of the body, are cut off, annihilated, and after death they are not."(39)

*A Buddhist commentator, Candrakirti, asserted that in the Lokayata view, consciousness was the product of the chemical interaction of the four elements of which the human body was composed, just as alcohol, with its inebriating power, is the product of ingredients which separately and by themselves are not inebriating. The Lokayatas appear to have rejected the idea of any moral causation: that is to say, the view that moral action produces one kind of consequence, and immoral action another kind of consequence. Every substance has its 'own nature' (****svabhava****) - it is self-determined. Translated into the realm of human action, this meant a doctrine of complete freedom of will. In the Lokayata view men were entirely free to act as they chose. The only proper criterion of action, in their view, was whether it increased human pleasure. By 'pleasure' was meant both the pleasures of the senses, and the mental pleasure of human relationships. Their ethic was therefore characterised as that of 'do-as-you-like' (****yadrccha****.) On balance, life was potentially more full of pleasure than of pain; what was needed was the discrimination to seek pleasure in the ways in which it could most profitably be found, and this, no doubt, provided the Lokayata wanderers with the justification for their adoption of the 'alternative life'."*

S: They sound a bit like the Epicureans, don't they.

Nagabodhi: It sounds a bit like the common world view of our society, the scientific world view today.

_____: What makes the Epicureans different from just your run of the mill hedonists?

(Laughter)

S: Well Epicurus' own writings haven't survived, but it is an interesting point of resemblance with the Materialists that he did maintain that pleasure was the thing for which human beings should live, that the pleasures of the mind were in a way more pleasurable than those of the physical senses, and that one should devote oneself to the arts and refined conversation with one's friends in an idyllic sort of atmosphere, not necessarily to gross bodily pleasures. You could say Epicurus' attitude was one of refined hedonism, of the aesthetic dilettante or someone like that.

We usually think of the hedonist as one who sort of rather reaches for the fleshpots, but there can be a more refined form of hedonism which is still hedonism. So it's interesting that here: "By 'pleasure' was meant both the pleasures of the senses and the mental pleasure of human relationships." Epicurus stressed very much the importance of friendship as in fact all the ancient Greek and Roman writers did. The pleasures of conversation, but conversation just for the sake of pleasure in the end becomes rather sort of, what shall I say?, rather weak doesn't it. Not very sustaining. You just sit around having refined conversation for hedonistic purposes. You end up by having nothing to talk about except yesterday's conversation. Hedonism seems to be self defeating. But it's interesting that they were also drop outs and technically ascetics, they were sramanas, and enjoyed the support of the people. So one can see that people supported them just because they turned up and they needed supporting. They certainly didn't teach people well if you support us it'll result in an accumulation of merit for you and you will go to heaven - no, they said just the opposite in fact, but they still received the support of the people!

So it seems the people were just willing to support them because they came along and they were there and they talked and even if they didn't agree with what they said well their conversation was interesting and they came from a far away place and they'd be gone tomorrow or the next day, why not feed them while they are here today. They might have been quite cheerful people, quite good company and so on. Again although these are all discussed in terms of religious sects and religious bodies and support for religious people and ascetics, quite clearly it's a very different sort of set up from what these words might be taken to suggest. There are these sort of freelance thinkers and speculators all of whom had dropped out, just roaming and drifting around and wandering from village to village and all being fed and supported and welcomed and sent on to the next village.

Lokamitra: This represents one of the classic wrong views doesn't it.

S: Yes, right.

Lokamitra; Would people like to give the arguments against that view? The one of the materialists, the Epicureans.

S: That happiness is the highest pleasure?

Lokamitra: Yes.

S: That pleasure is the highest.....Well it doesn't work! The law of diminishing returns. If you devote yourself to pleasure, you end up by having nothing to enjoy because pleasure seems to be a by product of something else. So in this sense the life devoted to pleasure is self defeating. People who devote themselves systematically to pleasure and having a good time and enjoying themselves, very often end up just miserable people. For instance this is what some people have noticed with regard to Sukhavati, that people are sort of working there and living there under sometimes not very agreeable conditions apparently with quite a

bit of hardship and so on and nothing much in the way of pleasure, but sort of thoroughly enjoying it, at least much of the time. In the same way you can meet people who've got everything apparently that they need, wine, woman and song, but who are jaded and bored and listless and don't seem to be enjoying life at all. That's the argument against it really.

Manjuvajra: But if you take it in the sort of wider view that supposing you got bored with those lesser pleasures and then got a bit more involved in the higher aesthetic pleasures, then the mental pleasures...

S: Well Tennyson has dealt with that in *"The Palace of Art"*. It also depends what you mean by getting involved with the higher pleasures. If you are concerned say with art purely for the sake of the pleasurable sensation it gives you, you end up not being able to enjoy art.

Manjuvajra: Let me give a kind of example, an analogy of what I mean. I like to go walking with a tent on my back, now that's not exactly pleasurable in that it's actually painful to do it, but on the other hand it is pleasurable. It's a pleasurable way to spend one's time.....

S: Yet but one does something that one finds pleasurable but one doesn't necessarily do it just because one finds it pleasurable. One doesn't necessarily think well I find this thing pleasurable, all right let me now go and do it because I find it pleasurable. You just go and do it, and you find it pleasurable.

Manjuvajra: That you would say is an acceptable view?

S: Depending. It's also a question of what you do, when you do it, how often you do it, what part it plays in your total life.

Manjuvajra: So you're saying that taking pleasure as the principle is the mistake that is being made by the hedonists?

S: Yes, taking it for the principle in the sense of aiming at pleasure consciously and deliberately. Certain things give you pleasure, but if you are thinking of making your life agreeable simply by collecting as it were as many pleasurable experiences as possible, or collecting experiences or getting involved in situations simply on account of the pleasure that they give you, regardless of any other value or interest that they may have, then that is self defeating, especially if this is the general principle of your life.

_____: But one shouldn't shy away from things just because they are pleasurable.

S: Oh no. Though again be very careful. If you find that you are inclined to get involved with certain things simply on account of their being pleasurable, and if you find the pleasure that they give you is connected sooner or later with certain negative or unskilful situations or states of mind, well then you certainly must not exactly shy away but keep mindfully aloof. You're not avoiding pleasure as such, but you are avoiding the unskilful states and situations with which that type of pleasure us usually associated, at least for you. But there's no need to shy away from pleasure as such. I was saying on one of the previous retreats that a certain amount of pleasure acts as a sort of tonic for the system. It's not very good to deprive oneself on principle as it were, of all pleasurable sensation. Some people are even afraid of enjoying the sunshine or nature. This is a very innocent sort of pleasure. That's the sort of pleasure that I have in mind, that has this sort of tonic effect. You enjoy the sunshine or you enjoy the atmosphere of the early morning, you enjoy walking in the forest. This is pleasurable, but it's positive. But even then you don't engage in it for the sake of just pleasure, not for the sake of the sort of thrill that it gives you. You as it were like nature, you like the open air. Not that you are sort of trying to use them so that you get pleasure from them. There's also the feeling

of expansion or feeling of openness or liberation that goes beyond pleasure in the ordinary sense at least.

Nagabodhi: Isn't it just a matter that if you try and seek pleasure by satisfying your desires, that can just never be done because new desires will crop up, just to put it so simply. Sooner or later you have to look to the root of those desires. This myth that there is something that can bring lasting satisfaction other than Nirvana.

S: Or if you don't want to pitch it quite so high as that, at least when you are talking with other people, well there is no lasting satisfaction other than that which comes from within your own self. Nothing and no body can give it to you. Otherwise we tend to think oh if I could only have that I'll be completely happy, but no. That may help, it might help in providing certain facilities or creating certain favourable conditions but it still nonetheless depends upon you and your own happiness is still dependent on your own overall attitude towards things and what you yourself do.

Lokamitra: It seems that we're particularly prone to this at present, because.....

S: We meaning?

Lokamitra: In the West generally, but also ourselves emotionally to some extent, because we're not brought up with the tradition of karma and rebirth, and there is the generally widespread view that everything is cut off at death, and so.....

S: Do you think that view is very widespread?

Lokamitra: Well you're sort of taught it at school almost, and it's the rational view of things almost.

S: But people still believe in ghosts.

Lokamitra: They try not to.

S: But spiritualist organisations in this country have two million members, don't forget that. This is the sort of not very respectable sub intellectual sort of level of semi-religious life that we don't usually pay much attention to, but it is there, among ordinary people, and it is very strong. I would say the majority of people in Britain at any rate do believe in a life after death, though they certainly wouldn't be able to say what form it took. They wouldn't be very clear about it but I think if pressed they'd say that they had this sort of vague belief that that wasn't the end.

Lokamitra: Maybe I'm not talking so much from that point of view as a general awareness. One can believe to some extent in a life after death or something but one can't be motivated by that or by an awareness of that.

S: Yes, I'd agreed that very very few people are at all motivated by any such belief in practical terms. They all have a sort of vague, well vague hope, that they will continue on the other side or even vague belief that they will, but they certainly don't seem to tie it up very much with any sort of ethical position.

Nagabodhi: If pressed they don't say I believe that this is some kind of life after death, what they usually say is, I can't accept that life just ends. That's usually the way it's phrased. It's not in a positive formulation.

S: Anyway onto the Sceptics before lunch!

Text *"THE SCEPTICS*

*Finally, there was among the **shramanas** one more major position or school, generally known as the Agnostics, or Sceptics. These appear to have been men who rejected the traditional way of life, the Vedic doctrines, and the priestly system on the grounds that the speculative doctrines of priests and teachers were contradictory of one another, and that no final position of 'truth' could ever be reached. They avoided all argumentativeness, which, they said, was productive only of ill-temper. Their positive emphasis was on the cultivation of friendship and of peace of mind. These agnostics were criticised in the Buddhist sources as 'eel-wrigglers' because they wriggled out of every question that was put to them and refused to give any firm answer. Their leader, Sanjaya, is represented as saying,*

"If you ask me whether there is another world - well, if I thought there were I should say so. But I don't say so. And I don't think it is thus or thus. And I don't think it is otherwise. And I don't deny it. And I don't say there neither is, nor is not, another world. And if you ask me about the beings produced by chance; or whether there is any fruit, any result, of good or bad actions; or whether a man who has won the truth continues, or not, after death - to each or any of these questions I give the same reply."(40)

*What was common to these various schools of thought found among the **shramanas** of whom the Buddha also was one, was their rejection of the practices, beliefs and social system of the hereditary Vedic priesthood. But, as we have seen, they differed among themselves, and the Buddhists certainly differed, to greater or less degree, from all of them. We shall be in a better position to appreciate the points of difference between the doctrines of these other **shramanas** and the doctrine of the Buddha when we have considered the circumstances of the Buddha's life. It will then be possible to evaluate his role in relation to the religious, ideological, political and economic conditions of the time."*

S: It seems that the Buddha had sort of points of contact with all these schools. Do you see this? He had a point of contact with the Ajivakas in the sense that he did teach a sort of evolutionary process. He had a point of contact with the Jains inasmuch as he did believe in free will. He had a point of contact with the Materialists inasmuch as he believed in free will, they did to. He had a point of contact with the Materialists inasmuch as he did not eschew pleasure as such. He didn't adopt a purely negative attitude towards pleasurable experiences, and he had a point of contact with them all inasmuch as, on the theoretical side he entirely rejected the Vedic tradition and the claims of the Brahmins, and also on the practical side that he and his followers followed the Ajivaka way of life, the alternative way of life, wandering from place to place.

Also he had a point of contact with the Sceptics inasmuch as he did not believe in argumentativeness that made you ill tempered and he certainly didn't believe in the discussion of unnecessary, purely intellectual questions, and he didn't believe in dogmatism. So you can see or you could make out a case for the Buddha as representing the sort of summation of all the sort of thought trends and thought colours of his time but making a summation of them because he'd just gone beyond all those different levels and points of view and attitudes by virtue of his experience of Enlightenment, but that he made at the same time use of whatever was worthwhile that had been thought or discovered in his day, when he came to try to communicate to other people.

So we find ourselves in much the same sort of situation today don't we. We have certain points of contact with different groups of people, even though we certainly don't see eye to eye with them altogether. I'm not only thinking of various Buddhist groups but I'm thinking

of people like say the New Age people. Well we do believe that a New Age could come but only if we ourselves make the effort. We believe in a New Age but we don't believe it's inevitable, and so on. We believe in evolution but we distinguish between Higher Evolution and Lower Evolution. We also have points of contact with people who go to Glastonbury for instance or people who believe in the revival of the ancient indigenous pre-Christian religious traditions of Britain. We have a point of contact there, not that we regard that as sufficient as they do. We think one needs to go far beyond that, but we accept that on that particular level. There is a point of contact there. We are quite happy to incorporate paganism into our overall approach or overall structure as it were. You know what the word 'paganism' literally means by the way? Or what word it comes from?

_____: Does it mean pre-Christian?

S: It does, though that isn't the literal meaning. The literal meaning is 'pertaining to the village'. So the pagans were the village folk who still clung onto the folk beliefs and practises which the Christianised people of Rome and the other Italian and Roman cities had abandoned for Christianity. So rather like the (Gameko), the village people of the Buddha's day, who were left simply with their animistic beliefs and practices when the more urbane people of the cities followed any of the teachings of one or another of the more sophisticated teachers of the time. This is why one translator renders the Buddha's description of the extreme of self indulgence as a lower pagan practice, that is quite literally correct, (hinogamo) low and village like or low and pagan, that is etymologically correct. Eventually of course pagan came to mean the non-Christian in the sort of ethnic sense.

Anyway this chapter does fill us in a bit more about the background, doesn't it, and we can see the sort of 'religious', inverted commas, milieu in which the Buddha lived and moved, and in which he worked. The sort of people he was regularly in contact with, the sort of ideas that were around in his day and with which he undoubtedly was very familiar, and in terms of which he had to think from time to time, whether positively or negatively. Either rejecting or refuting these positions or making what use of them he could. Taking up whatever was good in them and using that at least as a means or medium of communication with people.

So in the afternoon we come onto the principal part of this work which is part three - "Buddhist Civilization in Principle" and we start off with a profile of the Buddha. Rather interesting word this - 'profile'. I think it's the fashionable word isn't it, profile of the Buddha.

Siddhiratna: He does use fashionable words - drop out and so on..

S: I suppose it's helpful in a way. At least it creates the impression that this isn't just something of historical interest of 2500 years ago, it does have a sort of contemporary relevance, but at the same time he certainly hasn't thought ( ) very clearly or very deeply or very thoroughly. So now you know - you are all Ajivakas! In the broader sense, the non-sectarian sense. We've all dropped out. Yes I think we all have. Well the situation now exists in which you can almost be born a drop out! (Laughter). Can't you. "What does your daddy do? He doesn't do anything, he's a dropout! (Laughter)

_____: Just a question about the sceptics. Do you think that view exclusively would result in a sort of confusion, more confusion than insight?

S: Oh yes. It's quite inconsistent with any sort of practical life or definite attitude towards anything. On the other hand they had a point. The ancient Indians, many of them, were very intellectual, they were intellectually very sophisticated. There was a lot of fruitless argumentation, a lot of discussion of unnecessary issues in a very heated sort of fashion. The sceptics could well have represented a reaction against this and have reflected a sort of

healthy scepticism about the capacity of human reason. There's certainly this element in Buddhism, in the Buddha's own teaching, but the Buddha does believe that it is possible to develop a higher faculty which can see into the truth. There were of course sceptics in Greek and Roman times. All these schools of thought seem to have their classical parallels don't they? According to Jennings to parallel to Buddhism itself is to be found in the Stoic. Up to a point I think the parallel is there.

Vessantara: We had somebody coming along in Brighton who had been a Stoic for about ten years and then became a Buddhist.

S: But there is Stoicism and Stoicism. There's the Stoicism of say Seneca, the Stoicism of (Ephictitus?) which is rather different, at least temperamentally, and also Stoicism of Marcus Orelius which is again rather different.

_____: What was the view of the Stoics?

S: Well they had all sorts of views. They were a quite highly developed system in a way. They had views about cosmology and cosmogony. About the constitution of the physical universe, they were quite interested in that. They believe in an ultimate dissolution of the universe by fire, they had that in common with some forms of Indian thought and even with Christian thought in a way. They believed in a world soul. They believed that there wasn't much you could do about external things but your own mental state was well within your own power, your own control. They had very strong ethical teachings. They believed in you doing your duty, your civic duty. They believed in your accepting things as they came but exercising a strong control over your own mental state. They believed in being kind to animals. They believed in serving the public. But their distinctive teaching was that you should preserve your own sort of mental equanimity regardless of external changes, that you could not control external things, you could control only your own mind. This is their basic ethical teaching. And therefore you should not react to changes of fortune. If you were rich one day, poor the next, never mind. Adopt the same attitude towards both of those conditions. If you are an Emperor all right, be an Emperor and control your own mind. If you are a slave right be a slave, control your own mind. Happiness is within you - this is their principal teaching. External things can't give you happiness, and therefore they can't take it away. If any disaster or misfortune happens what is that to you? It doesn't affect your mental state. They also believe that suicide was permissible if you felt that you could no longer act your part in life in a dignified manner.

