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 26

Nagabodhi: I don't really see this original problem - if one's bad how can one become good - because if one simply says well, if one is ignorant ..... [**S:** Mm ! Mm!] .... one can learn. There are practices, there are methods, there is a whole system .....**[S:** Mm. Mm. Yes !] .....there is the Dharma, and one can learn. It's different. it isn't **`bad'**, and uh ..... [**S:** Yeah.] ..... or a case of being `good'.

S: Of course from a Buddhist point of view you have no fixed nature.

Nagabodhi: You're simply acting in an unskilful way.

S: This is the way you are acting at present; this is the way the majority of people do behave **at the present time**, which is not to say that they could not, with proper guidance and proper effort, act differently. The Theravada would tend to look at it in those sort of terms.

Vessantara: Surely it's also the case, theoretically if you like, that the movement from where you are as a puthujjana to being enlightened isn't just a continuum anyway, [**S:** Mm. Yeah.] ...Presumably you reach a point where when you develop insight it's not that you just carry on a continuum .... [**S:** Right.] ...you've moved in some completely different space.

S: Yes. There is a sort of break, as it were. Mm. Yes.

Lokamitra: Presumably it's possible for people to have faith before they come into contact with the Dharma .... **[S:** Mm.] .... and to that extent they could exhibit all the skilful qualities but on a very limited level, - still very confused. And when they come in contact with the Dharma they gradually get clearer and clearer. [**S:** Mm. Yeah.] ... but until then they will still, perhaps, be bound up with all the prejudices which they thought were skilful, and so on.

S: There is something that I was reading the other day by Ouspensky - a little book of his called *"The Psychology of Man's Future Evolution"*.

He says there that - he's speaking of positive emotions - those emotions, only are really positive which are **permanently** positive. Mm? Do you see what he means by this? He points out that for instance there's love, but that love can change to hate, so therefore that love is not positive in the true sense. So all our so-called positive emotions, he points out, are not really positive because under certain circumstances they can change into hatred, or they can change into some other negative emotion, so therefore he says only those positive emotions are truly positive which are permanent - which cannot change into an opposite like that.

All right, so if we look at it in these terms, the puthujjana would not have any positive emotions. He might be friendly to you now, but his friendliness could turn into hatred under certain circumstances. He may be kind now but he could be cruel, and so on. So from this point of view, and in this way you can say that the puthujjana did not have any truly positive qualities. **[Back to tape 17]**

Lokamitra: ..... That would be in the sense of being a `stream entrant', `transcendental'.

S: No. Puthujjanas are by definition as it were non-ariyas.

Lokamitra: That would deny skilful .....

S: Well, you can have a skilful action which is skilful, but which is not sustained. It is skilful so long as it's sustained but the fact is that it is not sustained. So in the case of the puthujjana

he is skilful, as it were, by accident. Do you see what I mean? You are not crossing his path, you're not coming up against him, you're not thwarting him, so he can be relatively skilful, at least in a mild sort of way. But if things don't go his way, or he is thwarted, or you cross his path then the skilful becomes quite unskilful.

_____: This brings in the importance of a conducive environment then very much.

S: Yes, indeed! Very much so! So therefore one has to ask oneself with regard to these positive qualities of ordinary people: how much strain would they be able to stand?

____: Why would you ask that particular question?

S: Because that will enable you to estimate the relative truth or untruth of this particular description.

Nagabodhi: How much does it take to turn people who might be sociably pleasant and easy to get on with and so on to raving monsters more or less. [**S:** Yes.]

S: It also goes to show how much depends upon conditions. As Lokamitra said: your skilfullness very often just depends upon conditions, the sort of people you are with, the surroundings in which you are. So therefore, for a time, you need helpful conditions so that you can sustain yourself, with perhaps the beginnings of conscious effort and awareness, sustain yourself in a skilful mental state and gradually consolidate that. And consolidate it to the point where it can become a basis for the development of some insight as a result of which the skilfullness and positivity will become permanent.

There's also another point that, for instance it is said here: "he will murder his own father or his mother". Do you think this is likely to happen, whether this is an absolute impossibility in the case of certain `ordinary' people? What do you think about this? [____: No. I don't think it's impossible.] .... You don't think it's impossible, no. There's another factor here: what about crowd behaviour? Because anyone who's a puthujjana can at any time be influenced by crowd behaviour and swept up in that. This we can see repeatedly in all sorts of situations.

Siddhiratna: It is as Lokamitra was saying: given the right environment they wouldn't be.

S: Given the right environment those same people would behave quite differently. Especially, of course, if you take them out of the crowd and you just have a few of them at a time, or preferably even one at a time. So here we can see the importance of conditions. So the puthujjana is someone who is very much at the mercy of conditions. You put him down in a decent environment, feed him properly, look after him properly, give him the things he wants: he can be very positive, but change the situation and not give him say any food and treat him harshly he can become completely different. So therefore the positive conditions, the helpful conditions become very, very important, and as I said they are just to enable you to stay in a skilful mental state, like for instance a state of meditation, long enough to develop insight which will consolidate and make permanent the skilful mental states and the positive emotions. Until you reach that point of insight and consolidation and permanent positive emotions, you're going to be pretty much at the mercy of conditions.

There are some people, of course, who are not, even without being stream entrants, show quite a remarkable resistance to change of conditions. There are some people who **do** maintain their positivity and cheerful under very, very adverse conditions, but they tend to be a minority, but there are some such people, one has to recognise that.

Siddhiratna: It's a bit like the characters in "*War and Peace*".

____: And that person could still not have had any insight?

S: Yes. It may be that either in this life or maybe even in previous lives from a Buddhist point of view their conditions have been very favourable for them and they've got into what is almost a sort of habit of skilfullness, a habit of positivity. You can see this among people: that for some people just a moderate amount of annoyance and difficulty just reduces them to a very unskilful mental state, but others can put up with very, very great difficulties and troubles and disasters almost indefinitely, and still remain positive; and still remain so cheerful. They don't lose that.

Nagabodhi: You could say, in a way, that that kind of person, yet who hasn't developed any or much insight is a `deva'.

S: You could, indeed! You could. Yes. And the other is perhaps the asura-like person, who gets easily irritated, easily upset.

Nagabodhi: All the realms, in a way, the hungry ghost realm, somebody who's never satisfied.

S: So I think on the whole what is said here about the puthujjana is correct, but one has to remember a few other facts: that the puthujjana is very much dependent on conditions. Give him better conditions and he'll be, at least for the time being, more positive and more skilful. Give him worse conditions and he'll change for the worse. And also that, from the Mahayana point of view at least, the potential, not only potential `seed' of Enlightenment is there - underneath, as it were, in a manner of speaking, all the layers of `lobha', `dvesa', and `moha', **all the time**.

Nagabodhi: Is the Mahayana belief that it's the Tathagatagarbha that's responsible, or at work, or whatever the term would be, for dreams, or experiences, or insights that just occur to ordinary people, would have the power to change them?

S: Possibly. I don't remember any actual statement to this effect. And also don't forget, according to Buddhist thought there must be at least two causes for anything to happen. There'd be the innate Tathagatagarbha plus certain external co-operating forces as well. [Pause] Anyway, any further point on that before we pass on to the concluding ..... I think ... there is another point that does occur to me: that if we're engaged in any sort of - for want of a better term - spiritual work or spiritual activity - it's very important that we do really see the way in which people are conditioned, and the potentialities of unskilfulness on their part, and if we make any sort of effort to help people, go into it with our eyes wide open, otherwise we may feel disappointed and hurt. Do you see what I mean? That our effort and the work that we put in don't meet with the response that we feel that they deserve; or you really try to help someone and he seems completely ungrateful and you wonder why. You feel a bit sort of sad, or a bit disillusioned. This is because you had this sort of over-idealistic and over-romantic view about people. So if you really are able to see that people can on occasions at least, go to the limit of unskilfulness, then you won't be disappointed, you won't look for any return of, as it were, positivity on their part.

____: How patient should we be with certain negative people?

[End of Tape 17 Tape 18]

S: But being patient doesn't necessarily mean just putting up with it and being at the receiving end! After all you want to help them, and it may not help them for you just to be a perpetual walking doormat for their feet! That may not help them at all. In that case it is

better to mindfully and skilfully just stand up to them, and tell them what you really think, and what you think they're really doing.

_____: And if they don't show any signs of development then you, maybe, should just wash your hands of them.

S: It's better to spend your time and energy on somebody else, unless you really can see a seed of enlightenment, as it were, in them and you really are convinced that you can help it to develop sooner or later. If you really feel that and are convinced, well, fair enough, go ahead. But if you sort of enter upon any sort of spiritual work or activity thinking that people are really very nice, and they'll be very appreciative as soon as do something for them, then they'll be very pleased and very happy, and treat you very decently: if you go into it with this sort of view then you'll be in for a big disappointment, and may then feel hurt and resentful, which means you didn't really go into it with your eyes open. So you must go into it not expecting any sort of return, and expecting to work indefinitely with little thanks and no reward, and be quite happy to do that. Not make a martyr of yourself. Be quite cheerful about it. It's all in a day's work, as it were.

Nagabodhi: In a way, the relevant question to ask, when you're considering someone, is not so much ,`Do they have potential?' But are you honestly capable of doing something about that.

S: Yes! That's true! Yes ! Because everybody has potential, I mean according to the Mahayana at least, that everybody has the `seed of Enlightenment', but in some it is really very, very deeply hidden and buried, and even a Buddha could hardly get it out, what to speak of oneself. So I'm afraid most people have to take on the relatively `easy' cases ....(Chuckling as he speaks) ..if they take on anything at all.

_____: Maybe..... if within the FWBO we may have to screen some individuals .... screen them out as it were.

S: Well, maybe. I think also, it's very difficult if one is a sort of, as it were, neophyte in this line, not to think, not to believe that you can do everything. But after all, even a Buddha can't do everything, even a Buddha can't convince people who don't want to be convinced. Even the Buddha can't help people who don't want to be skilful to become skilful. So you have to accept very definite limitations: there are some people who are going to resist, as it were, all your spiritual blandishments, who are not going to be impressed; who are not going to be moved; who are not going to be affected, be as sincere as you may. And you have just to accept that, and not feel upset about it, otherwise it means there is something of self-interest in your attitude, in your approach.

You may also have to accept that your, as it were, personality type is say rather distinctive, rather marked, and that there are certain people that your natural personality type will put off; and you'll not be able to do anything with people of that sort; whereas you might be able to do quite a lot with people of another sort. So you just have to accept that limitation, and not try to be omnipotent and omnipresent. Do you see what I mean?

You have got your limitations. You're only a human being, and even after you've become enlightened you still will have your limitations of natural endowment, as it were, even though an enlightened mind is functioning through your, as it were, limited human personality. So you won't be able to do everything for everybody, it won't be possible! Even the Buddha, apparently, couldn't help Devadatta. There were very, very few failures on the Buddha's part, but there were some.

So this sort of belief or confidence that there are no limits to your capacity, that if only if you try hard enough you can help anybody, this is really, for want of a subtler term, just egotism. So you have to accept that there are some people that you can't help, even though, yes, they are potential Buddhas, but it is not within your capacity to help them to actualise that. Somebody else may be able to do it, but not you. Even maybe someone less gifted than you, but more in harmony with their personality type or whatever; or with some means of approach to them that you don't happen to possess. So if some people don't respond, or aren't influenced by your sincerity etc., etc., well, just accept it. Don't feel hurt, or don't feel upset. Anyway you were going to say something before I started on that.

Siddhiratna: Yes, just that I was wondering about this ideal society that you put these people into and how far one idealises that in fact. Is it the proverbial welfare state where everything is provided? It doesn't seem .....

S: **No**. I don't think ideal facilities are `ideal' in that sort of way. I would say `ideal facilities' include a certain amount of challenge. It's not just laying things on for people passively to enjoy.

Siddhiratna: I think that is the mistake that can be made when one starts talking about ideal societies.

S: Yes. It also means having people around who can help, people who can encourage, people who can represent a challenge. But, at the same time, there may well be people who will not be favourably affected even by the best of societies, and the best of facilities- they will still be going on the rampage, etc,. etc. Just as on the other hand there are some people, apparently, who are not affected by adverse circumstances, who survive it all, and do well nonetheless. But the average, the majority, I think are very much at the mercy of circumstances.

So when one speaks from the spiritual point of view, of providing more favourable conditions, one doesn't mean just laying it all on: tape recorded lectures day and night, and that sort of thing, and just letting them passively enjoy it all, no! It means a positive **training** environment..... (Chuckling as he speaks) a gymnasium as it were with instructors making sure you go through the course.

Nagabodhi: The account of Sukhavati makes it seem as if it's quite a passive sort of place. It's all done for the people sitting in their lotuses. Things just appear spontaneously for them.

S: Do you think that is the impression that the literature gives? Has anyone else got this feeling?

Lokamitra: To some extent, yes. All you have to do is listen to this .....

S: All you have to do is work! There's nothing to do except work.

Lokamitra: Oh! You're meaning .....

Vessantara: They don't sit on lotuses in Roman Road. Were you talking ..... ?

Nagabodhi: I was talking about the Sukhavativyuha sutra, not Roman Road.

S: Ah well you're out of samsara then. There's no danger of slipping back. [Voice: Oh.]

Nagabodhi: Oh well, I'll just have to wait. (Laughter)

S: To go back to my point: do you think that the descriptions of the Sukhavati on earth might have given that impression, that everything is laid on for you there. [____: Oh no !]

S: When some of the literature speaks of the ideal environment and all that kind of thing, as some of the literature **has** done; you don't think it might give that impression?

Lokamitra: It is ideal in that all you have to do is work. You just get on with it.

S: Why do you think people have this view of people being basically good. I know I used to have it before I came in contact with meditation and so on, ... ?

S: Well where does it come from? Because it isn't a Christian view?
____: I think it's a sort of `liberal' view. You get a lot like *'The Guardian'* newspaper pushes that view. [**S:** Ah! Yes.] And I think just in general the media and the Labour Party.