Ratnaguna: Did they have a view of heightening consciousness?

S: No, one can't say that they had that, but they certainly believed in controlling one's passions and developing peace of mind and having the same attitude towards changes of fortune, and so no. This they believed very strongly. Marcus Orelius was a Roman Emperor, Seneca was the Prime Minister of Nero and a writer. (Ephictitus) was a slave. These were the three most famous Stoics. Of the Roman tradition anyway. There were others of the Greek tradition, less well known like (Clientes), at least less well known now. Though (Ephictitus) also in a way was of the Greek tradition. He lived and worked in Rome.

_____: Is that common? For slaves to become well known philosophers?

S: Well it wasn't uncommon for philosophers to become slaves, because your town or city could be raided and then you could be carried off, and if you were a man of education, as they discovered later on, well then you'd just be made a slave tutor to your master's children or something like that. Slavery wasn't all that uncommon in the ancient world.

_____: It doesn't sound a bad life actually.

S: Well you could be well treated. On the other hand you might be tormented. This depends who you got as your master or mistress. Ephictitus was tortured one day by his master - he was racked, and his arm was about to be broken and Ephictitus told him that if you rack my arm any further it will break, so the master continued racking him and the arm broke and Ephictitus is reported to have said there, "I told you it would break!"

_____: That's what you call a Stoical attitude.

S: Right, yes. But Ephictitus seems to have been the most attractive of these three characters. Marcus Orelius was rather sort of melancholic and sad; Seneca a bit pompous and florid in his writing, but Ephictitus, though a slave seems to have been the happiest and most carefree of the lot. Stoicism seemed to come to him quite naturally, whereas the others had to sort of practise it in a rather sort of painful, disciplined kind of way.

Anyway enough about the Stoics.

Next Session

S: Right onto part three and chapter six - *"Profile of the Buddha".*

Text: *"PART 3 BUDDHIST CIVILISATION IN PRINCIPLE*

6 Profile of the Buddha

THE BUDDHA'S HISTORICITY

*Evidently, the Buddhas belongs in the company of the **shramanas** the non-brahman teachers who were critical of the brahmanical sacrificial system and who rejected the religious and social claims of the brahmans. How the Buddha's teaching differed from the other non-brahman schools of thought is considered later (see Chapter 7). Meanwhile, there are other questions to be answered. We have to inquire about the characteristic concerns of the Buddha, the nature of his public activity, what kind of people he met with and what his relations with them were, how he was regarded by others, and so on. In this way, as the pattern of the Buddha's life is examined, and some sort of a profile emerges, it may be possible to determine a little more closely how he is to be characterised: that is, as religious innovator, or reformer, or as philosopher, or what. First, we have to note that for the earliest Buddhists it was the **word** of the Buddha rather than the **life** of the Buddha which seems to have been of paramount importance."*

"Evidently, the Buddha belongs to the company..... of paramount importance. p 105

S: We can possibly query that. This is based on a rather literal reading of the Pali Scriptures. It could be said that the monks who compiled the Pali Scriptures, that particular version of the Buddha's teaching, were rather more interested in the word of the Buddha than in the life, but there were other schools of Buddhism and among those schools there were some that eventually gave birth to the Mahayana and those schools and certainly the Mahayana itself, were more interested in the life of the Buddha. It could also be said that during the Buddha's lifetime and afterwards, the life of the Buddha was in a way taken for granted. Not taken for granted in the sense you didn't care about it or bother about it, but it was sort of so obvious it didn't need to be specifically mentioned that the Buddha was there. There is also the question of the cult, as it were. The Buddha was worshipped, the stupa was worshipped because it enshrined the relics of the Buddha, and later on the image of the Buddha was worshipped

because it represented the teacher. So one has to see that aspect of Buddhist practice reflecting interest in the life of the Buddha as well as what later became the scriptures which reflect interest in the word of the Buddha.

So I think we have to take this statement with some reservation, that for the earliest Buddhists it was the word of the Buddha rather than the life of the Buddha which seems to have been of paramount importance. Do you see what I mean?

Ratnaguna: Did you say the Buddha was worshipped even while he was alive?

S: No I didn't say that. I said the stupa was worshipped after his death, inasmuch as the stupa enshrined his relics or symbolised him in some other way, and then later on of course there was the worship of the Buddha image. So you mustn't think of the early followers say after the death of the Buddha as only studying or only remembering and repeating the word of the Buddha. Don't forget that they would also have been worshipping the relics of the Buddha, and also later on worshipping the image of the Buddha. So you do get that interest int he life as well as the interest in the word of the Buddha. Perhaps they weren't all that interested in details of his career, but it wasn't just the question of the word of the Buddha, it was the word of The Buddha. So one could not as it were forget the Buddha, it was the Buddha speaking, and you remember the Buddha. You might not be all that interested in details of his early career and so on, but you were never unmindful of the fact of the Buddha's existence as an Enlightened being. So in that sense the life of the Buddha was always in the background of the word of the teaching, because after all it was the Buddha who was speaking. You just didn't detach the word, the doctrine, the teaching from the man whose word it was. Perhaps later on the Theravadins did do this to some extent, but it can't be stated as a general truth that this is what all the earliest Buddhists did.

They might have given more conscious attention to the word of the Buddha because that needed to be preserved, but why did it need to be preserved, because while practising that teaching one attained Buddhahood or Enlightenment and how did one know anything about that? It was because there had been and actually Enlightened human being, in other words the Buddha. And how did you know that he was Enlightened? Well because of the whole way of life that he led. So you can't divorce the word of the Buddha so much from the life of the Buddha as this sentence seems to suggest, and even though the Theravadins did give perhaps rather more attention to the word of the Buddha than did the Mahayanists, I don't think one can generalise too much about the attitude of the earliest Buddhists in this sort of way.

[End of Tape 10 Tape 11]

All right on we go.

Text: *"It was the discourses which were remembered, rehearsed at his death, and carefully preserved and transmitted in the community of his followers. His life-story was not in itself a matter of such intrinsic interest apparently, since the canon of scripture of the Theravadin school, which is representative of early or 'primitive' Buddhism (though not necessarily exclusively representative) contains no continuous narrative of his life. It was not until later in Buddhist history that full-length biographies of the Buddha were produced, such as the Sanskrit work of perhaps (at the earliest) the second century BC, entitled The Great Event (**Mahavastu**) or the more elaborate work by the Sanskrit poet of the second century AD, Asvaghosha, entitled **The Acts of the Buddha** (**Buddhacarita**)."*

S: One mustn't forget also that even before the Mahayana period it was the life of the Buddha which was represented in sculpture at Sanchi and ( ) and Amaravati.

Text *"Because of this apparent pre-occupation of the earliest followers of the Buddha with his doctrines rather than his life, the idea has been suggested by some Buddhists that possibly the doctrine is all that matters. It is the doctrine, they urge, which has eternal validity; the disciples' concern is to accept it, apprehend it and practise it; the Buddha-figure is simply the personification of a spiritual principle. 'The existence of Gotama as an individual', writes Edward Conze, 'is, in any case, a matter of little importance to Buddhist faith.'(1) To some extent this attitude may have been provoked by the suggestions of Western scholars (at the time when it was fashionable to question the historical existence of any cult hero) that the Buddha who is described in even the earliest Buddhist literature is pure invention. H.H. Wilson, for instance, argued that the Buddha's life as it has come down in the traditions, is nothing more than an allegorical version of the Sankhya philosophy; others, such as E. Senart and H. Kern, suggested that the Buddha was a solar symbol and the story of his life, a solar myth.(2) The Indian scholar, T.R.V. Murti, while not denying the historical existence of Gotama, regards it as unimportant for the Mahayana form of Buddhist religion - that is, the form which he regards as the most fully developed and most adequate as a religion. 'The Mahayana religion escapes the predicament of having to depend on any particular historical person as the founder.'(3)"*

S: What does one think of this? *"It is the doctrine they urge, which has eternal validity; the disciples' concern is to accept it, apprehend it and practise it; the Buddha figure is simply the personification of a spiritual principle.` The existence of Gotama as an individual', writes Edward Conze,`is, in any case, a matter of little importance to Buddhist faith.'"* Mm. And then later on Murti says that *"the historical existence of Gotama is unimportant from the Mahayana point of view; `that the Mahayana religion escapes the predicament of having to depend on any particular historical person as the founder.'* Now what does one think of this? (Pause) Can you have, as it were, the Dharma without the Buddha?

_____: No.

S: Why is this, or how is this?

Manjuvajra: Because you've got to have someone who's attained Enlightenment to teach the experience if it.

S: Yes! It's true that in the Mahayana you do have the ideal of Buddhahood, and this ideal of Buddhahood has been, one might say, universalised, even absolutised until it has become independent of the historical Gotama, the Buddha - this is certainly true. I've mentioned before, for instance, that I've met Tibetan and Sikkhimese, and Nepalese Buddhists who had never heard of Gotama, the Buddha. They were quite pious, quite devout, practising Buddhists; they were going along to the temple, or the gompa; they were doing some meditation, they were reciting mantras etc. You could say that they were quite good Buddhists, very sincere Buddhists, but they had never heard of Gotama, the Buddha. So it does seem as though, within the context of the Mahayana, that you can get along without any knowledge of the historical Gotama, the Buddha, but then, you may say, `Well, even though you are getting along without any knowledge of the historical Gotama, the Buddha, what gives meaning, what gives purpose to your Buddhist spiritual life is the fact that there is such a thing as Enlightenment.' You can, for instance, regard Enlightenment as being embodied in the figure of Amitabha Buddha, or in the figure of Padmasambhava, so that you can be Going for Refuge to Amitabha or Going for Refuge to Padmasambhava; you could be reciting their mantras; you could be doing their meditations, be a perfectly good Buddhist making great spiritual progress, but you still don't know about Gotama, the Buddha but where has your ideal of Enlightenment come from originally? That ideal of Enlightenment embodied, say, in the figure of Amitabha, comes by way of as it were generalisation, universalisation,

idealisation from the original historical Gotama, the Buddha.

So had there not been that original historical Gotama, the Buddha, there would have been no Amitabha, there would have been no Padmasambhava, there would have been no Mahayana, even though, now, the Mahayana can exist, as it were, independently of any explicit reference to the historical figure of Gotama, the Buddha. (Pause)

And even though you are a devotee, say, of Amitabha or Padmasambhava, and doing their meditation, trying to gain Enlightenment, what is your guarantee that that is possible? The fact that there is on this higher plane, Amitabha Buddha, that doesn't guarantee it. Padmasambhava doesn't guarantee it. What does guarantee it? Well, Padmasambhava as an archetypal figure doesn't guarantee it. What does guarantee it? There were actual living human beings who did gain Enlightenment, so this is what matters to you, ultimately, as a human being who is also trying to gain Enlightenment. So this is why the historical existence of Gotama, the Buddha - of an Enlightened being with Enlightened disciples, right down to the present - this is a very important thing. You see this point?

Nagabodhi: In the case of those Mahayana Buddhists who hadn't heard of the historical Buddha: did they revere their own teachers or were there human beings within their field of...ah....?

S: Yes, they no doubt would have this attitude, yes. For instance Tibetan Buddhists usually regard Padmasambhava as historical even though they don't have a very sort of clear conception of historicity or divided as sharply from the legendary and mythical as we do; but they certainly regarded or certainly would regard Padmasambhava as an historical figure, in the sense that they would know that he had lived in India and had come to Tibet, come to their country and helped to found the Buddhist tradition there. They would certainly know that. (Pause)

So the Buddha figure is not really just a personification of a spiritual principle, as Conze says. To have a personification of a spiritual principle is not enough. You want, as it were, some guarantee that it is possible for a living human being to actually realise Enlightenment. You need more than a personification of the principle of Enlightenment. Conze, I'm afraid, seems just a little bit obtuse here. (Pause) Because there isn't much basis, there isn't much foundation, for your quest for Enlightenment, and not much hope for you, if you don't believe that others in the past, who were also human beings just as you are, have actually attained that; or at least have gone a very long way in that direction, as far as you can see, as far as you can make out. So the Buddha as a personification of an abstract principle of Enlightenment is not of very much help to us. (Pause)
Is that clear then or is there any further query about that?

Also Murti says, *`The Mahayana religion escapes the predicament of having to depend on any particular historical person as the founder.'* Why should it be a predicament?

Nagabodhi: Well then you've got to prove his existence to scholars like .....

S: Yes. Yes. (Laughter) But I think at the back of his mind he has a sort of comparison with Christ and Christianity. Supposing it was proved that no such person as Christ existed: well, what would that do to orthodox Christianity?

Nagabodhi: It would make a complete mockery out of it.

S: Because what is orthodox Christianity based on? It's not based on the teaching of Christ or on the belief that the teaching is true; its belief is based on the fact that at that particular time,

in that particular place, the second person of the trinity was incarnated as a human being, and that that was the central event in history - that incarnation, and that that happened only once. But supposing it is proved that there was no such thing as Gotama the Buddha, well then what would happen to Buddhism? You still need Enlightened beings; but you're left with Milarepa, you're left with Sariputra, you're left with Wei Lang, you're left with so many others, and you can't disprove the historicity of all of them. So you are left with quite a large number of people, who as far as anybody can see, have attained to that same Enlightenment which you believed originally had been attained by Gotama the Buddha whom you are now convinced didn't actually exist, but you are still left with a number of people who have realised that higher state. So there is no predicament for the Mahayana, or for Buddhism in general, if Gotama the Buddha is shown not to have existed. (Pause)

Because it isn't a question of just one unique being two thousand years ago, it's a question of a whole series of Enlightened beings, of whom one within the present period of history must have been the first, whether that first was Gotama the Buddha, or whether it was somebody coming along later, that doesn't, in a sense, really, very much matter. It's simpler to stick to what seem to be the facts and say that Gotama was the first. If it turns out there was no such person as Gotama, well the chain must have started somewhere. You've got this end of the chain so there must be another end of the chain. You see what I mean? (Pause)
So it's no predicament, so there's no predicament to escape. Incidentally, also some modern apologists for Hinduism try to maintain the superiority of Hinduism on the grounds that it doesn't have a single founder. Buddhism has a single founder - the Buddha; Mohammedanism has a single founder - Mohammed; Christianity has a single founder - Christ, but Hinduism has no single founder; but, of course no ethnic religion has a single founder because it doesn't start with an individual, it just sort of grows up. It's the culture etc. of the tribe, the group. But the Hindus point, or some of these apologists point, to the Vedic Rishis collectively as the founders of Hinduism, and say that Hinduism is in a stronger position because Hinduism is founded on the collective experience of a number of people, not just on the experience of one person. But then one could say in the case of Buddhism, that Buddhism is not founded just on the experience of one person: it's founded on the experience of the individual as such at a certain level of his development, because the Buddha's experience can, as it were, be duplicated, can be repeated, in the experience of anybody who cares to follow the path that he followed. So Buddhism, you could say, is not just based on the Buddha's experience, it's based on the experience of all those who gain Enlightenment; and who, by gaining Enlightenment, can confirm from their own experience the truth of the Buddha's teaching. Again, perhaps there's a difference between the Buddha on one hand, in this respect, and Christ and Mohammed on the other. Because you cannot become Christ, you cannot become Mohammed, but you can become Enlightened, you can become a Buddha. (Pause)
So all this is based, really, on quite the wrong assumptions. (Pause) It is quite important to get these points clear.

I wrote about this many years ago in an article which was unfortunately lost - *`The Spiritual Significance of the Historicity of the Buddha'*, which I wrote in 1950, but this is roughly what I said then. (Pause)
Does this sort of question ever come up in discussion or beginners' sessions or anything of this sort?

_____: Yeah.

S: Mm? Ah, in what sort of way?

Nagabodhi: All kinds of ways. It's never been a problem.

S: Yes. (Pause)

Ratnaguna: ( ) I just sort of doubted the fact that the Buddha lived, and it just didn't really bother me.