S: So if anything goes wrong it must be the fault of the environment?
____: They tend to see it that way. [**S:** Mm. Yes.]

S: And where does that come from philosophically? Is it Rousseau? Seems a very strong .....

Nagabodhi: (chuckling as he speaks) .....it's the philosophy of the `blitz'.... [**S:** Mm ?] .... the philosophy of the blitz.

S: What do you mean by that?

Nagabodhi: You know, things aren't like they used to be during the `blitz': you could speak to your neighbour and everyone shared, ... [**S:** So what's stopping you now ?] ...(?) came out.

Lokamitra: I know...it seems where I personally get this from is from drug experiences where you could relate to - especially `acid' - where you could relate to life and so on around you but one's sort of knowledge of things is very limited, but life itself did have some kind of meaning, and experienced it.

S: I don't think the philosophy as such originated from anybody's drug experiences. [Lokamitra: No, no, no, no.] ... No. Mm.

Lokamitra: But it seems to be that people seem to appreciate life more in a way when their environment gets harder. This could be something to do with it.

Siddhiratna: Does it perhaps stem from literature like Zola and people like that; Tolstoy, and people like that writing about the populace, as it were?

S: I don't think so. I think, perhaps, it's a reaction against the traditional Christian view that man is wholly bad, completely evil, so when you reject Christianity and all its works, you reject that and perhaps you tend to go to the other extreme and think of man as naturally good. [VOICES: Mm.] Rousseau did have that idea, didn't he? That man was naturally good - `the noble savage' and all that.

Lokamitra: Something sacred in life.

S: But is there any sense in which one might say that man is naturally good, or not?

Siddhiratna: I don't think you could say that he is naturally good.

S: No. He's able to be good; he's able to be bad. You can't say that he **is** intrinsically good, or that he **is** intrinsically bad. He's according to circumstances, and according, increasingly, to his own efforts, and his own decisions, and his own wishes.

Lokamitra: All you can say is that he has the potentiality to develop and should be looked at from that point of view; related to from that point of view.

S: Yes. Mm. Yes, one has to sort of steer a middle way between seeing man in such a way, or seeing rather his unskilfulness so strongly and clearly that one despairs of him altogether, and thinks that he can't change, and there's no point in trying to help him to change, on the one hand: and on the other idealising him to such an extent that you're just closing your eyes to the facts.

In other words there mustn't be cynicism, however clearly you see the unskilfulness of man, on the other hand there mustn't be sentimentalism, however assured you are of his spiritual potential. Really you have to see him as worse than people usually do **and** as better. Do you see what I mean? You've got to be, in a way, more cynical than the cynic, as regards man, but on the other hand more optimistic than even the wildest optimist. Otherwise you don't really do justice to both sides of the picture. Sometimes perhaps people are afraid of being cynical, or seeming cynical.

Ratnaguna: Doesn't `cynical' imply seeing something as worse than it actually is?

S: No, I don't think it's that. `Cynical' usually implies seeing things only in terms of the negative. Or refusing to recognise a positive side. And people usually consider that as a sort of aspersion on themselves, that they only see the negative side and they don't see the positive side, so sometimes they try to see, or to show that they see the positive side in a rather artificial way to avoid that accusation, which is not a very pleasant one nowadays - you're just a cynic and only sees the negative side of things. [Pause] What was that remark that got lost there?

____: It's very hard to see them both simultaneously. [**S:** Ah! Yes.] ..... and both in (life ?).

S: You've got as it were to plumb the depths of the `conditioned', at the same time that you keep clearly in view the heights of the `unconditioned', and see both as possibilities within human experience. You can see well that particular person, that puthujjana is all that the Pali texts say that he is: "he is addicted to pleasure, he's at the mercy of his senses. He's enthraled by the eye with objects that charm, by the tongue with savours that charm. He follows his natural desires, he's uncontrolled in the six-fold sense sphere, he eats his fill with ravenous delight among the five sensual pleasures. He welcomes personal fame and praise but resents obscurity and blame. He is easily provoked to deeds of a morally unwholesome kind; he will murder his own father or his mother; (laughter) inflict wounds on a saintly man, and cause dissension within the Buddhist Sangha. He is greedy and lustful. On the other hand he resents any ill fortune; when afflicted with pain he is distressed and overcome with bewilderment about it; he finds that those things on which he sets his hope frequently turn out to be a disappointment; he dislikes the sight of disease, old age, or death; when old age comes upon him he mourns and pines and is tormented by sorrow, and finally he goes to Purgatory."

That's all true but at the same time that person is capable of gaining Enlightenment. That very person! You've got to see that too, and if you are in a position to do so, help him change course in that direction. So this is certainly not enough by itself one may say, even with regards to the puthujjanas. It's not, in a way, a complete picture. It's all true, but it's not the whole truth. If one saw only this, or the Buddha had seen only this why should he have

wasted his time preaching for forty-five years? - or `teaching' I should say.

So he saw the mud, but he also saw that there was a lotus growing out of the mud, and both are in man, as it were. The mud is all there, plenty of it! But there's also the lotus, or at least the lotus seed. So you have to see both.

Lokamitra: If you don't see the mud, then it's a restriction on potentiality, as it were.

S: You **could** say that. Because the Zen people say the bigger the lump of mud the bigger the Buddha image. You know, the Buddha image made out of the mud. If you have a small lump of mud well a little, tiny image you produce. If you have a great big lump of mud there is a great big Buddha produced. So the more passions the more Enlightenment they say, rather optimistically perhaps. But there still is truth in that.

Lokamitra: Well if you don't accept man as he really is, I suppose.

S: Yes. If you don't accept him or recognise him as he is how can you help him to become what he can become?

____: Yes. Otherwise it is a form of self-view, to some extent. It's probably ? .....

S: So don't delude yourself; don't indulge in a rose-tinted, pseudo-optimism just to make things a bit more comfortable for yourself - you don't help anybody in the long run. So you have to see really deeply how unskilful people are, but on the other hand see equally clearly how skilful they could become, and even how enlightened. Otherwise, as I said, if you have this rose-tinted view, sooner or later you will be very disappointed, because why did you have that rose-tinted view to begin with? Why did you want to flatter yourself in that particular way and think it was all easy? Just over-confidence, which is a form of elation, which is a form of pride.

So it's more sort of positive to look at people and say, `They really are a very difficult lot. Their greed, their ignorance, their hatred are really very deep and very inveterate. It isn't going to be easy to change them. It's going to be a very difficult, up-hill task. I'll get no thanks and no reward for it, maybe not in this life anyway, and not from them. But anyway they have got that potential and I will do whatever I can, with or without thanks, to help them get just a little bit nearer to it, at least in the case of a few people. I will at least try to do that.' That is a more sober and realistic sort of approach.