S: Well, considering that the Buddha lived 2,500 years ago, there seems quite a reasonable amount of evidence for the fact that he did actually exist. There seems to be no reason to doubt that. There are people who lived even longer ago than the Buddha, about whose historical existence you can feel perfectly sure, as sure as we can feel about anything of that nature - like the Egyptian Pharaohs and so on, though so many of them lived before the time of the Buddha - well, the **majority** of them lived before the time of the Buddha, but we know their names, and in many cases, their biographies. They left inscriptions and so on. We have no reason to doubt their historicity at all, whereas there are others who lived only a few hundred years ago in some cases, we're not sure whether they actually lived or not. (Pause)

We're quite reasonably sure of Julius Caesar, and reasonably sure about Alexander the Great. We're reasonably sure about Hannibal, and so on. We're reasonably sure about Socrates - there's never been any serious discussion as to whether Socrates actually existed, or whether he was simply a character invented by Plato for the purposes of his Dialogues. So the Buddha falls into much the same category. But anyway we'll see probably more about that in a minute. Let's go on.

Text*"It is worth noting, in passing, that the late-nineteenth century wave of scepticism about the historicity of the Buddha has now receded. As Andre Bareau has said, nowadays, as a result of greater knowledge of the philological and archaeological sources, scientific study admits that in the case of the Buddha there really existed an historical personage the principal traits of whose life and personality can be known.(4) It is important to notice, too, that while the Buddha's earliest disciples seem to have had no interest in recounting the entire life of the Buddha* ***seriatim*** *they were nevertheless concerned to record carefully what they appear to have considered the most important events, events relating to certain crucial or significant moments in the pattern of the Buddha's life, such as his renunciation of the life of a prince, his enlightenment, the inauguration of his public activity as a teacher, and his decease."*

S: So there seems to have been not so much a lack of biographical interest as such, but a lack of a certain kind of biographical interest. ".....while the Buddha's earliest disciples seem to have had no interest in recounting the entire life of the Buddha *seriatim*, they were nevertheless concerned to record carefully what they appear to consider the most important events.....". In other words they weren't interested in telling what the Buddha had for breakfast or anything like that. So do you think that suggests a different attitude towards things, even a different set of values from what we have today?

I mean,they preserved information about the Enlightenment, about the beginning of his activities as a public teacher, and so on. But the little domestic details, they didn't bother much about. (Pause)

Does that suggest any sort of difference of attitude? (Pause)

Siddhiratna: To present day researchers?

S: No. In comparison with, say, our modern attitude towards, say, biography. (Pause) I mean, supposing there was a modern journalist biographer around at the time of the Buddha, well, what sort of picture would he want to get of the Buddha? What sort of things do you think he'd write about, or be interested in?

_____: Probably be more `voyeuristic' .....

S: But why this difference? I mean, we find this in the case of many ancient people: they were not interested in the trivial and the purely personal in the narrow sense. They were interested only in what was of real importance.

_____: There wouldn't have been so much trivia in those days, in that everybody would have lived more or less the same kind of life; more or less the same appendages.....like today: we identify with all the little bits of our life, whereas they wouldn't have done.

S: Do you think it is just that?

Lokamitra: The Buddha - his life is recorded by his disciples who just were above that sort of attitude anyway.

S: Yes. What were they above?

Lokamitra: Well if they didn't relate to Enlightenment or the spiritual life: they had no relevance, the other aspects.

S: Yes. Right! In other words they were interested in what was really essential about the life of the Buddha. But our modern tendency seems to be, you know, to be interested in a lot of trivial things amounting almost to gossip. You could say, of course, you could argue conceivably, that some of those details are of psychological or spiritual significance but one could say, well, in the long run, what do they really add up to, in comparison with the really crucial events of somebody's life. And perhaps, sometimes, we concentrate on those sort of things, because in the life of the person whose biography we're writing in many instances, there isn't really, very much more.

Nagabodhi: So you get, in the case of a public personality these days, this tremendous gap between the public personality and the private individual, and a lot of journalistic technique is to try and reveal to the public the private individual behind the public `face'; whereas in the Buddha's time I imagine the Buddha was more integrated and it wasn't a matter of.....

S: Yes. You could go along....you could see the Buddha having his meal any day of the week. You would see the Buddha begging etc.

Nagabodhi: `Meet the man behind the Dhammacakrapravartana Sutta'-sort of thing. (Laughter)

S: Yes. Right.

Siddhiratna: Wouldn't the details about one's biography, maybe, help establish the authenticity of the person called Gotama?

S: What do you mean: his authenticity as a person or....?

Siddhiratna: As a real human being, yeah.

S: You could say that.

Siddhiratna: And that if there were a number of biographies in provinces say of the south, north, China etc., recording these sort of details, the cross references would be enough to

establish that.

S: There are a number of instances .... a number of episodes in the Buddha's life where something of his character, as it were, comes through. I mean, like for instance, the story of the way he dealt with Kisagotami; or the way he dealt with the sick monk: things of that sort. But surely there are hundreds and thousands of little things - trivia - which don't have that sort of bearing.

Siddhiratna: Mm. Yeah.

S: ....and we get, in modern days, so much of these sort of things.

Dipankara: Do you think these would have been sifted out over the years, particularly when they were translated just orally between the monks?

S: It could be. It could be. Or it may be that the early disciples
who were in close contact with the Buddha, were so impressed by what was really impressive that they just didn't bother about other things. But what does this show - this sort of interest, or preoccupation with quite trivial aspects of a man's life?

Siddhiratna: In some senses does it mean today we are a bit jaded in terms of the wisdom that one can receive - in some way that there is so much of it?

S: But why should you have any interest in what sort of breakfast food somebody eats, eh?

Nagabodhi: It's to do with this tendency to pull things all to the same level.

S: Possibly it's that. Yeh.

_____: Maybe it's just an absence of any other interests, any other sort of weighty information. You've got to sort of dredge up trivia.

S: And in the case of the disciples of the Buddha, well, they had the Buddha, they had the Dharma, well, there was just **no time**, presumably, in their lives, or no space in their minds, as it were, for these sorts of trivial things, and in any case there would be fewer of them. Life being so much simpler in those days anyway.

It does seem as though nowadays we do tend to be preoccupied with quite trivial things in this respect, rather than trying to assess the real significance of somebody's life. A biography becomes very anecdotal.

Lokamitra: You can't say much more than is said in the text. The Buddha got up in the morning, went with his bowl to the town, and came back, ate it, meditated . I mean, his life seems to have been so simple ....(Pause)

S: Maybe we just have trivial minds nowadays.

Siddhiratna: Is there an example of somebody in fairly contemporary society that you feel that their biography has been overdone in some way or trivialised - that they have in fact been trivialised.
S: Well, possibly, in a way, almost everybody. But I'm thinking more of the sort of the popular, serialised biographies, and things of that sort which appeal to the average reader.

Siddhiratna: Could you give an example?

S: For instance a life of T.E.Lawrence that appeared a few months ago, or some of the `Lives' of D.H.Lawrence that have appeared. (Pause) In other words you don't try to get at the essence of somebody's significance. (Pause) Or the life of Cromwell I was reading not so long ago. (Pause) You don't seem to see - you don't seem to get - the sort of essential outline - the essential outline seems to be obscured, even when there is one, by a mass of detail. You're not given the general significance of the man. Well, perhaps if you were, it would appear that it had no significance at all - that the life had really been quite meaningless and worthless, valueless; whereas in the case of the Buddha, even if you don't know anything else about him, you know that he was a prince who left home, who gained Enlightenment, he taught, or decided to teach, and then died amidst his disciples. Well, these are four very great things indeed to know. You hardly need to know anything else, but if you try to reduce the biography of almost anybody else, even though quite famous, to bare essentials, well, what have you? You haven't got anything like that left. You either say, well it wasn't all that important that he went to school, after all everybody goes to school. So you cut out that - well he got married, well practically everybody gets married, that doesn't really tell you anything about him - oh! he wrote some books, well, all right you've got the books, no need to say anything about those, people can read them . Or he had several illnesses, well, is that really very significant. Well then he died. (Laughter)

Perhaps, maybe, there's so much of trivia in biographies because there isn't very much else to relate - very much else to tell about, **really,** - not when you compare, say, with the life of the Buddha. (Pause) I mean, all the ancient people's, including the Greeks and the Romans, would have regarded our obsession with biography, as really quite morbid and difficult to understand. Yes, a few lines about some really great man, but why do you want to write a whole biography about someone whose life was not that important or interesting!. You know, not even in historical terms anyway. Why are we so interested in the details of other people's lives? Why this sort of gossip in print? This is what it really comes down to. Maybe it's because we don't find our own lives very interesting. (Pause)

So perhaps it isn't all that surprising, or maybe it's only to be expected, that the Buddha's earliest disciples, while being very mindful of the main events of his life which are of great spiritual significance, were just not interested in all the minor details, the trivia of his existence. All right, let's go on then.

Text.*"These four events provide a convenient framework within which to examine the personality and role of the Buddha; they indicate four historically important aspects of the Buddha's relation to the life of his time: (1) his particular social and cultural milieu; (2) the experience of spiritual unrest, and subsequent enlightenment which he underwent; (3) the nature of his public activity; and (4) the significance of the ceremonies connected with his decease."*
S: (Pause) All right, let's go on then.

Text.*"GOTAMA'S SOCIAL AND CULTURAL MILIEU*

The man who was to become known as the Buddha (and who until his enlightenment at Bodh-Gaya is properly known as the ***Bodhisattva*** *or one who has the essence of Buddhahood, or enlightenment) was, says the tradition, the son of Suddhodana, the leading citizen of Kapilavastu. This was a busy town on the north-west to south-east trade route which ran along the foot of the Himalayan mountains, amid the thick forests at the extreme northern edge of the Gangetic plain. It lay due north of Banaras, and a few miles within the border of what is now Nepal. The town was the capital of the Shakyas, a people who had, as we have seen, an aristocratic republican form of government. Their territory probably extended about fifty miles from east to west, and about thirty or forty from north to south, from the foot of the*

Himalayas.(5)"

S: That's about as big as Wales isn't it? (Pause) Would you say?
Yes, I think it is roughly, maybe just a little smaller.

Text.*"Apart from Kapilavastu, the capital, the region contained a number of market towns. The Buddha-to-be belonged to the clan of the Gotamas, and it is by this name that he is often known, as it were a surname. His given, or personal name was Siddhartha. Later Buddhist literature magnifies the position of his father to that of a very great king and depicts the life-style of the young prince as one of extreme grandeur, luxury and wealth. It is more probable that his father was the elected head of an aristocratic hereditary ruling class, having some of the rank, status and prestige of the rule of a small kingdom, but nothing more. As might be expected, the Buddhist sources provide a certain amount of information about the Shakyas, although it is mostly of the kind that has to be pieced together from scattered references. With regard to the ancestry of the Shakyas, for example, there is an interesting allusion to the progenitors of their tribe having had their dwelling 'on the slopes of the Himalayas'.(6) In the present form of the story, as it is told in the Pali canon, although it is explained that these progenitors* ***went*** *to the Himalayas when they were banished from the court of their father, a legendary Indian raja of ancient times, named Okkaka, the explanation could well be a device to account for the fact that the ancestors of what was now a north-Indian tribe had at an earlier period lived in the Himalayas, if this were a strongly established tradition among them. It would, in fact, be more in accordance with the natural course of migration for a Himalayan tribe to have moved southwards towards the sun and the plains than* ***vice versa****, for, in general, this has been the predominant direction in which migration of peoples occurred throughout north India and continental South-East Asia. The* ***Ambatth Sutta****, in which the story occurs, suggests that the Shakyas were a non-brahman tribe. The brahman Ambattha, in conversation with the Buddha, referring to the division of society into those who were brahmans and those who were not, reminded the Buddha that it was the duty of the latter to serve the former, and to honour them. The Shakyas, he complained, appeared to be lacking in this sense of respect for brahmans. "Once, Gotama, I had to go to Kapilavastu on some business or other .. and went into the Shakya's Congress Hall (****Santhagara-sala****) Now at that time there were a number of Shakyas, old and young, seated in the hall on grand seats, making merry and joking together, nudging one another with their fingers; and for a truth, methinks, it was I myself that was the subject of their jokes; and not one of them even offered me a seat. That, Gotama, is neither fitting, nor is it seemly, that the Shakyas, menials as they are, mere menials, should neither venerate, nor value, nor esteem, nor give gifts to, nor pay honour to Brahmans."(7)*

Such a lack of respect for brahmans which is attributed to the Shakyas in this tale may possibly reflect the attitude of the developed Buddhist community towards the brahmans. It is also possible that this was known by the Buddhists to have been the attitude of the Shakya people. If the Shakyas were Himalayan hill people who had migrated to the edge of the plains, it is likely that they would have been of a sturdy independent spirit, and well disposed to reject the social pretensions of the Aryan brahman class. That they were of such a spirit is suggested by one or two other casual references.(8) Their sturdy spirit is shown too in their relations with the neighbouring great monarchy of Koshala (see chapter 3, pp. 53 f.). The king of Koshala, Pasenadi, a great admirer of the Buddha, and benefactor of the Buddhist Order, wished to strengthen his relationship with the Shakyas. He sent to the Shakyan elders a polite request that he might be allowed to marry one of their daughters. They, however, considered that such a marriage would be degrading to them; it would, they said, destroy the purity of their race and be contrary to their tradition. But they could not afford to risk the anger of this very powerful neighbouring king, so they sent him the illegitimate daughter of one of the chiefs, born of a slave-woman, passing her off as pure Shakyan. The attitude of the Shakyans is referred to in the course of the story (the ***Bhadda-Sal Jataka****) in the words of*

*king Pasenadi's messengers: 'These Shakyas are desperately proud, in matters of birth!'(9) Another interesting fact about the Shakyas is that they were fond of sports, and especially archery. They had an established school of archery, run by a family who specialised in this sport.(10) It is said, too, that the Buddha, as a young man, had to prove his prowess as an archer before any Shakyan nobleman would consider him as a future son-in-law.(11) While Kapilavastu, the capital of the Shakyan republic, was not one of the recognised six great cities (**mahanagara**) of the time, it was certainly a place of importance and some affluence. It is described as a city where there were crowds of people and plenty of food, a place whose streets were full of traffic, in the form of elephants, horses, chariots, carts and pedestrians, and where, with their hubbub and jingle and clatter, was mingled the sound of street musicians, singers and traders.(12) The general pattern of Indian cities of this period has already been described (see chapter 3, pp. 53 f.) and Kapilavastu would no doubt have conformed generally to this pattern. The Buddhist sources mention the council hall, the **Santhagara-sala** which stood at the centre of the town, and where public business, administrative and judicial, was carried out. Mention is made, too, of the massive ramparts surrounding the city, said to have been eighteen cubits high. It was as the leading citizen of such a city, and as one who carried the responsibility for presiding over the affairs of the small state of which Kapilavastu was the capital, that we have to see the father of the Bodhisattva. It is appropriate to think, not so much in terms of the idle ostentation of the court of some great oriental emperor, as of the material comfort and well-being of a cultured upper-class townsman in a prosperous commercial and administrative centre: of urbanity and sophistication, rather than of luxurious imperial grandeur. The background of the Buddha's youth and early manhood is represented, therefore, as having been one of urban life, comfortable and easy by the standards of the time, and made more so by the privileges that went with superior social class; Shakyan society was certainly not classless, as the story of king Pasenadi's bride makes clear. The fact that the Shakyan state was not a monarchy may be significant in connection with the problem which was raised in chapter 4, namely, which came first - individualism, monarchy, or urbanism? Gotama's milieu, to the time of his manhood, was that of urban life, but it did not include experience of a developed monarchical society. The problem which he seems to have felt most keenly and which set him on his spiritual quest, was that of the suffering of **the individual**. This suggest that it was primarily urban life which precipitated individualism, rather than monarchy, or, at any rate, that this is how it was understood by the early Buddhist community."*

S: Mmmm. Do you think that really follows?

____: No.

S: "The problem which he seems to have felt most keenly and which set him on his spiritual quest was that of the suffering of *the individual*." Well, that,s fair enough, isn't it? -"This suggests that it was primarily urban life which precipitated individualism..." . What's the logical error here? (Pause)

Well, it's the error of `prior to, there because of'. You see what I mean? `Prior to therefore because of'. (Pause) Because the Buddha grew up in an urban environment, because he was concerned with the plight of the individual, - that doesn't prove that urbanism gave birth to individualism. It doesn't prove it at all! Urbanism was **there**, the Buddha's preoccupation was with the individual, but it doesn't prove that urbanism was the cause of that. There were causes much more to be found in the Buddha's own personal sensitivity and awareness, which **might** have had something to do with the fact that he was born and brought up in an urban centre, but one can't say that therefore urban life was the direct cause of individualism. It's definitely a sort of non sequitur. But anyway Ling says :"This suggests that it was primarily urban life which precipitated individualism rather than monarchy ....." But is that to suggest that if the Buddha had been say born in Rajagriha that he would have been unlikely to have

been preoccupied with the suffering of the individual? [Pause] " ..... that this is how it was understood by the early Buddhist community." Well that seems complete nonsense! I don't think there's any evidence at all for that!: `that the early Buddhist community believed that it was primarily urban life which precipitated individualism' - which seems to be what Trevor Ling is saying.
Anyway, let's go on.

Text "Moreover, it was a concern with the pain and the unsatisfactoriness of ordinary, common mortal existence....."
[Bhante interjects]

S: Yes ! "...ordinary, common mortal existence...." whether in the city or whether in the village; whether under a republic, or whether under a monarchy. [Pause]

[End of Side One, Side Two]

Text.*"..... which stirred Gotama; this can be seen as both a consequence of his upbringing and a determining factor in the shape of the solution which he discovered for the ills of human existence...."*

S: Again, this is very doubtful, whether it can be seen as a consequence of his upbringing. Surely that's much too simplistic isn't it?

Text *"For the milieu in which he probably grew up is that of a traditional ruling class, one occupied with the practical aspects of public life, with the smooth functioning of the machinery of society and perhaps at least some general concern with, and feeling of responsibility for, human welfare."*

S: It does seem that he is trying to account for the Buddha's preoccupation entirely in terms of his origins, leaving out the Buddha himself, and his own particular spiritual genius altogether.

_____: Typical Marxist ?

S: It is, isn't it ? Mm. A reductionist sort of view.

Siddhiratna: Is he not saying, Bhante, that ...um....I'm not really sure if I've understood the earlier part of the book so.... Is it not that if you have a primitive tribe, or a primitively organised society, given that it will grow with certain developments, say technology of moving from stone into metal, that once you reach a certain standard of civilization within that society then some people are released from having to hunt or work, therefore they have time to, perhaps, develop themselves, for want of a better term.

S: Yes.

Siddhiratna: Isn't that what Ling is saying in some sense when he keeps harping on this urban environment - that once the urban environment was **there**, as a progression from a primitive society, then there was a chance for individuals to arise?

S: This is certainly possible, but one can also conceive an individual stepping forth just from a tribal society; from a village. For instance what about Mohammed? Or what about Christ if you accept Christ as a historical figure? [Siddhiratna and Bhante speaking simultaneously] in a village. Mohammed certainly wasn't born and brought up in an urban environment. What about the Jewish prophets? Many of those weren't born and brought up in an urban

environment.

Siddhiratna: So from that, then one can say it is not necessary, or at least not completely necessary, for a civilisation to have reached a certain developed growth - economic and the rest of it - that sort of stability, for individuals to appear? They can appear as and when, as it were. I don't know what would be the conditions under which they would arise., but .....[Bhante interjects]

S: Mm. [Bhante and Siddhiratna speaking together] I think one can certainly say that individuals are probably more likely to arise within the context of urban life than otherwise...

Siddhiratna: Yeah.

S:...certainly to any great extent, or in any large numbers, but I don't think you can say, therefore, that urbanism itself is the direct cause of individualism.

Siddhiratna: Yeah.

S: ...because there are masses of people who are born and brought up in cities that never approach individualism, or never become individuals, and you do have some examples outside the cities. At the best you can say, or, the most you can say is that life in the city predisposes you, or enables you, to be an individual, if there is that sort of almost innate tendency in you already. Otherwise you are trying to see the individual simply as a product of the group.

Siddhiratna: Yes. [Pause]

S: It still doesn't logically follow that because the problem that set the Buddha on his spiritual quest was the suffering of the individual: that is no proof that it is "primarily urban life which precipitates individualism rather than monarchy". [Pause] And it is certainly not correct to say - "this is how it was understood by the early Buddhist community." - their terms of reference were quite different. [Pause]
And as he goes on to say himself, "it was a concern with the pain and unsatisfactoriness of ordinary, common mortal existence which stirred Gotama."

Nagabodhi: In that he saw the `Four sights' from his chariot, and the people he saw that had been near the roads: you could just as logically say it was the growth of roads which led to individualism.

S: Yes. [pause] Or the invention of the chariot, the horse-drawn chariot. No doubt urban life was one factor which helped in the emergence of at least embryonic individuality; but it's very sort of crude and clumsy to assign it as the sort of primary cause in this sort of way. And to make it directly responsible for the Buddha's personal concern before his Enlightenment, with the suffering of the individual. All right, let's go on.

Text *"It is meaningless to say, as some have done,(13) that the Buddha, a child of his time, was heir to the Hindu religious tradition. In the first place, it is an anachronism to ascribe a Hindu religious tradition to this early period; the characteristic set of beliefs and practices which came to be known as 'Hindu' (the word itself being a product of the Muslim period) was yet to be developed. Moreover, it is difficult to see how the Buddha can be described as an heir to the brahman religious tradition. One who did not believe in God, nor in theories of creation, and who did not accept the authority of the Veda, was about as much an heir to the Hindu tradition as Karl Marx was a Zionist."*

S: Yes! With this paragraph one can completely agree. In so many books, especially books written by Indian scholars - Hindu scholars - about Buddhism, they say that the Buddha was the product, or the offspring, or the heir to Hinduism etc. etc. Well this paragraph completely explodes that.

Lokamitra: It is funny that his terms aren't very good, because previously he talked about religious traditions and so on existing at the time of the Buddha, in India, and now he dismisses that there was any religious tradition....

S: No! No! He doesn't. He says - "it is an anachronism to ascribe a Hindu religious tradition to **this early period**; the characteristic set of beliefs and practices which came to be known as `Hindu' was yet to be developed." In other words [short break in master recording]

..... What we nowadays call Hinduism just didn't exist in those days. That is the mistake of so many modern Indian writers: to assume that the Hinduism that we know today just existed in the Buddha's day and that the Buddha was familiar with it and influenced by it.

There was the whole development of Puranic Hinduism, the development of Tantric Hinduism to come still, in the time of the Buddha. And that is popular Hinduism. The *Bhagavadgita* was not written in those days. There was only Brahmanism, and these various other philosophical schools. Was the Buddha heir to Brahmanism? No, certainly not! He didn't accept it at all! Did he agree with the other schools? No! Only to a very very limited extent. What about the worship of Rama and Krishna which is so popular and predominant in India today? It didn't exist!

Nagabodhi: Did people who foretold dreams and things ... people we hear about in the Scriptures, who Suddhodana dealt with: who made the prophesies, what would they have been? Would they have been Brahmans?

S: Probably Brahmans, yes. [Pause] Anyway let's go on.

Text*"It has been suggested that if Gotama was indebted to any earlier figure in the cultural history of India, the most likely candidate is Kapila, to whom is attributed the atheistic Sankhya doctrine. It is very likely, writes R.C. Majumdar, that Gotama, since he came from Kapilavastu, 'had some knowledge of the Sankhya doctrine'.(14) The affinity between the teaching of the Buddha and the Sankhya philosophy was hinted at by Asvagosha (the Buddhist writer mentioned on page 106) in his full-length biography of the Buddha, the* ***Buddhacarita*** *Those who hold the view that the Buddha was influenced by Sankhya attitudes point to the fact that one of the teachers to whom he resorted in the course of his wanderings, before his own 'awakenment' at Bodh-Gaya, was Alara (or Arada) Kalama. Alara's philosophy seems to have borne some slight resemblance to the Sankhya system, although there seem also to have been significant differences. The fact that Gotama stayed only a short while with Alara and then left him, because he was not satisfied with his teaching,(15) could mean that Gotama found Alara either insufficiently Sankhyan in his views, or too much so. A modern Indian writer takes the view that it would be a serious error to overlook the major similarity between the Sankhya system and Buddhism - the atheistic position which is common to them: 'since the Sankhya was undoubtedly much older than the rise of Buddhism, we are left with the strong presumption that at least for his atheism the Buddha was directly indebted to the Sankhya, though he evidently differed much from Kapila in his main interest.'(16) But this is to assume that Gotama was incapable by himself of arriving at an atheistic view, or adopting an atheistic premise as his starting-point. The likelihood that Gotama, living in Kapilavastu, might have been familiar with the Sankhya view, has to be taken in conjunction with the suggestion of Dandekar that the origin of the Sankhya is to be found in a 'pre-Vedic, non-Aryan thought complex'.(17) So it is an open possibility that*

Gotama's atheism also had its origin in the pre-Vedic, non-Aryan, non-Brahmanical culture of north-eastern India in general, and of the Shakya people in particular."

S: Mm. It's quite correct what Trevor Ling says about - "this is to assume that Gotama was incapable by himself of arriving at an atheistic view, or adopting an atheistic premise as his starting-point." So many writers about Buddhism, or about other teachings too, tend to think in terms of `borrowing'. You see what I mean ? As if to say that whoever they were writing about was not capable of thinking the matter out for himself: that if he developed a certain idea, or professed a certain idea, that it must have been borrowed from some earlier source.

One overlooks the power of originality of the human mind, especially in the case of the genius, and also overlooks the fact that somebody must have been the originator of that particular idea at some period or other. But, again, Indian writers especially, do this time and time again with the Buddha: it is almost axiomatic with some of them that he must have **borrowed** everything in his teaching from earlier writers or earlier thinkers. So this makes a mockery, in a way, of the whole idea of Enlightenment. Do you see how this is so? [Pause]

They rather think of the Buddha in terms of him being influenced by this, and being influenced by that, and learning about this and learning about that, and borrowing this, and borrowing that from here and from there; putting it all together and formulating a sort of teaching of his own. They don't think in terms of the Buddha developing himself, and having a spiritual experience and seeing everything in a new way, and in the light of that experience, in the light of that new vision, trying to communicate with other people about what he saw; and maybe using current terminology, and using current religious idioms to do so, but essentially trying to communicate his own vision as an enlightened individual. They just don't think in those terms at all! Many of the writers of these sort of pseudo-historical accounts of the Buddha's life and teaching. You see this ? [Pause]

Lokamitra: I can see what you mean but I don't think they are necessarily ..... I mean, maybe he **did** borrow his ideas from other areas and used them in his very own special way, in that he was using ideas taken maybe from other sources to communicate his own experience.
S: Well, this is what I'm saying. Yes, but they leave out off account, the experience altogether! As though the Buddha was just a sort of intellectual eclectic. This is what I'm getting at.

Siddhiratna: Synthesising .....

S: ....That when he started trying to communicate his vision, well, of course he had to use existing language, and as I said, existing idioms, and make use of whatever was available in his environment for purposes of communication; but he was trying to communicate his own vision all the time. But this is what such writers deny him: they deny him any vision of his own, any experience of his own which he was trying to communicate through these mediums, and they make him a sort of eclectic philosopher or cum-religious reformer and so on. They don't see him as an Enlightened individual with a unique vision to communicate **at all!** [Pause] All right, let's go on.

Text*"The notion that Gotama was a 'religious' man evidently needs careful scrutiny. That he has come to be so regarded may be partly because of the assimilation of Buddhism with theistic systems of belief and practice as a 'religion', and partly because of the ill-founded idea that the inhabitants of India are, and always have been, more religiously inclined than the peoples of the West. In this way the Buddha as been subsumed under the general category of religious teachers or leaders. The Buddha's teaching, and the life of the early Buddhists is often regarded as an answer to personal spiritual* ***malaise*** *a doctrine of personal salvation.*

The possibility which is being raised here is that it was something other than this. It has to be admitted, however, that the story of Gotama's enlightenment does, on the face of it, look very like a personal salvation story of a purely religious kind. But this may be because the modern understanding of 'religion' is being projected back into the time of the Buddha and made the criterion of his experience. We need to inquire what is said in the tradition of early Buddhism about the whole complex of events leading to the enlightenment at Bodh-Gaya."

S: This seems terribly confused, doesn't it? [Pause] The word `religion' is used in a very ambiguous sort of way. You see this? [Pause]

"....The Buddha's teaching, and the life of the early Buddhists is often regarded as an answer to personal spiritual *malaise*, a doctrine of personal salvation." Leaving aside the fact that maybe the word `salvation' isn't quite appropriate, certainly the Buddha's teaching was directed to the individual, it's concerned with the development of the individual, or is even `an answer to personal spiritual *malaise*'. [Pause]

It isn't really `religious' in some of the senses in which that term is used, but Trevor Ling seems to use the word `religious' here, for purposes of this paragraph, in the sense of `concerned with the individual, and the development of the individual, and the solution of the individual's problems.' Certainly Buddhism was that, if it was anything!

There may have been, as he goes on to try to argue, this public dimension but you notice that he says: "The possibility which is being raised here is that it was something other than this." As though it was not this at all: it had, as it were, nothing to do with the individual, and the development of the individual. Not that there was an additional dimension, but that it was something quite different. He puts it in a rather sort of tendentious way when he speaks about `a doctrine of personal salvation'. Well, it was never a doctrine of salvation: it was a doctrine of Enlightenment, you could say, and the development of the individual. [Pause]

So it isn't really a question of "modern understanding of religion being projected back into the time of the Buddha" - this is exactly how the Buddhist scriptures present the Buddha's experience: that it was an ascent through successively higher levels of consciousness culminating in a spiritual experience called Enlightenment. This is how the early Buddhists all understood the matter. You can't really get away from that!

Anyway let's go on to see how he handles the matter. "The Enlightenment".

Text*"THE ENLIGHTENMENT*

According to tradition, Gotama was twenty-nine years of age when the decisive events occurred which led to his enlightenment."
S: Mm. This is what is usually stated, but it seems that there are quite a number of accounts. We came across some of these in the Sutta Nipata which clearly suggest that the Buddha was very much younger, and according to Mahayana tradition, I discovered the other day - or the tradition preserved in the Mahayana - he was not 29 but 19; and 29 when he became enlightened, not 35. This seems much more plausible, much more likely. And it is in agreement with a number of traditions. For instance, in the beginning of the Mahavagga of ? , the Sutta Nipata, King Bimbisara says to the Buddha : "You are young and tender and delicate etc." That would hardly be applicable to someone who was 29, at least, or maybe in his early thirties. And these sort of references are constantly used about the Buddha, even after his Enlightenment, in the Pali Canon: that he was young and delicate . And that would hardly be applicable to someone who was in his late thirties.

So, I'm coming, myself, to the conclusion that the accounts preserved in the Mahayana

sources read in the light of quite a number of passages in the Pali Canon, point to the Buddha being 19 rather than 29, when he left home, and 29 rather than 35 when he gained Enlightenment. It's not all that important, but it does suggest a rather more youthful and - what shall I say - adventurous Siddartha than we've previously been led to suppose.

Lokamitra: It's always seemed strange to me that he must have been betrothed to his wife in his teens .....

S: Yes. the usual account is when he was sixteen. One child was born, then at nineteen he left home. That seems quite plausible.

Lokamitra: Yeah. Otherwise he would have waited thirteen years to have a child, which seems crazy.

S: Yes. Especially conditions in India being what they were, he would have had probably six or eight children by that time. But it does seem much more likely that, yes, he was married at sixteen, that he had a child, and at nineteen he left home. All the accounts agree on forty-five years of public activity, which, if you take that literally and add it these other figures would make him seventy-four at the time of his death, rather than eighty, which is, of course, not unlikely. Not that he couldn't have been eighty but there's no difficulty of adjustment with regard to his total age, his age at the time of his death. Anyway let's go on. It's not just that: "according to tradition, Gotama was twenty-nine....." - that's just one line of tradition and there are several others. Even in the Pali Canon, as I said, there are definite suggestions, very **clear** suggestions that he was much younger than that.

Text*"Various accounts are available, and they differ considerably, especially with regard to the circumstances of the renunciation. According to the later, more elaborate accounts, written in Sanskrit, the Bodhisattva, while he was out driving his chariot, was confronted successively by a very old man, then by a very sick man, and finally by a corpse being carried out to the burning* ***ghat*** *These sights disturbed him profoundly, for they raised questions which he had apparently not considered before. Finally, the sight of a holy man stirred in him the desire to live the ascetic life and strive for spiritual enlightenment....."*

S: Mm. It isn't, by the way, only the Sanskrit accounts which describe these `Four sights', the Pali texts describe them too. All right, let's go on.

Text"*On the other hand, an early Pali text gives an account which suggests that it was as a result of long reflection upon the human condition that Gotama decided to devote himself to a disciplined quest for spiritual satisfaction.*"

S: Mm. This is of course, the `Ariyapariyesana' sutta which we studied on the mitra retreat. It doesn't say anything about **long** reflection, by the way - this text: it merely says that he reflected.

_____: What was the sutta?

S: `Ariyapariyesana' . [Pause] ...in the Majjhima Nikaya.