I've known enthusiastic young monks in the East be very disappointed in a non-Buddhist environment. They think they've only got to stand up at some public meeting, proclaim the Four Noble Truths like that, and everybody will fall flat on their faces and be converted. (laughs as he speaks) They really honestly thought that. `This is the Truth, who would refuse to see that?' - and be really disappointed when maybe they came to the West and they proclaimed their Four Noble Truths, and people didn't fall flat on their faces, and **weren't** converted. I've talked with bhikkhus of this sort after they'd returned to the East and they just, clearly, thought that people were just deliberately being difficult, as it were. They thought is was so easy. The bhikkhus had thought it was all so easy to convert people in the West. They just over-estimated their own power, and their own capacities, and came back being rather aggrieved, and wondering what had gone wrong; and, of course attributed it not to their own lack of capacity but to the inveterate hardness of heart of the Westerners who'd heard them.

S: Anyway let's read that concluding paragraph of the section.

Text*"The fact that he is described in the singular should not be allowed to disguise from us that this is the Buddha's view of the mass of mankind. Such being the case, J.P.Sharma is justified in his conclusion that the Buddhist Sangha, like the Greek oligarchies, was based on a belief in the `unwisdom of the multitude.'*

S: Mm! There is a very suspicious parallel here, isn't there?
(Laughter) In other words as though the Buddhist Sangha is sort of comparable to the Greek oligarchies. But the point is that from a Buddhist point of view the members of those oligarchies would all have been puthujjanas. The kings would have been puthujjanas. The elders would have been puthujjanas. So it isn't the multitude, the masses as opposed to the classes that had a monopoly of `unwisdom': the classes had their `unwisdom' too. [Long pause] Any further point about all that: `The Buddhist Attitude to the Common People'? [Pause]

____: Isn't it also questionable to even use the term `oligarchy'? Just going from there to talk about the `unwisdom' of the multitude is to say that because of this latent `unwisdom' that exists, the Sangha just consists of oligarchies... [**S:** Mm.] .... to rule them?

S: Mm. Yes. Yes. That seems to be a sort of suggestion, in a way, if you compare the two: the Buddhist Sangha on the one hand, and the Greek oligarchies on the other. [Pause]

Let's go to *`Buddhist Social Ethics for the Layman'.*

Text*"Such belief did not lead, however, in the Buddhist case at least, to an attitude of cynicism towards the multitude. Far from it: the common people have an important part in the Buddhist scheme of things, for their present condition is not accepted as permanent or final. Indeed, between them and the Sangha there exists and important relationship, not of reciprocity exactly, but of complementariness. This relationship is set out formally in an early Buddhist text, the Sigala homily, which remains today one of the best-known portions of Buddhist literature among the Buddhists of Ceylon and South-East Asia.*

The Sigala homily is presented as being the extended answer given by the Buddha to a question from a young householder regarding his moral duties. The comprehensive nature of the advice which the Buddha gives him with regard to domestic and social relationships would by itself be sufficient to dispose of any assertion that the early Buddhist community's concerns were entirely -other-worldly', 'spiritual' or 'selfish'. As a Buddhist of a later age, commenting on it, said, 'nothing in the duties of a householder is left unmentioned'. It was, added the same writer, for the householder what the Vinaya, or code of discipline, was for the members of the Sangha".

S: We have to be a bit careful how we take the statement here: "would by itself be sufficient to dispose of any assertion that the early Buddhist community's concerns were entirely `other worldly', `spiritual' or `selfish'. As though `other worldly' and `spiritual' are synonymous with `selfish'. And after all why do you have such things as domestic and social relationships; and why is it important to order those according to ethical norms? It's because the ethical life provides a basis of entry for meditation, and meditation provides a basis for insight, hence for the true development of the individual. Anyway let's go on.

Text*"The duties are set out in an orderly way, intended, no doubt, as T.W.Rhys Davids observed, to assist the memory. Six sets of reciprocal role expectations, or duties, are enumerated: first those between parents and children; next, between pupils and teachers; then, husband and wife; followed by friends and companions; masters and servants; and finally householders and members of the Sangha. In each category, five duties are enumerated, with the exception of the Sangha's duties to householders, and in this case there*

are six.

Children are to support their parents, who once supported them; they are to perform the proper family duties, to maintain the family line; to uphold the family tradition; (meaning, perhaps, not dissipating the family property and maintaining the family honour); and they are to show themselves worthy of their heritage. Parents are to restrain their child from wrongdoing, to inspire him to virtue; to train him for a profession, to contract a suitable marriage for him; and in due time to make over to him his inheritance."

S: Mm. Do you think this is all still relevant, and in principle, still holds good?

Manjuvajra: It's rather reminiscent of the Victorian attitude.

S: In what respect?

Manjuvajra: Well in most respects really. They are the sort of the things that the ideal Victorian family, middle class family, would have..... ? .

S: Are you intending that as a criticism or just as a statement of fact?

Manjuvajra: As a statement of fact really. In that there's now been a reaction against the Victorian attitude, and I would say that that attitude probably doesn't ..... isn't normally held now.

S: Regardless of whether it's normally held now or not, is it, as it were, intrinsically valid?

Lokamitra: On the whole it seems to be. [**S:** Mm.]

____: It's speaking a very different sort of society, more like a tribal society, but .....

S: But what would correspond then in our society to some of these things?

Siddhiratna: Supporting parents. [S: But should you support your parents ?] ..... and maintain family.....

S: Take that first one : "Children are to support their parents who once supported them". Take that as a sort of specimen. Do you think this is good, do you think this is valid? [___: Mm.] [**S:** Mm.]

Nagabodhi: We're talking about people in the world, we're not talking about people who are in the homeless state? [**S:** Yes. Right.] .... Well then, yes.

S: "Children are to support their parents who once supported them". In other words there should be a feeling of gratitude, and you should do what you can for your parents out of gratitude, remembering what they did for you. This would seem to be part of the normal, healthy, human state, at least within the group. It may be, now, you don't have to do so much for your parents, just because in many respects the Welfare State looks after them, but there is still a lot that you can do. It isn't just a question of, say, supporting them materially, but maybe a bit of psychological, even a bit of moral support sometimes they need. Especially if they're living on their own. So thinking that when you were young they did for you whatever they could, or whatever was needed, so out of gratitude one thinks: well, now in a sense positions are reversed - they are old and feeble, and a bit dependent - you do, out of gratitude, whatever you can for them. They may not need material support, but they may need other things from you, or could be helped by other things from you. So the principle seems still to

hold good doesn't it? Or do you think not?

_____: I think perhaps more so [**S:** Yes. Maybe, yeah.] ....because it is very easy to push them off into a `Home' or something.

S: Mm. Yeh. What about "perform the proper family duties, to maintain the family line, to uphold the family tradition" Has this got any sort of positive modern, parallel?

Ratnaguna: I don't really know exactly what they mean, actually.

S: It is a bit vague, isn't it? It says here, "(meaning perhaps, not dissipating the family property" It's usually in terms of almost maintaining the good name of the family. Not letting the family down; not being a disgrace to the family. But of course this is still not taking into account any sort of spiritual factor, from purely as it were the group point of view, the point of view of the ordinary society.

Siddhiratna: Might it not mean carrying on the family business and things like that.

S: It might mean that too.