Text *"In this account of the matter, the Buddha, some years after the event, makes known to his followers the two possible ends to which men may devote their lives, in terms of his own earlier experience. He identifies these two ends as the noble or holy quest (****ariya-pariyesana****) and the ignoble or unholy quest. Briefly, the human situation is seen as one in which, because of belief in self (****atta*** *or* ***atman****), men are vulnerable to the process of ageing, decay and dying, and hence to sorrow. The word translated as sorrow (****dukkha****) in fact*

carries a much deeper and stronger connotation than the English word, and implies a sense of utter unsatisfactoriness, weariness, and pain of mortal existence. The ignoble quest, to which many devote their lives, consists in seeking after things which are liable to ageing, decay and death, the very conditions from which deliverance is needed. 'And what, monks, is the noble quest? That someone, being liable to birth because of self, and knowing the peril in whatever is liable to birth, seeks the unborn, the uttermost security from bonds - ***nibbana.*** *The same formula is then repeated for each of the other conditions of mortal existence. The noble quest is that in which someone, who because of self is vulnerable to ageing, decaying, dying, stain and sorrow, and who knows the peril in whatever is liable to the same things, seeks the unaging, the undecaying, the undying, the stainless, the unsorrowing - that which is itself freedom from all constraints:* ***nibbana.*** *The Buddha then goes on to say that when he was still the Bodhisattva, it was considerations such as these which stirred him, and made him ask 'Why do I seek what is liable to birth ... to ageing ... to decay ... to death ... to stain ... to sorrow? Being myself liable to birth, to ageing, to decay, to death, to stain, to sorrow, I should seek the unborn, the unaging, the undecaying, the undying, the stainless, the unsorrowing.'(18) It is understandable, as E.J. Thomas pointed out, that this kind of account of personal experience and reflection should have been developed into the story of encounters with an old man, a sick man, and a corpse; it is less understandable, on the other hand, how, if these encounters had been real events the story could subsequently 'have been converted into this abstract form'.(19) On the day on which he saw these three manifestations of the human condition, so the tradition asserts, another event took place - the birth of Bodhisattva's son. On hearing the news, he pronounced his son's name, 'Rahula'. The commentators suggest the presence of a pun: the word 'rahula' means, they say, 'a bond', and so the Bodhisattva's utterance had a double meaning: 'Rahula is born. A bond is born.' Thus, it is very interesting to notice that of the six conditions of human existence mentioned in the Buddha's discourse - birth, ageing, decay, dying, stain and sorrow -* ***four*** *illustrative examples have been found in what are represented as the events surrounding the great renunciation. Finally, there is the further curious incident concerning a Shakya maiden named Kisagotami. It is said that from her balcony she saw Gotama returning home in his chariot after the news of his son's birth had been announced to him. She saw Gotama's 'beauty and glory' and 'she was filled with joy and delight', and began to sing: 'Happy is the mother, happy is the father, happy is the wife who has such a husband!' The word which she used for 'happy' (****nibbuta*** *meant also 'cool' or 'healthy'. The Bodhisattva, upon hearing her song, took the word to mean 'cool', and, says the tradition, 'with aversion in his heart for lusts, he thought, "When the fire of passion is cooled, the heart is happy; when the fire of illusion, pride, false views and all the lusts and pains are extinguished it is happy".' In gratitude for the lesson she had taught him, the story continues, he sent the maiden a very costly pearl necklace. 'She thought that prince Siddhartha (Gotama) was in love with her, and had sent her a present, and she was filled with delight.' But a few hours later, in the quietness of the night, awakening to the sight of the dancers who had been entertaining him, and were now asleep in all kinds of disgusting and unseemly postures, he renounced the life of sensual pleasures, and took the crucial step of leaving his home, to set out on the life of the homeless wanderer, in search of spiritual peace. Perhaps both the abstract analysis of the human situation, and the picturesque account, with its various personal illustrations, of the kind of 'fetters' or constraints from which Gotama felt he had to escape, indicate in their contrasting ways the nature of his quest. The abstract version emphasises that it is 'the self', the* ***atman*** *which is the ultimate root of the human experience of sorrow. It is because of the idea of 'self' that men are vulnerable to birth, ageing, decay, death, stain, and sorrow; it is this notion of 'self' which causes men to experience life as sorrowful. The stories of Gotama's encounters with old age, disease, death, birth and the taint of passion may have been the kind of characteristic experiences which brought a young man to see that it is the unending search for the satisfaction of the desires of the individual which leads to spiritual disenchantment. It was from this condition, from these constraints, that he sought some way of deliverance. We return, therefore, to the point which was made earlier, that it was the ultimate*

unsatisfactoriness, the sorrowfulness of life, which set Gotama on his spiritual quest. How this quest was fulfilled, what was the nature of the 'salvation' which he found, we shall consider in detail in the next chapter. What we now have to take account of is the typical environment, the ***locale*** *for his public activity after the enlightenment, after the great discovery had been made."*

S: Mm. It does rather seem as though Trevor Ling connects the `atman' with individualism, and the getting rid of the `atman' with getting rid of individualism, in a way. But anyway he deals with this in greater detail later on, so maybe we should leave it until then.

Anyway, what do you think of his discussion - the whole discussion - of `the Enlightenment' at this point? [Pause] I mean, apart from his quotation from the `Ariyapariyesana' Sutta, it's very unsatisfactory, isn't it? He seems to have no idea whatever about it.

Vessantara: It seems odd in a way, that he's going to go from there on to the "Nature of the Buddha's Public Activity." It's as if once he's set the Enlightenment in the arena of his public activity, he can then talk about the Enlightenment, and carry some of the preconceptions about it being more of a public event, if you like, with it.

_____: In fact, in that section, I've only just realised that the section is headed "The Enlightenment". He doesn't, in fact, mention it at all. Does he?

S: Mm! Not really.

_____:[Several voices at once - words blurred.]

S: No. [Pause] It does refer, in the quotation from the "Ariyapariyesana Sutta" - it does speak in terms of that which is mortal, that which is conditioned, going in quest of the Unconditioned rather than in quest of something else which is conditioned. But it doesn't actually speak about the attainment of the Unconditioned by the conditioned, which is Enlightenment.

_____: You get the impression that what he calls `Enlightenment" is the sudden realisation of human suffering, and `The Four Sights'. That is what he means by `Enlightenment'.

S: Almost that, yes. But anyway he does promise more detailed discussion later on. So let's hope he does, in fact, give that.

Vessantara: What does he mean by "stained" ?

S: The stain of passion presumably, `klesa'. [Pause] It does, in a way, go to show in a general way, how unsatisfactory is the scholar's approach to spiritual things. It really illustrates that, doesn't it. That the academic mind is simply **blind** to certain things; and is quite unaware of that blindness. In a way, it is a sign of spiritual degeneration that a culture and society exists in which it is possible for people like Trevor Ling - and he is one of the more well-meaning -to write books about the Buddha. [Long pause] Anyway, let's go on.

Text.*"THE NATURE OF THE BUDDHA'S PUBLIC ACTIVITY*

If we are correct in thinking that the problems of human life with which the Buddha was primarily concerned were the kind of problems which arise with the development of individualism, and if this was a feature which was more characteristic of urban than of rural life, then it is reasonable to expect that those in greatest need of his teaching, of his prescription for freedom and peace, would be found in the urban centres rather than in the

countryside. It was, in fact, precisely there, in the cities, that most of the Buddha's public activity took place."

S: With each repetition his tentative conclusions become firm conclusions, then they become `laws' and so on.

"If we are correct in thinking that the problems of human life with which the Buddha was primarily concerned were the kind of problems which arise with the development of individualism....." Well he's clearly equated 'atta' with individualism. And:"... if this was a feature which was more characteristic of urban than of rural life then it is reasonable to expect, etc. etc."

Well, even supposing that the Buddha **did** concentrate on the urban centres rather than in the countryside: well, was it necessarily because there was more individualism and therefore more suffering in the urban centres?

Lokamitra: More people there.

S: More people, to begin with. And maybe a lot of people who were more free, had more leisure. People in the countryside usually have to work. [Pause] Anyway, let's carry on.

Text *"The profound experience he underwent at Bodh-Gaya was his awakening to the truth; it was itself an end of all the constraints of which he had previously been aware, and it was therefore described as **vimutti** release, or **nibbana** the state of 'coolness' or 'health after fever'. The tradition represents him as at first uncertain whether this truth which he had apprehended could ever be conveyed to other men. 'This **dhamma** attained to by me is deep, difficult to see, difficult to understand, tranquil, excellent, beyond dialectic, subtle, intelligible to the learned."*

S: (interrupting) Mm. "...intelligible to the learned." Actually it's `the wise', those who know. You couldn't have a learned man in those days, anyway. There were no books. [Pause] `Intelligible to the wise, or those who know, is quite a different thing from `intelligible to the learned'. Otherwise, it suggests it's intelligible only to the academic.

Text *"But this is a creation delighting in sensual pleasure, rejoicing in sensual pleasure ... [and for them] this were a matter difficult to see ...' The Buddha recalls that, as he was pondering and deciding against the attempt to communicate his discovery of truth to the generality of men, it occurred to the god Brahma that the world would be lost, would be destroyed, if the Buddha now refrained from teaching his doctrines (**dhamma**)."*

S: Mm. Well, even to translate "dhamma" as `doctrines' here is misleading: the Buddha didn't have any doctrines, he just had an experience to communicate.

Text *"He thereupon manifested himself to the Buddha in the way we have already seen.(20) The intention of this story may have been to show that even the gods were dependent on the eternal **dhamma** which the Buddha had perceived, and were therefore subordinate both to the **dhamma** and to him who was its bearer. The story has the effect, too, of showing that the relationship between the Buddha and the gods of popular belief was one of tolerant co-existence. Now that he was persuaded that he should attempt to communicate the truth to others, the Buddha began to consider how this might most effectively be done. It is significant that the place he then made for was Varanasi, or Banaras, which, as we have seen, was at that time the intellectual and philosophical metropolis of northern India (see p. 56). To some extent this significant fact is concealed by the ostensible reason given for his choice of Banaras - that he knew that he would meet there a group of five men whom he had known*

earlier, when he and they had been seeking spiritual satisfaction. It was to them that he now hoped to make known the truth. What has to be noticed is that their spiritual quest had led them to Banaras: it is almost as though, in ancient India, it was the case that all religious and philosophical seekers must at some time or other find their way to that ancient and holy centre of worship and philosophy. There, in a park a little way outside the city, he found them; and there he expounded to them in systematic, developed order, the ***dhamma*** *the truth by which release from the problems and constraints of mortal existence might be gained."*

[end of tape 11 tape 12]

S: What he's written about Banaras is very questionable. Whether it was "an intellectual and philosophical metropolis of Northern India" at that time, that's a bit doubtful. The five ascetics hadn't gone to Banaras, they had gone to a little park, or whatever, some distance from Banaras, at least seven or eight miles away. It wasn't just outside Banaras. "What has to be noticed is that their spiritual quest had led them to Banaras." No! It hadn't led them to Banaras. They were just staying seven or eight miles outside Banaras, which is quite a different thing from `their spiritual quest leading them to Banaras.' So therefore it doesn't follow that 'it is almost as though, in ancient India, it was the case that all religious and philosophical seekers must at some time or other find their way to that ancient and holy centre of worship and philosophy.' No! There's not a word about that in the Buddhist texts.

Lokamitra: In fact, Banaras is never mentioned later on, is it ?

S: There are references to it, but it doesn't figure at all prominently.

Lokamitra: Does he go there ?

S: Yes, the Buddha did go there, as perhaps we shall see later on. But who did he find there? Yes, I'll say something about it when we come to it. It seems simpler to accept that the Buddha went to Saranath, Isipata, near Banaras because his five followers, previous followers were there. And there is no suggestion in the text to suggest they were there because it was near to Banaras, and they had come primarily to Banaras. There is no suggestion of that at all. After they had experienced the same Enlightenment that he had. It's true the Buddha did go to Banaras, but that may well be because it was the nearest urban centre, and not because there was anything very special about Banaras, or that everybody had to go there, as it were. And, as we will see in a minute, who the Buddha actually met there. Anyway let's go on.

Text *"The account of this exposition is the famous* ***Dhammacakka-pavattana Sutta*** *- the discourse (or Sutta) concerning the putting into motion of the wheel of* ***dhamma****."*

S: Yes. This is usually considered a later sort of version of what actually happened. According to the very earliest account which I pointed out in a lecture we are simply told that the Buddha admonished the five, and talked with them, discussed with them over a period of several months, during the rainy season.

Vessantara: So that sentence at the end of the previous paragraph - "there he expounded in systematic, developed order, the dhamma" suggests again the sort of doctrine side of it.

S: Yes. He did his best to explain to them what he had experienced, and tried to convince them, and to help them achieve the same experience. Later tradition, though still quite early, puts, as it were, into his mouth, the *Dharmachakra pravartana sutta*, with a rather stereotyped account of the two extremes, the Middle Way, and the Eightfold Path. But the earliest account which we have in the Vinaya pitaka simply says he admonished them. [Pause] All right, let's go on.

Text *"The Buddha remained with the five at Banaras and, a few days later, after another session of teaching, the five achieved the state of wisdom, dispassion, and release from all the bonds of empirical mortal existence, a state known technically in Buddhism as* ***arahant-ship*** *a term which will be explained later. It is appropriate to call the occasion 'a session of teaching', for this is the nearest, in the writer's view, that one can get to a satisfactory description of the method used by the Buddha. To say that he preached a sermon (although this terminology has been used by Western writers to describe the Buddha's activity) would be rather misleading for, to Western ears at least, it suggests a wholly passive role for the hearers, and for the preacher a position which is sometimes described as 'six feet above contradiction'. This was not so in the kind of teaching-sessions which are recorded in early Buddhist literature. The hearers frequently interject, or raise questions, or supply answers to questions addressed to them by the Buddha, and sometimes the Buddha engages them in what is almost a catechism. Even 'discourses' suggests something rather stilted, formal, and humourless, and it is clear that they were far from being addresses of that sort. It was, in fact, almost always a session of teaching, with the Buddha suiting his words to the occasion, and taking advantage of incidents happening at the time, adapting himself to the mood or condition of the hearers and allowing them to take a good deal of the initiative. In some ways these sessions might suggest, as the closest parallel, an academic seminar or tutorial, but the resemblance is only partial. On occasions the Buddha was addressing very large numbers of people, and apart from the fact that one is unlikely to meet tutors of his quality, there seems, in addition, to have been something of what today would be called a 'charismatic' quality about his teaching."*

S: Yes. So what Trevor Ling says, on the whole, about it not being a sermon or `discourse' that the Buddha delivered etc. etc. - that is all fair enough, and very correct, but he still seems to have no sort of idea of the spiritual intensity of the occasion, as it were. He compares it only, even though with certain reservations, to an academic seminar, or tutorial. Though he does say the resemblance is only partial, well, one would hope so! It's quite true that one is unlikely to meet tutors of his quality. To say the very least, of course! All right, let's go on.

Text*"At Banaras the Buddha remained throughout the rainy season which then followed: that is to say, for about four months."*

S: No. My impression is, from my recollection of the scriptures, that he remained in Saranath for the four months and then went to Banaras. Anyway, I'll check up on that. It's not all that important. He does say earlier on that he was a few days with the five, but, no, as far as I recollect, he spent the whole of the rainy season with them, and then went to Banaras.

Text*"His teaching won further adherents....."*

S: (breaking in) You notice : "his teaching won further adherents." There hardly was `a teaching' at that stage. It was the Buddha trying to communicate whatever it was that he had experienced, whatever it was that he had discovered.

Text *"The first was Yasa, a young man who, according to the Pali sources, came to the Buddha by night, feeling distress and disgust at the sordid sight presented by his own attendants who were asleep in unseemly postures."*

S: The text, of course, says female attendants, which makes it slightly different.

Text *"This disgust at the physically sordid aspects of human life was only the occasion for his flight from home; other, earlier experiences had conditioned him for it."*

S: Mm. I wonder if `conditioned' is really quite the right word here. More like `deconditioned' him for it.

Text *"He is represented as having been, like Gotama, one who had enjoyed a comfortable life; his father was one of the most wealthy financiers of Banaras."*

S: Mm. Yes, this is the point I was going to mention earlier. Trevor Ling represents the Buddha as going to Banaras because that was the `intellectual and philosophical metropolis of Northern India' - but does he meet intellectuals and philosophers ? No ! He seems to have met exclusively, people belonging to the trading community. He doesn't seem to have met any philosophers at all! [Pause] All right, go on.