Siddhiratna: How does one resolve that if you're going to lead the `homeless' life, as it were?

S: Well, you don't, because it is held in the Buddhist tradition, that if you want to lead the `spiritual' life that abrogates all your mundane responsibilities.

Nagabodhi: In a way, it's turning the ordinary household life into a commitment in itself. Because to undertake to support your parents is something you can't kind of half do - you decide to do it, and then do it. [S: Yeah. Mm.] .... so .... Would the Buddha have been ... Would he have discouraged somebody who was supporting their parents from joining the Sangha? Would he have pointed out that person's responsibilities?

S: There's no known instance of him doing that, but there is one important consideration: if you become a monk, a bhikkhu, naturally you live on alms, you are not allowed to support lay people out of your alms bowl, including your relations and so on, with one exception: according to the Vinaya you are allowed to support your mother. If your mother is destitute, with no other means of support, the monk is allowed to support her out of his begging bowl even after becoming a monk. This is according to the Theravada Vinaya. So there are these sort of exceptions you can say. Not for father! That's rather interesting. But mother, yes. Perhaps it was thought that Mother would be more likely to be left destitute in this sort of way. Of course in Indian society it was much more difficult for a woman to get by on her own than a man. So this exception was made: that the monk could support his mother, if necessary, out of the contents of his begging bowl.

But what is really meant here by `upholding the family tradition' is a bit difficult to say , so maybe we should leave that. What about the parents? "Parents are to restrain their children from wrong-doing." Just train them up in skilful behaviour: this is all that it means. And, "to inspire him to virtue ..." Yes. ".... to train him for a profession". Well leaving aside any spiritual considerations, yes, help your child, your son or your daughter to find their place in the world, and to be able to be independent and support themselves in a suitable trade or craft or profession, according to their nature and inclination. "To contract a suitable marriage for him..." What about that? Do you think this is out of date? (Laughter)

____: Maybe if they wanted to. [Sounds of chuckling)

Nagabodhi: Who wants to? (laughing)

S: Well, assuming that they do. [_____: Yeah.] You see, in India most marriages are still arranged marriages and they nearly always work, almost invariably work. So even this I think is not necessarily out-of-date. Even now you have - what do you call them? - computers that arrange a partner for you and all that kind of thing. [Siddhiratna: Datelines.] ..... datelines. The Indian view is that it is really ridiculous to leave such an important matter as marriage just to the passing whims and fancies of two inexperienced young people. It's almost **asking** for trouble, they feel. (Laughter) So they carefully consider the temperament of the young man and the young woman involved, the family background, their social positions, they study carefully whether they are likely to get on well with each other or not. And also each is asked what sort of wife, or what sort of husband they would really like to have, and that is also taken into consideration. Their horoscopes are consulted, and also the girl is brought up in the full belief and conviction that her parents will do their utmost to get the very best husband for her they possibly can, and the boy likewise believes that his parents will do the very best for him that they can.

So the young people have got complete faith in their parents, and are very happy to accept their choice and fully believe they `we couldn't have made such a good choice ourselves - we don't know the world well enough. Our parents know these things, or our uncles know - they understand.' So it usually works out very well. And you just don't have the trouble. You don't have to go out and look for anybody; you are not at the mercy of your emotions; you don't just think in terms of marrying the first person you happen to fall in love with, which usually is disastrous. So marriages in India usually work very well; better than in this country; better than in the West generally, because they go about it in a sensible, practical way; not in this pseudo-romantic sort of way which is just asking for trouble.

So even this may not be out-of-date: we may have just taken the wrong turning for the last few centuries. Doctor Johnson said that he was convinced that most marriages would be far happier if they were `arranged by the Lord Chancellor without reference to the wishes of the parties concerned', he said!

Lokamitra: There have been leading articles in the last few years, coming out of this sort of .....

S: I'm quite sure that if within `the Friends' we had been asked to `pair' say half-a-dozen people, I'm sure we would have made a better job of it than the parties themselves have usually made of it. (Someone laughing quietly) Anyway, leave that, eh.
(Delayed laughter erupts as **S:** goes on with text)..... ".... in due time to make over to him his inheritance".

I think you would have made a better job if you'd just drawn lots! Just left it entirely to chance, because people who are unsuited to each other seem to have a fatal attraction for each other. (Chuckling) Anyway, so this all may not be as out-of-date as we might have thought at first sight. All right - Pupils and teachers: let's go on to that.

Text*"Pupils are to serve their teachers by showing respect to them, by waiting upon them, by showing eagerness to learn, by supplying their needs, and by paying attention when they are being taught. Teachers in return are to give their pupils moral training, they are to inspire in them a love of learning, they are to instruct them in every subject, are to speak well of their pupils, and to protect them from any danger".*

S: This is pupils and teachers within the secular context. So do you think all this still holds good in a general way?

___: Yes.

S: It does really, doesn't it?

____: I think you probably learn more from your teachers than you do from your parents.

S: Mm. Mm. All right go on to the next one then.

Text*"A husband is to cherish his wife by treating her with respect, by being kind to her, by being faithful, by allowing her her proper due rights, and by providing her with suitable ornaments. In return, a wife is to show her love for her husband by maintaining a well ordered household, by being hospitable to their relatives and friends, by being faithful, by being thrifty and by being diligent".*

S: Mm. What do you think of this? Is this still relevant? Does this still hold good? [Pause] Or is it still rather valid in principle regardless of whether it's fashionable or not fashionable? [___: Mm. I would say (?)] ... Mm ?

Siddhiratna: Yes. It sounds in principle ? .

S: Does it even sound particularly Indian, in a way. In a way, it doesn't. [Pause] All right, on to the next one then.

Text*"A man should recognise his obligations to his friends by making them gifts, by courtesy and benevolence towards them, by treating them as his equals, and by keeping his word to them. In return he may expect that they will take care of him or of his interests when he is unable to do so himself (for example, says the commentator, if he falls down in the street after too much drinking, his friend will stay with him until he sobers up, so that his clothes are not stolen), they will provide him with refuge when he needs it, they will stand by him in times of trouble and will be kind to his family".* (Much laughter at points in the reading of the text).

S: Mm. Right. (Laughter obscures the words), could be: Does all this hold good too?!. "A man should recognise his obligations to his friends by making them gifts, by courtesy and benevolence towards them, by treating them as equals, and by keeping his word to them". So all this sounds completely up-to-date doesn't it? - The principles of ordinary, worldly friendship, leaving aside spiritual friendship, or spiritual fellowship. Is there anything not relevant? [Pause] Doesn't seem so. On to the next one then.

Text*"A good master (i.e. employer) is one who may be relied upon to show consideration towards his employees by allotting each one work suited to his capacity, by supplying them with good food and pay, by providing care for them when they are sick, by sharing with them any unusual delicacies which he receives, and by granting them regular time off from work. In return, employees and servants should show their affection for their master by being out of bed betimes and not going to be until he has done so, by being contented with the fair treatment they receive, by doing their work cheerfully and thoroughly, and by speaking well of their master to others."*

S: This seems to be very relevant, doesn't it? Not to say topical. [_____: What do you mean?] ..... Well, `doing their work cheerfully and thoroughly and by speaking well of their masters to others'. (Chuckling) One doesn't find much of this sort of thing nowadays, does one?

Siddhiratna: I think `unusual delicacies' which he receives is quite good as well. It means a

better sharing in what comes into the firm.

S: Also don't forget that the old businesses .... it's not just sort of business in the modern sense, but people employed in the household - they were often treated as members of the family, and also people working with you in a sort of cottage industry, or family business, who also, as in the West until very recently, were treated as members of the family, or lived under the same roof, ate at the same table, very often. So, here, the Buddha is saying that well virtually they shouldn't be treated any differently from members of the family. A critic would say that this is `paternalism', of course. But perhaps even `paternalism' has it's positive side.

Siddhiratna: Why would that be bad ? [**S:** Mm ?] ... What is negative about `paternalism'?

S: Well, you're in a sort of position of `father' and you treat them as `children' and `dependents'.

[End of side one side two]

After all `the delicacies' are yours and you share them with them. Not that. Not that you all have a **`right'** to the delicacies anyway, and that they can insist on those rights.

Ratnaguna: I think this is particularly relevant at the moment to us isn't it? With businesses and so on starting up.

S: Yes. Right. Yes. (delayed laughter)

Ratnaguna: Well isn't it? Like Aryamitra's got employees.

Nagabodhi: Is that how the relationship is defined?

Ratnaguna: I don't know? I expect so. [____: Master and servant.] It would have to be wouldn't it, as it got bigger.
S: Well he's sort of `in charge' in a way. He does a lot of work with a lot of responsibility. But it is different in as much, in a way, because they are members of the community, and the community as a whole looks after their needs. I mean, it's not Aryamitra who feeds them and clothes them, as it were.

But if, say, we did actually literally employ people from outside in any `Friends' enterprises, and paid them, say, a salary, then these principles would hold good. Right, on to the sixth, then.

Text*"Finally, the reciprocal duties of householders and members of the Sangha are set out. A good householder ministers to the bhikkhus by showing affection for them in his actions, in his speech, and in his thoughts, by giving them a warm welcome and ample hospitality and by providing generally for their material needs. In return, the members of the Sangha are to show affection for the householder by restraining him from evil courses of action, by exhorting him to do what is honourable, by entertaining kindly feelings towards him, by imparting knowledge to him, by dealing with his difficulties and doubts, and by revealing to him the way to heaven. The last is the sixth duty. Every other class of citizen named has been given five duties, but for the bhikkhu there is this one extra, which thus stands by itself in a position of special emphasis".*

S: Perhaps we mustn't take this: "revealing to him the way to heaven", too literally. I mean,

what is heaven? `Heaven' represents the positive mental states, the positive emotions which have become, as it were, habitual. And this includes even meditation in the sense of samatha. Certainly it includes, for instance, the four *brahma viharas*. So any comment on this? Do you think this is still up to date, still relevant, still valid?

____: How can the members of the Sangha restrain the householder from evil courses?

S: Well, by advice - not in any other way. By pointing out the evil course is an evil course, and by bringing, as it were, their moral influence to bear.

____: They're assuming that there's a relationship to start with so there's some receptivity.

S: Yes. Assuming that they are lay followers. In India every sort of layman or laywoman is at least an `honourary' follower. At least they have got some respect for those who lead a spiritual life, or who are members of the Sangha. This wouldn't necessarily hold good here, of course, in this country. It's a different kind of society.

Lokamitra: What about "his difficulties and doubts"?

S: This can be `difficulties and doubts' about worldly matters, or about the Dharma itself: probably more about the Dharma. [Pause] All right let's carry on - the next two paragraphs.

Text*"'We can realise', commented T.W.Rhys Davids, 'how happy would have been the village or the clan on the banks of the Ganges, where the people were full of kindly spirit of fellow-feeling, the noble spirit of justice, which breathes through these naive and simple sayings.' , Those who have been acquainted with the life of a country like Burma, where Buddhist culture was still a living force will know that this is true, for the reality has existed. There is evidence that in India something approaching such a state of society existed wherever Buddhist culture or civilization was able to establish itself.*

Here the crux of the matter is reached: the ability of Buddhism to establish and maintain itself. The 'practicability gap' which was mentioned a little earlier, between the Buddhist vision for human society and the realization of it in any actual society, was not quickly or easily bridged. There were, and are, certain essential conditions to be fulfilled before a Buddhist form of civilization can come into being anywhere. These necessary conditions have two primary focal points: (1) the Sangha, and (2) the governing power. In India at the time of the Buddha, the latter meant, of course, the monarchy. These will now be considered in a little more detail".
S: We'll have to leave that till tomorrow. Anyway, any general comment or point about what we've done this afternoon - "Buddhist Attitude to the Common People", and "Buddhist Social Ethics for the Layman". What does one think about `the social ethics for the layman'? This little section is just based on one discourse which **may** have been given by the Buddha - it's in the `Digha Nikaya' - or may not. It may be a later codification of different things he said on different occasions. But what sort of impression does it leave one with? Does one agree, say, with T.W.Rhys Davids?

[Several voices at once] S: It seems quite positive and wholesome, yes, and making for stability, though perhaps rather general and maybe rather limited in certain directions, but very good indeed as far as it goes. And no doubt highly suitable for a simple society, and perhaps even suitable in principle for more complex societies.

Any relationship you think has been left out? For instance, compared with the corresponding Confucian list.

____: Friend and friend. No that is .....

S: Friend and friend is included.

Vessantara: King and minister.

S: King and minister, or king and subject: this is missed out, so what does that sort of suggest?

Vessantara: It suggests more weight against Trevor Ling's argument about the importance (sound of soft chuckling) ... the sort of nexus between the Sangha and the king.

S: Yes. But also perhaps, because the relationship with the king was not a relationship with the king individually but with the government which was rather impersonal. You very rarely saw the king. You might only meet the local tax gatherer. So you wouldn't have a sort of regular personal relationship with the king, as perhaps, say, the minister had with the prince under the old Chinese system. Also the Chinese list of duties, I believe, or list of relationships I believe included brother and brother. I think the Buddhist would regard that as being covered by friend and companion. You behaved towards your brothers in much the same way.

Manjuvajra: It only includes those people to whom one's got a kind of definite relationship to ... [**S:** Yes.] ..... it leaves out strangers and traders and .....[**S:** Yes.]

S: Though there are other teachings given elsewhere about one's behaviour towards guests. And also, of course, among the wife's duties is being hospitable to relatives and friends - that could include just receiving whoever happened to come. [Pause]

Vessantara: Reading this made me aware of the way in which, at the moment, perhaps especially because the level of the mitra as a value in itself hasn't been fully established, there's a certain amount of pressure on some people: it's as if they're basically in the 'householder' category, but somehow because of the way in which `the Friends' has developed, and is developing, they feel as if they should be pointing towards ordination .... [**S:** Well, some do.] .... some do, yes. And it's as if they can't..... yes, they're in a position of stress, where ideally it would be good perhaps if they settled for the kind of things mentioned in the `Sigala' homily, and yet feel somehow they should be almost working towards `going forth'. [**S:** Mm. Mm.]