Text *"The Buddha, seeing his distressed state, called him and said 'Come, Yasa, here you will find neither distress nor danger'. There followed a session of teaching, as with the five, and at the end of it Yasa, too, apprehended the truth which the Buddha had been expounding and achieved the state of release, or* ***arahant-ship*** *His father, alarmed by his absence, had followed the marks of Yasa's slippers, and now he, too, arrived on the scene. Not seeing Yasa at first, but only the Buddha, the father engaged him in conversation. After a time the father also came under the power of the Buddha's words, and there and then declared himself a follower. He is remembered in Buddhist tradition as the first lay-follower, or* ***upasaka.*** *The next day Yasa's mother and another woman became the first female lay-followers, when the Buddha, in response to an invitation from Yasa's father, visited the family at home and had a meal with them. Four of Yasa's companions, sons of leading families in Banaras, also became disciples of the Buddha. These, with the five former associates of the Buddha who had been the first to receive his teaching, now constituted the nucleus of what was to become the* ***Sangha*** *or assembly of disciples, sometimes called the Buddhist Order. Later, fifty more citizens of Banaras, who had heard the Buddha's teaching, became* ***arahants*** *and entered the Order. So there came into being at Banaras a community of disciples of some size. Its members, having understood the doctrine taught by the Buddha, were sent out in different directions to teach the* ***dhamma*** *to others. The result is represented as having been a great number of further candidates who were, from this time onwards, ordained into the Order by the monks, rather than by the Buddha himself.(21)"*

S: Mm. [Pause] So what sort of impression do you get from this section? - "The Nature of the Buddha's Public Activities". [Pause] Very little is said about what the Buddha communicated. I mean, the word `truth' is used, suggesting almost something intellectual that was a sort of teaching or doctrine, or something of that sort. But, if you knew nothing about Buddhism: if you just read this particular section, you'd have no idea what had happened to the Buddha, and what happened to his followers when they came in contact with him. Would you? You are not really told anything at all! I mean, for instance, yes, the Buddha does say, and this is quoted, to Yasa : `Come Yasa, here you will find neither distress nor danger.' But why ? What sort of distress would you not find? What sort of danger would you not find? And why? How?

So there's nothing of the nature of the Buddha's **experience**, nothing of the nature of the Enlightenment experience suggested at all! And the impact that that must have had, when the Buddha started speaking, on the people with whom he came into contact. Nothing is said about that at all. You're left wondering `Why?' It's rather odd that these people should be leaving home. What are they leaving home for? What did it **mean** to become an arahant? It all seems rather contentless, doesn't it? [Pause] Because certain sort of fundamental spiritual things he just just hasn't comprehended at all!

This is what I used to find in my earlier days when I was reading books about Buddhism, and so on, it was as though the authors had never really asked themselves 'what **did** happen, and

why?' or 'Why did the Buddha say this? What was it meant to convey? What sort of impact was it meant to have?' They never seem to ask themselves these sort of questions. The life of the Buddha never seems to have been **real** to such authors. And I think this goes for Trevor Ling too, really, on a deeper level. The life of the Buddha is not **real** to him. The Buddha is not **real** to him. He's struggling to make some sort of sense of the story, as he's read about it in the scriptures, but there are very big `blind-spots' that he has! He's bringing it all down to the level of historicity and sociology and philosophy, and all the rest of it. All that we're told, and let's hope we're told later on, is that the Buddha understood the `truth', and it's this `truth', that he told to others, and that did the trick, as it were. [Pause].

But one is given no suggestion of a profound spiritual experience, - the Buddha struggles to communicate this, and the effect it had on other people. It all seems very casual and matter-of-fact almost. **Almost mechanical!** We are told the Buddha didn't give a sermon, which is quite right, and he didn't even deliver a discourse, which is quite right, and there was something like a seminar, which, maybe, helps you to understand, but there is no feeling of anything spiritual, or any spiritual intensity, or spiritual experience, or spiritual drive. There is nothing of that kind communicated at all! If there is, I at least have completely missed it. Anybody else feel anything spiritual? No !

_____: Possibly the word `charismatic' is a very oblique reference.

S: Yes. But even `charismatic' is a very questionable word nowadays, isn't it? Has rather dubious overtones. When somebody is `charismatic', well, you'd better be on your guard against him. That's the sort of overtone, isn't it, for sensible people anyway. `Be on your guard against `charisma'.' Charisma is sort of dust {A voice comes in speaking over Bhante - }

Vessantara : It is `charismatic' in single inverted commas.

S: Yes ! Indeed !

Lokamitra: It's almost as though he's really more interested in the fact that he's got himself fifty or sixty followers.

S: Yes. Well, he's now launched on his public activity. But why they should have followed him is not really made clear. Or who he was, is not made clear. Anyway, sorry to be so critical, but I think we might as well see quite clearly the limitations of this sort of scholarly, academic, pseudo-scientific approach. [Pause] Anyway any further query about what we've done this afternoon? Time is actually up. [Pause]

At least we've learnt something about the historical background, haven't we? And something about the historical facts of the life of the Buddha, which is quite useful. And we've certainly seen the sequence of events so far. But it has also become clear that Trevor Ling has got just no depth of understanding, and no insight, no spiritual insight, into what actually happened, at all, and doesn't even try to have. He seems unaware of the existence of that, - for want of a better term - spiritual dimension.

_____: He seems well and truly bogged down in these contemporary terms.

S: Yes. It's not as though he is using contemporary terms, it's more like contemporary terms are using him!

Lokamitra: It's maybe that he hasn't even considered the possibility of .. uh...

S: ...of such a thing as Enlightenment.

Lokamitra: Yeah.

S: Yes. I think, probably, he hasn't.

Siddhiratna: Why do you think that came ....? I mean, if he was a Doctor, presumably, of Religious Studies at some time, and he starts off his work with Evil - Mara as Evil, or something, and then goes on to "Buddha, Marx, and God", and then goes on to "The Buddha" . I mean, what do you think would have caused him to take up Buddhism in the first place as his key subject?

S: I just don't know. I just can't think.

_____:? It seems of all the religions it's got the most appeal to the academic and intellectual types.

S: Possibly.

Siddhiratna: It's a religion which will incorporate them without too much.... um ...

S: Why didn't he take up Jainism?

Lokamitra: Well, I think Buddhism, generally, in the Western academic .....

S: Yeah. It is more interesting. There's quite a lot of literature. Quite a bit of it still unexplored. And the Pali scriptures do give you quite a lot sociological, anthropological, and so on, material, which you can use as he has done. That is done quite well. He has given us a good account of the frame but he seems to care very little about the picture, which the frame is enclosing.

And also, of course, a man has to live. You've got your Ph.D, what are you going to do? You've got to teach something, well, I suppose you might as well teach comparative religion as anything else. If you're not inclined to the sciences, well, that sort of thing is the soft option. Isn't it, really. It's not a very intellectually demanding discipline in the way that they usually go about it.

I remember when I was in Helsinki, a group of people from the University came to see me, who belonged to the "Mythic Society", and they were really a lot - real `drips'. And Vajrabodhi told me that at the Helsinki University, the people who did least well in examinations and were of the lowest intellectual calibre, opted for "Comparative Religion", because it was the easiest and least demanding. The really capable people took up the tough scientific subjects, Physics, Chemistry, Maths and so on. If you weren't quite up to that standard, because the work that you had to put in was really very, very demanding, and you had to have a real grasp of certain things: if you weren't up to that standard, you went in for philosophy, or you went in for psychology. The really `soft' subjects were the Arts, Sociology, and right at the bottom of the list was "Comparative Religion", which required the least mental effort of all. [Pause]
So maybe it's something like that. Maybe there is some truth in that. Maybe if you're studying Physics, for instance, Chemistry and Astronomy, you really do need much more brain, much more intellectual ability, than if you take up something like this. Take it up in this sort of way, that is. [Pause]

_____: {murmurs}

S: You would agree with that, would you? [Laughter] You're speaking as a mathematician?

_____: Speaking as a physicist.

S: ...as a physicist. [Pause] I was hearing on the radio the other day, a report that .... I think it was East Anglia - the University of East Anglia - that you could still apply for a place provided you wanted to apply for places in the tough subjects - the `soft option' subjects, the Arts, Drama, Sociology, - these were all full up. They turned away applications. But there were still places for Medicine, Physics and Chemistry, Engineering and things like that. You could still apply. And the Government was becoming a little bit worried that people were taking up the soft options, the less demanding subjects; subjects that you don't have to work very hard at, that leave you plenty of time to enjoy student life. [Chuckling - words obscured]. You probably still enjoyed student life too.

Manjuvajra: Yeah. I think to be fair, actually, those other subjects you mentioned, are not so popular now. They.....

S: What subjects?

Manjuvajra: Well, the sciences. They've lost their popular appeal.

S: Mm. Yeh. I think it is also - certainly it seemed to be so in Finland, according to Vajrabodhi - that people who weren't intellectually up to scratch, just went and took these much easier subjects; or, at least, subjects which were taught in a much easier way and with regard to which, you could get away with a lower standard. Not that **really** this is an intellectually less demanding subject, it isn't by a long chalk! And it is spiritually demanding too, which other subjects are not. Not even Physics. [Pause] But the way in which the subject is taught, if we can really say it's taught at all, it isn't really taken seriously. It's regarded as being very **marginal** to modern life. [Pause] It might be quite interesting if we met Trevor Ling.

Siddhiratna: Have you met him before?

S: No. I haven't met him, though I have a bit of correspondence with him. He's kept in sort of friendly contact, and sends me offprints from time to time; offprints of articles and reviews that he's written. He knows of me quite well. He probably thinks we're quite a naive sort of lot. He probably doesn't think of me in that way because he has read my *"Survey"* and so on, but he probably thinks of `The Friends' as a rather naive lot of well meaning sort of people who don't really know very much about Buddhism, or understand what it's **really** all about.

Lokamitra: But at the same time not one of those suburban groups.

S: I hope he doesn't see us in this light. I hope not.

_____: He didn't mention us in the ? published in 1973.

S: We certainly were reasonably well-established by then.

_____: At the beginning he does talk about other groups and so on, but he doesn't seem to think there's anything like a `sangha'.

S: Yeh.

Lokamitra: In 1973 the Friends.....

S: It was a Sangha!

Lokamitra: Yes, but it was much ..... we just had one Centre at Archway, and a smaller community at Aryatara.

S: Yes. [Pause]

Lokamitra: He probably didn't take us so seriously.

S: Well, very few people take us seriously, even now, but let's see! [Pause] There was another little incident in my life in India, which was an eye opener to me, enough though of these little incidents which taught me a lot. When did I start being taken seriously by brother Buddhists? Not when I published my `*Survey'*, not when I gave all my lectures, etc. etc., but when I acquired a piece of property. {Laughter} Yes! When I became the owner of the `Triyanavardhana Vihara' in Kalimpong. As soon as I went down to the plains and I visited different Buddhist Centres and groups, the change of attitude towards me was most marked. I was treated with a new respect because I had shown my capacity of acquiring property! (Laughter) Yes! And this made an impact which all my lectures and writings had not made at all! Yes. And again this really opened my eyes.

Siddhiratna: You became really financially stable, as it were.

S: Yes. I had arrived! This is what I was made to feel by acquiring that piece of property I had arrived! And this is why I've said, slightly cynically I must admit, in the context of `The Friends' - I'm not going to even think of receiving any visiting Buddhist dignitary from Asia, until we've got a decent place of our own in London. Otherwise, leaving aside a few really genuine people, the fact that you don't have a decent place, and the fact that you're merely practising Buddhism will not impress them in the least. But if you've got a big headquarters, and quite clearly have succeeded materially to some extent, **then** they will take notice of you, then they will recognise you. Not otherwise!

_____: Why do we want them to take notice of us?

Siddhiratna: Yeah !

S: Well, no we don't - but we want communication. I found life in India much easier after I'd acquired my vihara. I mean, they listened to me. They didn't listen to me so much before.

So this was another of those little incidents which taught me quite a lot. It's not that we're going to invite everybody along to `*Sukhavati*', but if we do choose to do so, the fact that we've got a place like that may well mean that people who wouldn't otherwise have taken us seriously will do so, and will be inclined to listen to what we have to say, and our ideas about Buddhism, and our ideas about teaching the dharma and so on, which otherwise they just wouldn't. I know quite well Buddhists from Asia go along and see a place like `Pundarika', Archway, they wouldn't want anything to do with you, most of them. That is actually the position. That is the extent to which these groups are just groups. They just think in worldly terms. So when I went down to Calcutta or to Sarnath .... even other monks whom I knew quite well, but also were not sort of spiritual personalities, they treated me in a completely different way. I was given the `red carpet' treatment, a better room to stay in than usual, did I want this? and did I want that? Running around me, and so on. And they were very interested in the fact that I'd got this vihara, and wanted to know all about it. Was it my own property? Yes, I assured them it was - Oh, they were very pleased then. {Laughter}

It's just the same among the Hindus. If Swamiji acquires his own `ashram', as it were, well, he's a recognised teacher then. He's succeeded. Forgive my cynicism, but one has to be a little aware of these things, and just know the nature of the people with whom one is dealing. No doubt, there are around, many Buddhists in the East who are sincere Buddhists, who would take much more notice of whether you were actually practising the dharma and so on. But they're not very likely to find their way to this country. I mean, those who go on world tours, and who visit foreign countries and go `to preach the dharma', these are usually people of quite a different calibre - a sort of general sightseeing in the name of Buddhism. But anyway, if we receive some of them, fair enough, we may make some impression, and they will go back to their own country {a great clatter of falling crockery or something obscures the words} at least they will convey that news and that may help us attract some good people from those areas.

In the early days of the Friends, some of our Friends used to be a little bit upset that I wasn't ready to welcome each and every visiting bhikkhu, Lama, Roshi, etc. etc. But I know the set-up too well. And I didn't think we should be involved in that in our early days. No doubt we can learn something from some of them, but there's quite a lot of them that have got a hell of a lot to learn from us. And I think that we should not be unclear about that.

Anyway I'm sure that dinner's nearly ready.

[BREAK IN TAPE - first words missing]

S:.....Rajagriha and Shravasti."

Text*"THE BUDDHA IN RAJAGRIHA AND SHRAVASTI*

At the end of the rainy season the Buddha set out from Banaras eastwards, towards another of the six great cities of the time, Rajagriha, the Magadhan capital. On the way he visited the site of his enlightenment, staying there for a while and making converts to his doctrine. At Rajagriha more converts were made, including Sariputta and Moggallana, who later became, with Ananda, the most prominent members of the Order. The then king of Magadha, Bimbisara became interested in the Buddha's teaching; he, too, was convinced of its value, and became a lay-follower. No consecutive narrative of the public activity of the Buddha was constructed by the early Buddhists, but from the account of the travels and teaching which is contained in the Pali canon, it is possible to suggest, as Malalasekere has done,(22) an outline for at least the first twenty years. Then comes a period of a further twenty-five years when it is impossible to trace any consecutive chronology, until the last few weeks of the Buddha's life, when there is the very detailed account of the last journey in the ***Maha Parinibbana Sutta****, the* ***Sutta*** *concerning the great event of the entry by the Buddha into complete nirvana (****pari-nibbana****). What is significant, however, from the evidence contained in the vast collection of discourses of the Buddha in the Pali canon, is the large proportion of these which were delivered in two major cities, Rajagriha and Shravasti. In almost all cases the discourse is introduced by a short note, indicating the place where it was delivered, and the occasion. From the evidence of these contextual notes it is possible to see that the Buddha lived more in the city of Shravasti than anywhere else. Until the later part of his life, when it lost its pride of place to Rajagriha, Shravasti, the capital of Koshala, was the most important city of the Gangetic plain, commercially and politically. The Buddha first went there at the invitation of a rich merchant named Anathapindika, whom he met at Rajagriha on the visit which has just been described. Anathapindika was visiting Rajagriha on business, and like so many others in the city, came to hear of the new doctrine which was being taught by the Shakya-sage. He, too, was converted and became a lay-follower. He invited the Buddha to spend the next rainy season at Shravasti, and when the invitation was*

*accepted, he bought a piece of land on the outskirts of the city, at considerable cost, and had a suitable **vihara** or retreat-house, built in readiness for occupation by the Buddha and his company."*

S: Mm. I expect you've noticed this when you read the Pali suttas, that virtually each one is introduced by a little introduction, a little note, stating where the Buddha was when it was delivered, and the circumstances. And the point that Trevor Ling is making is that so many of these, a very high percentage of these suttas are introduced by the statement that the Buddha was staying at Shravasti, either in the vihara of Anathapindaka in Jeta Grove, or at the `storeyed' house of Megaera's mother, that is Visaka, on the opposite side of the city. So from this fact, from the fact that there are so many of the discourses of the Buddha introduced by this statement, that he was staying at the time at Shravasti, we may infer that the Buddha, especially towards the end of his life spent a lot of time in that particular place. That that became, as it were, virtually, his headquarters. This is the point Trevor Ling is making. We need not doubt the truth of that. Alright let's go on.

Text *"From the time when the Buddha and his companions first went to live in Shravasti it became virtually their headquarters. Twenty-five rainy seasons were spent there by the Buddha; the remaining twenty were spent in various other towns and cities, mainly Rajagriha. Of the discourses of the Buddha which go to make up the **Sutta-Pitaka** 871 are said to have been delivered in Shravasti. Of 498 canonical **Jataka** stories, the telling of which is attributed to the Buddha, 416 are said to have been told in Shravasti."*

S: Mm. This isn't quite correct. There aren't 498 Canonical Jataka stories. What does one mean by a `canonical Jataka story'? Strictly speaking only the verses of the Jataka are canonical - that is to say, really attributed to the Buddha. There's about a dozen or fourteen actual Jataka stories, which occur in the scriptures, and which are attributed to the Buddha. The Jataka book, and the stories of the Jataka book are non-canonical. It's true that the stories are supposed to have been told in Shravasti, but this puts us on our guard against one particular thing and that is that if after the Buddha's death anybody - any particular group of monks - had wanted to give a particular teaching the authority of the Buddha and had wanted to connect it with the life of the Buddha, then the obvious thing to do was to construct a little sutta and begin it with the words : "The Buddha was staying at Shravasti" because it was well known that he had spent so much time there. So it may well be that the fact that there are so many discourses which are introduced by this note - that `the Buddha was then staying at Shravasti' - may be due in part to the fact that, yes, the Buddha did spend a lot of his time there; certainly many many rainy seasons, but **also** to the fact that if something could be attributed to the Buddha when he was staying at Shravasti then this gave it an additional authority, as it were. You see what I mean?

Because that was known to be the place where he spent a lot of time, so if there was a discourse which one wasn't sure whether the Buddha had really spoken it or not, well, if you assume that he must have spoken it at Shravasti maybe you are on pretty safe ground. So we **can't** take it that all these 871 discourses were actually given by the Buddha at Shravasti. They may well include a number that were sort of connected with the Buddha at a later date, and had Shravasti inserted as the place where they were given, just because it was known that the Buddha had, in fact, given quite a number of discourses there. So we have to make **some** allowance for that fact, no doubt. But also it's quite clear that the Buddha did spend a lot of time in Shravasti, and did give a great deal of teaching there. [Pause] Alright, let's go on.

Text *"Kapilavastu, the Buddha's home city, was visited by him more than once in the course of the years. On the first visit, in the year of his enlightenment, Gotama's little son, Rahula, was ordained as a novice. Thirteen years later, when he had come of age, Rahula was given **upasampada** or higher ordination, this time in the city of Shravasti.(23) Rajagriha, the*

other major city with which the Buddha's work was most closely associated, was the capital of the Magadhan kingdom, which was increasing in power and prestige throughout the Buddha's lifetime. The expansion of the city beyond its old bounds during this period was a sign of its increasing population. Its king, Bimbisara (see p. 120), remained a firm friend and supporter of the Buddha throughout his life. He entertained the Buddha and his companions and presented them with a place of residence. Even during the years when Shravasti was mainly his headquarters, the Buddha seems to have paid frequent visits to Rajagriha. Many important discourses are connected with the Magadhan capital, and it was from here that the Buddha set out on his last journey. By that time there were in Rajagriha eighteen large monasteries for members of the Buddhist Order.(24) This concentration of Buddhist houses in a large capital city shows the kind of milieu in which early Buddhism flourished and was most at home."

S: Mm. We must, of course, beware of this word `monastery'. What does monastery usually suggest nowadays?

Nagabodhi: A big building.

S: Mm.

Vessantara: People living cut off...

S: Mm. It was much more like a rest house, a sort of caravanserai or something of that sort, something quite temporary. Rather like the modern Indian `dharamshala'. Does anyone know what a `dharamshala' is? Yes. It is usually just a building, sometimes even a large building with rooms where pilgrims can stay, either for a few nights, or even a few weeks. And occasionally you get people just putting up there for years on end. But most people just pass through on their way to some place of pilgrimage. So these so-called `monasteries' were very much more of this sort of character. They were just places where wandering ascetics could put up for the night, or for a few nights, or a few weeks. And in this particular case there were 18 such places specifically intended for the followers of the Buddha, which shows that, as Trevor Ling says, the Buddha did have quite a following in Rajagriha. But we mustn't think of large scale monasteries, fully equipped, and fully organised. He might just have had five or six bhikkhus staying at any one of these, or even if it was 15 or 20, that still isn't very many. And just going out for alms every day and coming back, getting on with their meditation, meeting people, talking about the dharma, and just leading a very quiet, simple kind of life. Maybe, after a while, moving on to some other place. Most of the time, apart from the rainy season, they did move around.

Nagabodhi: He really does seem to be trying to make the point that early Buddhism was an essentially urban phenomenon, doesn't he? and that the capital city was kind of milieu in which early Buddhism flourished and was most at home. It sounds extraordinary really.

S: Well, it depends what one means by `an urban phenomenon'. If one means that Buddhism was a simple product of urban society and urban conditions, well, clearly that can't be sustained. But it does seem that the Buddha spent quite a lot of his time in an urban environment, and in contact with people who lived in the big cities, and especially in these two biggest cities.

There is also another point that as the Buddha became better and better known, and with more and more followers, and went around with more and more followers, then obviously he would need the resources of a city to provide for them all, rather than a small village. Supposing you're going to spend the rainy season with a couple of hundred followers, and that means they have to be fed every day for three whole months, clearly, you can't live in or

near a village - it's got to be at least a sizeable town. According to the Pali accounts, the Buddha frequently went about with a following of about 1200 bhikkhus. This doesn't seem to be an exaggerated figure. You find this even today: Indian teachers tend to go around with quite a large following and it's either the very rich who entertain them or whole sort of corporations, as it were.

[End of Side One Side Two]

So this may have been one of the reasons. It was all right if they just spent a single night in a place on tour, then, maybe, a single village just on that one occasion, could supply several hundred monks with food; but not every day, day after day, for three whole months. That meant that the Buddha, if he was to be accompanied by so many people, would have to stay in or near quite a big city, or at least a sizeable town. So there is that factor too. Also, perhaps, as we were saying yesterday, there were simply more people in the city, and therefore more possibilities of contacting people and preaching and teaching. It may have been simply that. But that is still a long way from saying that Buddhism itself was an urban phenomenon. If Buddhism originated anywhere it was under the Bodhi tree, which was far from being an urban situation. And also, though there are these 870 discourses which are believed to have been delivered in Shravasti, there a quite a number of other discourses which were delivered in all sorts of out of the way places: we mustn't forget that. So all that we can say is that the Buddha did spend quite a lot of his time, perhaps even a somewhat disproportionate amount of his time, or more than one would have expected, in places like Shravasti and Rajagriha. So that is quite a fair point that Trevor Ling makes, but his interpretation of Buddhism therefore as an urban phenomenon seems to be completely astray. [Pause]

As I've mentioned, from our own experience, we can understand that a city is in many ways, a more sort of fertile field, for the teaching of the Dharma, than a village would be. You might just get one person from a village, but in a city maybe you'd get several hundred, just because there were more people. And also, in a way, life was more intense; and people perhaps were more interested, and maybe with more leisure and so on. So it wasn't so much that Buddhism itself was an urban phenomenon, so much as that the urban situation provided the Buddha, when he was accompanied by a large number of followers, with possibilities of support and also provided him with a field for his teaching : provided him with an audience, as it were.

Lokamitra: It was quite easy in those days to have contact with a large number of people and still have sort of peace to live on the outside of the city.

S: Yes.

Lokamitra: Would you say it would be a good thing for us to live on the outside of towns, perhaps, and move in just to take classes and things like that?

S: That is a possibility. For instance the ideal situation was then assumed to be that if you stayed near a big city, you were about a mile outside the city gates, as it were, and that meant that the bhikkhu could make the journey into town for his food once a day quite easily. He may not have to spend more than two hours all together walking in, walking round from house to house collecting food, walking back. But also there is the point that just outside the city gates there was the open country, well, fields, and countryside. We're not quite in that situation. We'd have quite a long journey before we could get to the city centre, as it were, even a place like Norwich, even if we drove in, and also there is the abrupt change. Maybe it was all right in those days, when you just walked a mile through pleasant fields and then one or two groves and parks, and then in at the city gates, and a five minute walk perhaps, and there you were at your host's house, or you started your alms round immediately. That seems to be rather a different situation. But if there is a sizeable city, or a moderate sized city, say,

in this country, with a quieter sort of suburban area, well, yes, one can consider having the centre there as it were and going into the .... or rather have the **residence** for the workers there, and going into the centre of the town for meetings and classes. This is a possible pattern. But I don't know how one would feel about the alternation between the relative peace of one's retreat and the relative noise and bustle of the centre of the city.

Lokamitra: It might be preferable to living in the noise and bustle all the time. [Laughter]

S: I don't know. Well Manjuvajra is in that sort of situation. How do you get on with it?

Manjuvajra: I find it quite good actually.

S: You **do** find it good. How far are you from Truro?

Manjuvajra: Well, I'm quite a way from Truro, about fifteen miles.

S: You've got a motorbike.

Manjuvajra: Yes. Though I could be nearer; I make about four miles an hour. [Pause] You do need transport.

S: Yes. So if you had your own transport it would be all right. But you couldn't do this sort of thing very easily with a city like London, could you? Mm. That would mean about a three hour drive perhaps, or two hour drive.

Lokamitra: You can get to places even on the tube, in sort of a `green belt' area, which is half an hour or a bit more, from the centre, even in London.

S: But that is a very expensive area isn't it? [Pause] It's more than half an hour. You can get right up into Hertfordshire on the tube, but then it's quite a way - I actually go up there to visit someone. But there are big main roads and all that, even there. It isn't really the countryside, but it was a generation ago.

_____: It could be done in most other places other than London, even the other big cities.

S: This presupposes a definite sort of community, with transport and also with a city Centre. But this is a sort of possibility. Perhaps we ought to experiment on a grander scale even than Truro.

Lokamitra: It's one idea that just came into my mind recently: where you have a number of towns, fair sized towns near together, you could have a country Centre .....

S: That's very true, yes.

Lokamitra : ....and use that as a base, and have weekend events there for people from all the towns, and during the week go out and take meditation classes in each one of them.

S: Yes, that's very true. Well, you could do that especially in the Midlands, where you've got quite a large number of sizeable towns within a relatively small area. You could have, for instance, a Centre in between Manchester and Liverpool, couldn't you? If you could find some countryside.

Lokamitra: There are quite a few areas. That sort of thing would be quite possible if you had transport.

S: Anyway let's go on to "The Buddha's Last Journey."

Text: *"THE BUDDHA'S LAST JOURNEY*

*The Buddha's last journey is described in some detail in one of the longest of the Pali texts, the **Sutta of the Great Decease** (**Maha Parinibbana Sutta**). The events which are related cover a period of some months, and the narrative has many facets, each having its special value to this or that reader or hearer. What is unmistakable is the portrait of the Buddha which emerges: the portrait of the discoverer, initiator and exponent of a social, psychological and political philosophy, who takes his place among the great leaders and rulers of the world (a **Chakravartin** or **world-ruler**)."*

S: All right let's get into this, then. [Pause] I mean, let's go straight on and see what Trevor Ling has to say. Yes, by the way, one thing he just doesn't mention at all, is that scholars hold that this sutta is a very composite work. That is to say that as a sutta, as a work, as a composition, it is not very early but it does contain some very early material, but it also contains quite late material. It doesn't always quite fit together. This he doesn't mention at all, but I think we need to bear it in mind.

Ratnaguna: When you say that, Bhante, what do you mean? It doesn't seem to fit together?

S: There are discrepancies sometimes. For instance, at one stage it seems that the Buddha is alone with Ananda, shortly before his death, and there isn't anybody else around but in another passage it seems that at that same time there was a large number of bhikkhus with the Buddha. The two accounts don't quite square. It's as though the compiler was drawing on different sources, different traditions, which didn't completely fit together, but he's included them all nevertheless. For instance one moment the Buddha is out in the open air, but the description of the same scene which continues, represents him as in the vihara, and you don't know how he got from the open air into the vihara, and the fact that it's still the same scene isn't explained. [Pause]

Text *"The narrative of the **Sutta** begins in the city of Rajagriha. Bimbisara, the Buddha's helper and admirer, is no longer king of Magadha; he has been succeeded by his son, Ajatashatru. We are told that he was about to launch an attack on one of the remaining republican federations, the Vajjians, whose territory was to the north of Magadha, across the Ganges. He is represented, rather curiously, as sending a messenger to the Buddha, who at that time was in Rajagriha, to ask his advice on the matter. 'Tell him,' the king instructs his brahman messenger, 'that Ajatashatru, the king of Magadha ... has resolved, "I will strike at these Vajjians, mighty and powerful though they be, I will root out these Vajjians. I will destroy these Vajjians, I will bring these Vajjians to utter ruin!"'(25) The messenger is instructed to listen carefully to what the Buddha has to say by way of comment, and to come and repeat it to the king. The Buddha's comment turns out to be rather cryptic. He declares that so long as the Vajjians continue to observe their traditions properly, and to meet regularly in their republican assembly, seeking agreement in all matters, so long as they honour their elders, and maintain their customary rites and ceremonies as a republic, no harm can come to them; their prosperity is assured. The brahman messenger takes the meaning of the prediction to be that the Vajjians cannot be overcome in battle; they will be overcome only by diplomacy and internal dissension. Having drawing this conclusion, he hurries back to his royal master."*

S: Mm. So why do you think the Buddha made this cryptic comment, as Trevor Ling calls it? Taking this account as historically accurate.

Manjuvajra: So as to try and stop the battle without actually getting involved.

S: Mm. Without actually sort of directly opposing the king.

_____: Yeh.

S: But you see the way in which the Brahmin took it, which is typical of a Brahmin view, you could say. Anyway, let's carry on and see what else happens.

Text *"The Buddha then repeats to his companions word for word what he had said concerning the Vajjians, but applying his prediction, now, to the Buddhist **Sangha** So long as the **Sangha** members continue to observe their traditions properly, and to meet regularly in their assembly, seeking agreement in all matters, and so on, no harm can come to the Sangha: it can only prosper. The crucial fact in the interpretation of this utterance of the Buddha is that the Vajjians were destroyed very shortly after this incident. According to tradition, spies and infiltrators succeeded in sowing the seeds of suspicion among the leaders and elders of the ruling assembly, and soon there was a rich crop of dissension and internal conflict which Ajatashatru was able to turn to his advantage. The Vajjian republic was conquered, and absorbed into the Magadhan monarchy. So, by the time this prediction of the Buddha was being repeated and transmitted in the oral tradition of the monks, it was known that, as a fact of history, the Vajjians had not succeeded in meeting the conditions required for their survival. It would have been clear to the monks who passed on these words of the Buddha that there must be some other, more permanent value in this utterance than simply an oblique prediction of the ruin of a people who were now only of historical interest. The point of the discourse lay in the application to the Buddhist Sangha of the same conditions for survival. The old republican sanghas or assemblies had now almost all disappeared, victims of historical circumstances in the form of expanding monarchical power. If that were a matter for regret, it had to be remembered that the sangha tradition was nevertheless being perpetuated and preserved in a new form - in the life of the Buddhist community, the new Sangha; we shall take up this point again later, when we come to examine the life of the Sangha (chapter 8). Meanwhile, what emerges from this opening section of the Sutta of the Great Decease is the evident and real interest of the Buddha in forms of social and political structure..."*

S: Mm. To what extent does this really seem so? [Pause]
I mean, what Trevor Ling says is, on the whole, correct, but unfortunately he doesn't, as it were, transpose the Buddha's comments vis-a-vis the Sangha from the social and political level to the purely spiritual level. You see what I mean? And he's taking the Sangha as just a better, a sort of improved version of the old republican assembly, but very much on the same level, as it were. He doesn't see that it's what we call a spiritual community: that it is made up of real individuals, all of whom are oriented in the direction of Enlightenment. This he doesn't seem to appreciate at all! So the Buddha is certainly drawing a lesson for the benefit of the Sangha, the spiritual community, from the state of, or the possible fate awaiting, the Vajjians, but he is, as it were, implicitly transposing it all to a much higher level. But this, as I've said, Trevor Ling doesn't seem to appreciate. it's not so much that the Buddha has a real interest in `forms of social and political structure'. It's more as though he's told about the king's intentions with regard to the Vajjians. He's asked what is likely to happen, and it's clear to him that if the Vajjians continue to follow their republican traditions, and if they're faithful to them, if they are united, then they can't be overthrown by the king. But it's as though as soon as that issue is out of the way, he, especially now being quite old, his thoughts immediately revert to his own Sangha, the spiritual community, and he realises the importance of unity on the spiritual level for them. And he proceeds, therefore, to apply the lesson, as it were: to speak to the monks about the conditions for the stability of the Sangha in the sense of the **spiritual** community. It's not that he's placing the spiritual community on the

same sort of level as the tribal republic at all! It's just a question of analogy, a certain similarity between two different systems on quite different levels. But, as I've said Trevor Ling doesn't seem quite to appreciate this.