S: But quite a number of them are not, as it were, in regular family situations.

Vessantara: Sorry, what do you mean by regular?

S: Well either they're divorced or they are single people with unsatisfactory personal relationships and so on. We haven't got so many people who are, as it were, definitely married with children and with a job and with, on the whole, a sort of positive and healthy setup of that kind. We don't really have that many such people. We've got quite a few mitras who are sort of unattached people in the family sense, who don't have any sort of regular family responsibilities, but who, on the other hand, are definitely not individuals. They almost sort of fall between two stools. I think if one **does** have mitras who are sort of `householders' in this sort of sense it can be a source of great strength. So this sort of positive ideal could well be presented.

Nagabodhi: What about within the Order? **Our** Order, not the bhikkhu sangha?

S: Well, in the case of those who are married and have families, and family responsibilities, then obviously they must be encouraged to look at that in a positive way, since it is something that they are definitely committed to, rather than in a negative way, and be encouraged to apply these sort of principles. [Pause]

Nagabodhi: Just at the moment within the Movement it seems that we are quite limited for that kind of happy, healthy, human householder type. I know that people have commented, say, on reading the *`Newsletter'* or quite a lot of the stuff we put out, there doesn't seem to be room, or the pressure, or the emphasis of these just in terms of sheer volume of what we've put out is in to directing people towards taking up a more `homeless' sort of life.

S: Well this, of course, was the Buddha's own emphasis.

Nagabodhi: Yes. And maybe one day .....

S: There is one `*Sigalovada Sutta*' but there are dozens and dozens, and hundreds and hundreds of suttas addressed to the `wanderers', those who had gone forth and who were, as it were, the `full-timers'. So that is certainly the **overall** emphasis. [Pause] It's as though the `householders' in this sense and the mitras in our sense provide a sort of buffer between Sangha and the world, or between, in our case, the Order and the outside world. Do you see what I mean? There are quite a lot of things the monks can get householders to do that wouldn't be suitable for them to do themselves; or the householders might have contacts that the monks wouldn't have. In much the same way, say, with Order members and mitras. Mitras who are working, and who are family people might have access to facilities that Order members didn't have access to, or might be able to contact people that Order members couldn't contact; might **know** people and so on. They would have a wider range of social contacts, and that would sometimes be very useful. [Pause]

I think while there's got to be encouragement for people to go further, there mustn't be any feeling of pressure on them, or feeling of pressure being put on them to go further than they are really ready for as of this present. Encouragement, yes, but pushing, no. Otherwise, if sometimes people feel that they are pushed and are not really able to take that next step, then they might even feel guilty about not taking it, which wouldn't be at all a positive development. [Pause]

One also must recognise that in certain respects the old traditional distinction of the bhikkhu and householder has broken down, and we have got, sometimes, people whom it's very difficult to classify as either the one or the other. There seem to be all sorts of intermediate, almost sort of hybrid forms, as indeed there have been, from time to time, in the Buddhist world itself in the past even. So an Order member certainly isn't quite a bhikkhu, however devoted and however `full-time'. In much the same way the mitra isn't exactly a `householder' necessarily. [Long pause]

Lokamitra: In the East in the Buddha's day by taking the robe it was fairly easy to make it clear to the rest of society exactly what your orientation really was. It's not possible here in the West, at least without looking .... without to some extent .....

S: (coming in) Well in the light of what I said yesterday it isn't even necessary, it only needs to be known to those within the Movement, because it is **there** that one is getting one's support from. It is there, or from there that you get your `share'.

Lokamitra: It's also ..... that's one aspect of it but how important is it - it's probably not, maybe - for others to ... well say you were leading a celibate life and so on, to know that, and accept that?

S: Mm. You mean in the sense that they then, for instance in this particular instance, won't put temptation in your way - like for instance knowing that you are a vegetarian. [Lokamitra: To some extent ....] .... and therefore they will .....[Lokamitra: .... will just respect your way of life and make an effort at least to understand to some extent, and in as much as it affects the relationship.]

S: I think that would be quite difficult to, as it were, signify and to get that sort of co-operation just in a formal sort of a way by wearing a robe. I think it would be quite unlikely to happen, might even become counter-productive in certain respects.

Lokamitra: I'm not suggesting wearing a robe in that way, but it did..

S: People would still have to understand what the robe signified. And that means you'd have to educate them. So that you could do even without wearing the robe, presumably, just on an individual basis. A lot of people should be ready to accept that other people are a bit different. For instance if someone invites you for a meal and you say `I'll be happy to come, but I am a vegetarian'. They shouldn't get all upset and accuse you of trying to lay something on them, as sometimes does happen. Just accept the fact that you are a vegetarian and give you what you want. And similarly with other things. Give you what you want and don't give you what you've said is not in accordance with your way of life to take, or to accept, or to use. [Pause]

S: Anyway, that's that.

[NEXT SESSION]

S: All right, *"The Social Function of the Sangha".*

Text*"In the first place, it was essential that the Sangha should function within wider society in the kind of way that was outlined in the Sangha homily. The duties there envisaged for the `bhikkhu' in his relations with the householder require constant day-to-day contact between the two. That is why the word `monk', if it means a man who lives apart from the world, is in the strict sense inappropriate as a translation of `bhikkhu'. The `bhikkhu' has to exhort the householder, restrain him when necessary, instruct him, clear up his doubts, and constantly direct his attention to the path he should follow in order to reach `heaven". This he would do most effectively if he himself was following that path and was providing an example and an inspiration to the householder, who otherwise, as we have seen, was all too prone to aim at the short-term goal of sensual pleasure. From the point of view of an anthropological analysis of Buddhism in modern Ceylon, Obeyesekere points out a principle which is inherent in early Buddhism also. The life of the bhikkhu, who has given up the comforts of household life as something which he no longer needs, has an important social function. His life 'exemplifies in exaggerated form the inhibition of natural drives, and such inhibition is a prerequisite for the conduct of all social life.' The effect of the example of an ascetic life was pointed out by Durkheim in terms which exactly fit the Buddhist situation:*

... it is... a good thing that the ascetic ideal be incarnated eminently in certain persons, whose specialty, so to speak, it is to represent, almost with excess, this aspect of the ritual life, for they are like so many models, inciting to effort. Such is the historic role of the great ascetics. When their deeds and acts are analyzed in detail, one asks himself what useful end they can have. He is struck by the fact that there is something excessive in the disdain they profess for all that ordinarily impassions men. But these exaggerations are necessary to sustain among the believers a sufficient disgust for an easy life and common pleasures. It is necessary that an élite put the end too high, if the crowd is not to put it too low. It is necessary that some

exaggerate, if the average is to remain at a fitting level."
S: All right, let's consider this. "The duties there envisaged for the `bhikkhu' in his relations with the householder require constant day-to-day contact between the two. That is why the word `monk', if it means a man who lives apart from the world, is in the strict sense inappropriate as a translation of `bhikkhu'. The `bhikkhu' has to exhort the householder, restrain him when necessary, instruct him, clear up his doubts, and constantly direct his attention to the path he should follow in order to reach `heaven".