_____: There are important differences too, in the one applying to the Sangha, too.

S: Well, there are **very** important differences. First of all you're not born into the spiritual community as you are into the tribal republic. It is essentially an association of individuals: people who have, as it were, voluntarily joined, or rather committed themselves to, that common way of life. Within the Sangha there is no social life in the ordinary sense, there's no domestic organisation, there's no marriage, there are no children, there are no worldly goals of any kind, no worldly objectives of any kind. Everybody's thinking in terms of individual spiritual development and gaining of Enlightenment. So it's a very different kind of community indeed! Even though there may be certain analogies with the tribal republic.

Lokamitra: What I meant, though, was: Ling says that he repeats word for word what he said about the Vajjians to the Sangha, which he doesn't, he adds quite.....

S: He adds quite a number of further conditions, yes. A whole series of them.

Lokamitra: ...which make it very clear.

S: The condition which they have most of all in common is that of regular assembly. Mm? Yes? Obviously if there was to be a tribal republic at all, well, there had to be regular assemblies, because there was no other means of communication, and similarly with the members of the **spiritual** community. If they were to communicate at all then they had to gather together regularly and in large numbers. This is what they did in the case of the Sangha on the full-moon days and the days of the new-moon. They gathered together. [Pause] And the Buddha made it clear what they should do when they gathered together in that sort of way. When the republican people gathered together it was to transact the business of the republic, but when the Buddha's followers gathered together it was to meditate, to listen to the Dharma, to discuss the Dharma, and so on. It was a quite different sort of thing.

So there's certainly an analogy between the two **but not a parallel**. It was an **analogy** between the tribal republic and the spiritual community, but not a parallel between them as though they were two things of the same order. [Longish pause]

I've been thinking quite a bit recently about this question of meeting together in our own case in connection with the annual convention, because it does seem important that all members of the Order should be able to meet together. But it is also important that they meet together in the right way, and for the right sort of purpose. And whereas it does seem that one can all meet together and meditate together, and one can all meet together and perform the Puja together, it would seem that discussion, when numbers go beyond a certain point is very, very difficult. I think this is one of the things we're going to have to think about: that if there is to be discussion we have to think in terms of possibly breaking the convention up into smaller units for discussion purposes, and having only the meditation and Puja in common. I don't know whether anybody else has been thinking about these things, or have got any sort of views on this sort of topic. It's something which has been quite in my mind over the last few months and which is why I'm mentioning it now.

_____: Clearly the old ..... what we've been doing up to now is tending to be much too difficult as number grow.

Siddhiratna: I should have thought that the conventions are only difficult in the sense of

organisation, because personally, I really enjoyed the two conventions that I've been on, that they in some sense they weren't only concerned with the Dharma, with meditation and Puja, but they did include .... you were able to see how the Movement functioned as a whole, and able to voice opinions with a large number of other people, rather than responsibility being delegated to a smaller group. I thought very much, you know .....

S: Mm. Well this is the difference, on the political level, between the direct participatory democracy and representative, as it were, Parliamentary democracy . Yeh? But if you've got more than a certain number of people it becomes very difficult for everybody to participate directly in discussion.

Siddhiratna: (breaking in) Mm. Yeah. That I agree with.

S: This is the great difficulty, yeh? It's alright if everybody just stands up and says what he or she thinks and then sits down, but if people try to discuss across the floor, this becomes very, very difficult indeed. It's even sometimes difficult when we've got, say, about twenty people, what to speak of having the whole Order. So this is something I think we have to look at very, very seriously. I certainly wasn't very happy about the last convention from **this** point of view: the point of view of the discussion across the floor. Only too often I just had to sort of almost raise my voice and shout just to be heard! You can't discuss the Dharma in that sort of way. You see what I mean?

Siddhiratna: I thought what was good was being able to be there even if you didn't actually speak, but to see and to hear what was being said, even if you didn't actually actively contribute.

S: Well if some people just **feel** like sitting back and listening to what others say, that's fine: That makes the situation easier, but it does seem that more people are willing or wishing to participate than is really possible, so that it becomes quite difficult to have any sort of constructive discussion. It isn't, I think, a suitable occasion just for people to sort of let off a bit of steam. That would be quite out of place.

Lokamitra: Maybe we should just get a large enough area where we just sit and meditate all day, and you be there, and people could come up and ask you questions if they wish, and you can .....

S: No I don't think it is quite as simple as that. Yes, meditate together, yes, perform the Puja together, there's no problem about those things obviously. In fact for those things, in a sense, the more people the better, if you've got a big enough space. But also, the convention is a sort of forum. I mean, I can say certain things that I've been thinking, or just communicate certain conclusions that I've come to. It's also quite useful for me to know what people think, and what people feel. But if there are too many people present and participating, then the whole thing just gets out of hand, and the whole sort of spiritual level just becomes lower and lower, which is not what the Order as a whole has come together for. Bearing in mind also, that people aren't always as mindful as they should be, or as careful as they should be, or as non-reactive as they should be. Then it becomes even more difficult. So I'm, therefore, thinking quite seriously what to do about the discussion side of things, because I want to be able to share my thoughts and conclusions with as many people, at a time, as possible and to hear what they have to say, but not if it leads to a bit of a hubbub of discussion, and sort of general confusion, with a bit of reactivity and even negativity thrown in. Do you see what I mean?

So I was just wondering whether anybody else had had any sort of views and ideas of this kind, because the coming together in large numbers and regularly, is very important. But one must remember what it is that has brought one together, which is the common commitment to

the Dharma. [Pause] It may be, for instance, that we may have to have different sessions to discuss certain things in smaller groups, and then just report back, and all the others - the sort of plenary session, as it were - just listen to those reports, and not have any actual discussion in the plenary session. Otherwise it seems, now that we've got also more Order members than ever, it would seem to get a little bit out of hand.

_____: Could you not have spokesmen - something like that?

S: This is what I've tried to avoid so far; otherwise you get what I call the `Parliamentary representative' type of system. Then you get, say, two representatives from such and such ....

_____: (Breaking in) Centre.

S: No! Not centre, chapter of the Order, two representatives from another chapter. This is one way of doing things, certainly; but it would seem to be not so good as the direct participatory way of doing things. This is delegating. Well, you can delegate responsibility but you can't delegate participation.

Manjuvajra: Would it be a matter more of keeping your Centres down to a sort of size that could be accommodated by a certain kind of structure? [Pause] For example you have talked about having within the one major convention - having meetings with smaller numbers of people...

S: Yes.

Manjuvajra: Well, that would be alright, because people have got different areas of interest anyway, so they go to the one that interested them ....

S: Right.

Manjuvajra: ...and then after a while those meetings are going to get too big. [Pause] So would it be a matter then, of kind of limiting the size of the convention when it gets to .....

S: Ah, but so far, in principle, the convention is everybody coming together. Well, you can certainly have regional conventions - this is another thing that I have thought of - say, you have a regional convention, say, once a year, and maybe a big national, international convention every five years. This would be another possibility. But it would be a good thing if there could be a mixing-in of all Order members so that new Order members of other parts of the country, other parts of the world, not just those within your sort of regional chapter, or whatever. [Pause]

Vessantara: In situations like this which get very large, you tend to have to rely more on written contributions - you get written questions.

S: Yes, there is that too. There is also the point that if there's a larger number of people, those who are quick on their feet and a bit communicative, what's the word? Not just sharp, articulate and self-confident, they will hold the floor. And then, maybe, other people present who are not so quick to speak, but who have something equally worth listening to to say, but they never get a chance to say it. This even happens when we've got a dozen, or 15, or 20 people. It's even more likely to happen if you've got, say, a hundred people with perhaps maybe 20 people who are quick on their feet and come in with their points very rapidly. The others will just be nowhere: they will either contentedly accept the situation, or just feel rather resentful that they've not been able to have their say.

Anyway I don't want to go **too much** into this, but I really wanted to give it a small airing in case anybody had been thinking of it, and could also come up with any sort of possible resolution that might be of some use, but apparently not so far.

Nagabodhi: The thing that seemed most important to me sort of beyond, really, the discussion has been just being in proximity with so many Order members for a few days, all staying in the same area and seeing each other. In some ways if *"Shabda"* kind of becomes a more fluent organ of communication, and if Order retreats were more frequently organised, this would take the pressure off the convention as being the kind of situation for that kind of interaction. It would be recognised that the convention is a situation for working things out, working with new ideas, and I think people would naturally accept that .... well, it would take the pressure off the convention.

S: Yes, perhaps we shouldn't try to do so much, or settle so much, or discuss so much in the course of the convention.

Nagabodhi: Well, in the course of seminars! Things come out on seminars.

S: Yes, indeed!

Nagabodhi: And they get around in the Movement very quickly.

S: Sometimes they get around in a highly distorted form! (Laughter)
Sometimes quoted completely out of context! For instance in Dhammadinna's letter which I got the other day she said she's seen Ashvajit - apparently seen him just after this last seminar - and from him had got the impression that conventions in future were to be single-sex conventions - with a separate one for the men and a separate one for the women. So this has already got around which is not correct at all!

_____: That is why Jinamata was so upset yesterday!

S: Ah. See, here I am again being, well, not even being quoted out of context, but misrepresented.

Nagabodhi: I don't think the answer is that you .....

S: ...Because you still have far too many men. If ...even if you had a men's convention separate from the women Order members' convention, that isn't really the solution because the difficulty lies with discussion. If anything it would be more of a problem because men tend to take a more active part in discussion than women do. So apparently Dhammadinna was under the impression that this was already cut, dried, decided and that's that, kind of thing. The way she puts it - `the blow has fallen'. On the last retreat I did a little thinking aloud as I'm doing now, but this is the point that has got around, and is apparently being taken as something which has been decided, which is ridiculous.

Nagabodhi: I think this is one of the things about the convention, that so many things come out from seminars and retreats and just conversations that people have had with you, and often they're conflicting and I know, in the past, I've looked forward to a convention, because for once and for all in the presence of the greatest number of people you're going to say what actually you mean!

S: But even then it's not always ..... I'm not even correctly reported always in the (loud laughter obscures words.) That is why I insist on seeing it myself and editing it all. Yeh? Yeh? I mean, I'm not going to mention any names but I happened to say something to somebody

the other day, and on that basis he wrote or drafted a letter to another person, another Order member, - luckily he showed it to me before he sent it off. It was completely different from what I'd said. So I just had to say, well, I didn't say that. You draft another letter, which he did, which was a bit nearer the truth, but it wasn't nearly near enough, so I said, "Just drop it. I'll sort it out when I see you both together".

So I don't know why it is, but there does seem to be this persistent tendency, first of all, not to listen carefully to what I say, and secondly, to quote me out of context, and thirdly even to distort what I say, and even to actually misrepresent. Because sometimes I sort of think aloud, and I say, as I said repeatedly, in the course of the ? (interference obliterates words) I mentioned, I'm only thinking aloud, and airing ideas. But there's this constant tendency to get things wrongly reported, and I just wonder why this is. As though people don't have much objectivity. And I'm very careful to qualify whatever I say, but the qualifications are nearly always missed out. So I just sometimes wonder why this is. I sometimes am astonished at how quickly little rumours get around - I'm supposed to have said this, and supposed to have said that. [Pause] Sometimes I like to think aloud and invite people's suggestions, and hear what they have to say. It doesn't mean I've made up my mind finally about something. Did you get that impression? You were on that last discussion - that I'd made up my mind that there should be single-sex conventions.

Manjuvajra: I got the impression that, in a way, you were pretty clear of the direction you were going, that your thoughts were going, but I didn't necessarily think that that was the direction things would have to go.

S: Right. Anyway (Nagabodhi chuckling and voices obscure words) If I'm definitely thinking that things will go in that direction, well I expect they will go in that direction. On that occasion I aired quite a number of possibilities, but this was the only one, apparently, that got around and was reported.

Manjuvajra: I mean, I could foresee at the time, while you were saying that .....

S: Foresee what?

Manjuvajra: Well, that that would be a rumour that will spread like wildfire.

S: Well, this is why I said several times, "I'm thinking aloud." But presumably that wasn't reported. Anyway, it's interesting that that sort of thing does get around so quickly.

Siddhiratna: Do you think that maybe, on the basis that you've thought aloud so many times, Bhante, and those thoughts have actually been put into practice that..... (Bhante breaking in obscures words)

S: **Some** of them; but all sorts of `thoughts aloud' that I've had have not come any where **near** being put into practice. Yeh?

Lokamitra: Not yet anyway!

S: Not yet (words obscured by a kind of chuckle). I also think perhaps I ought to stop talking about things and just write something in *"Shabda"*, and that will be that, kind of thing. Maybe there's too much discussion.

Nagabodhi: I think it's just the old thing: people hear what they want to hear.

S: Mm. Yeh. **Yes.I** sometimes think that too.

Nagabodhi: From what I've heard of two seminars that have taken place within four weeks, um, either you were very confused, (laughter) or someone was very confused (laughter) ... an outside observer would get the impression that you were literally on your last legs (chuckling as he talks obscures words) before complete nervous collapse and confusions of people coming back from one seminar saying, "Oh Bhante's saying this that and the other, and we've all got to do this." And two weeks later people come back from another one and say we've all got to do the complete opposite! (Laughter makes it difficult to hear what's said).

S: Yeh. Maybe I'd better confine myself to writing and short aphorisms.

Lokamitra: I wasn't entirely not serious when I said, or suggested what I did....

S: What was that?

Lokamitra: That, um, that we **meditate** much more together and you sit at the front; but the whole situation is geared to discussion, which I think is not, possibly, a good thing. You cannot do .....

S: Well, not with this number of people .....

Lokamitra: ... and also, that number of people can't be receptive, they get bored quite easily, their energies get blocked, and so on, it's difficult, and what I had sort of envisaged was, um, maybe not very practical but an idea along these lines, everyone sitting in a hall together, any questions or people could go up and say them, and the answers would be given publicly, as it were.

S: No. What I've also been thinking, or wondering, is - again I'm thinking aloud, no promises or if you repeat what I'm saying please make it clear I'm `thinking aloud'! -I was thinking I might, say, in the course of each convention give two or three lectures outlining my thoughts on different topics which are of concern to Order members as such. And then maybe invite a few questions from the floor, as it were. I've been thinking also, along those sorts of lines.

Lokamitra: It does seem one of the most important aspects of the convention is that things can be clarified in a public situation, which if you're with a small group of people, people come back and say "Bhante said this, and this is what we've got to do." You never know for sure, except, maybe, until the transcripts come out, and til you've seen them. But this can be done, and that seems to be quite valuable.

S: Mm. I still think, though, for complete sort of accuracy and reliability, probably I'll just have to write more. Because different people could even go away from the convention with quite different impressions as to what I'd actually said and disagree among themselves afterwards, this is quite possible. But if I give, say, a lecture ..... say for instance, just to give an example of the sort of thing I've been thinking about, speaking on: the systematic teaching of meditation, which particular methods, in what sequence, and why. Well this is something I've been thinking of talking about, which will be of interest and concern to all Order members, and then they could ask questions at the end just to clarify anything that wasn't completely clear. This is the sort of topic I've been thinking of. But I wouldn't like the convention just to degenerate into something social, which I think it could very easily do. But maybe it would be a good idea to have more of meditation and Puja and silence, and perhaps receive reports on different aspects of the Order's work. But perhaps not have any full discussion in full session - perhaps have different groups of people meeting for different purposes and just reporting back. Maybe a lecture by me, or something of that sort. Anyway...

Vessantara: Maybe there's something to be said for having ..... if we know that you're going to be discussing a particular topic or you've had a report presented on, say, kalyanamitra system, to then invite written questions. Because that means firstly, people tend to think of it more clearly if they have to put it in writing, and secondly it means that the twenty who are quickest off the mark don't get any advantage (chuckling) It worked quite well when you did it on the second convention... where you were asked questions on the Dharma, which was quite good.

S: Yes. Because another point is, that the way things are going, it does suggest there's going to be an enormous amount of paperwork - I hope everybody realises this, which means that the Order needs a proper secretariat and all that kind of thing, because I simply can't do any more myself, than I am already doing.

[End Of Tape 12]