There's something here that is a bit questionable. What do you think that is?

Ratnaguna: As if he's a sort of almost a policeman, in a way.

S: I was thinking: almost a parish priest. "Constant day-to-day contacts between the two" - well, is that the impression that one gets from the Pali suttas, or from the scriptures in general? That the bhikkhu was expected to keep up constant day-to-day contact with the householders? No, one doesn't get that impression at all, especially in the early days of Buddhism. The bhikkhus tended to dwell very much aloof and apart, and to sally forth from their retreats, to sally forth from the forest even, just once a day to collect alms.

____: Wasn't it in their tradition to collect alms in silence?

S: Yes. Very much so! Not only the tradition, it was the rule for the bhikkhus. I don't recollect when the rule was made, but it certainly was made at some time or other by the Buddha, again according to tradition, that the bhikkhu collected his alms in silence, and that is still the tradition, especially in Theravada countries, with one little exception: after you've received the alms in your bowl there is a little verse that you traditionally recite giving thanks, but you don't enter into conversation.

Tibetan monks when they go begging which they do in a slightly different way, do it in a way even more appropriately: they go around with a little drum and they half chant, half sing, verses of `rejoicing in merits', or `sharing of merits'. And this can be very much more lengthy. They start up this chant, they start up this song, which is very, very melodious and beautiful as they approach the house, and they go on chanting, or singing, while they are actually receiving the alms, and then they just nod their heads and just smile in acknowledgement, all the time carrying on their chanting and singing, and then they go away. And sometimes - I've noticed this myself - they may chant and sing in this fashion as long as twenty minutes. And of course the verses are in Tibetan and very meaningful, so people who give, in a way hear something of the Dharma, at least they are reminded of the whole idea of `rejoicing in merits' and `sharing of merits'. But no conversation is entered into, not in the least! Either by the Theravada bhikkhus when they go for alms, or the Tibetan monks who beg in this sort of way. So it is very much a tradition of silence. If, on the other hand, the bhikkhu or the monk or whatever, is invited by the householder to his house, then usually the invitation is extended the previous day. Then the bhikkhu goes along to the house, he's given a meal, the meal is eaten in silence, then he gives thanks, and then, if he so wishes, and if the assembled householders so desire, then he gives a short talk or discourse on some aspect of the Dharma, and then he goes away; and it's suggested or advised at least, that he doesn't prolong his visit and stay gossiping. He gives his talk on the Dharma, he gives his advice, and then he goes back to his retreat, or back to the forest. So this is very much the pattern.

It certainly doesn't accord with the impression that Trevor Ling is giving here of bhikkhus constantly in attendance upon the lay people almost in the capacity of parish priest or domestic chaplain, and constantly admonishing them. This may be somewhat the pattern in modern Ceylon. You do sometimes get bhikkhus who are very closely associated with certain households, and certain families, and take a keen interest in all their worldly affairs, but this

sort of interest, and this sort of bhikkhu in fact, is rather frowned upon in the scriptures by the Buddha himself, by all accounts.

So I think, though it is true that when the bhikkhu is in contact with the householder, yes, he is to give good advice, influence the householder in a positive fashion, but to suggest that this is his main duty and this is mainly why he exists, as seems to be Trevor Ling's suggestion: this is to give a very wrong, a very false, impression.

Vessantara: It's as if Trevor Ling has taken the advice of the `Sigalovada sutta' for what you do if you **are** in relation with ..... [**S:** Right !] householders, and says, well this is what you **must** do.

S: Yes. Mm. You must always be in relation with them. What do you think of this anthropological principle, as it were?: "It is necessary that an elite put the end too high, if the crowd is not to put it too low. It is necessary that some exaggerate, if the average is to remain at a fitting level." What do you think of this? Leaving aside the term `exaggerate'; don't take that too literally, but what do you think of the general principle involved?

Manjuvajra: I think it's reasonable taken just on a sociological level.

S: Yeah. Because if you take it at the spiritual level how **can** you put your practice too high? [Pause] "....such is the historic role of the great ascetics. When their deeds and acts are analyzed in detail, one asks himself what useful end they can have." Well, from the Buddhist point of view this is nonsense, because the great example of an ascetic - to use that term - in the Buddhist tradition is certainly Milarepa. Purely as an ascetic he probably outdoes the Buddha himself. But can one say with regard to Milarepa that `when his deeds and acts are analyzed in detail, one asks himself what useful end they could have'? No. Clearly they were directed - all his acts were directed - towards Buddhahood **in this life**.

So one can't really speak in terms of an `excess' strictly speaking. They may seem, or they may be very, very much more than the average man will possibly contemplate: it may well be that they have the function, the sociological function, of keeping him up to a certain level by confronting him with such really uncompromising examples of the practice of the ideal, but that uncompromising practice is not useless in itself.

There's also a danger in this sort of approach, - as I've seen myself - with regards say to the Theravada Buddhist community, and that is that it's all very well to speak in terms of the bhikkhus setting the lay people an example, it's true that they do, ideally, because they are supposed to put the Dharma into much more effective practice than the lay people, at least because they have better facilities. And they've been provided with the necessities of life by the lay people just so that they may be free to devote themselves to meditation and to the study of the Dharma, and so on. But the danger which I've observed is this: that the lay people tend to think, or get into the habit of thinking, that the Dharma is the business of the monks. Mm? Do you see what I mean? They are, as it were, the professionals. And the best way in which you can practise the Dharma is to help the monks to practise it, or to provide them with the facilities for practising it. This is all very true but again what happens is that you make it your sort of chief business in life to keep your bhikkhus up to scratch. Do you see the sort of attitude I have in mind? And sometimes you find that the Theravada lay people - and I've seen very striking examples of this - don't bother themselves about the practise of the Dharma; make no effort whatever themselves to practise the Dharma, but they're very keen on making sure that the monks practise it. And they're very quick, and very prone to criticise any bhikkhu who is not up to their standard of behaviour, or what they think is the proper standard for a bhikkhu. And some of the Theravada bhikkhus, especially those of Ceylon, they get really fed up with this.

A situation develops in which, almost, the lay people practise the Dharma vicariously through the bhikkhus. Do you understand what I mean? You don't practise it yourself, but you have a bhikkhu who practises it for you, as it were. It's almost literally like that! And you find sometimes Ceylon lay people boasting, as they've boasted to me, `Our bhikkhus are very pure'. Not like the Tibetan monks, or not like the Japanese monks. 'Our bhikkhus are very pure'. So they take a sort of pride in the purity of their bhikkhus, - `their purity' meaning their very strict observance of technicalities of the `Vinaya'- and they're very keen on keeping the bhikkhus up to scratch in this respect. And sometimes the unfortunate bhikkhus feel the surveillance of the lay people as something very, very oppressive, especially, as often happens, the lay people don't understand the `Vinaya' properly anyway, and have got their own ideas about what is permissable and what is not permissable.

So one must beware of this; even though it is true that the uncompromising practice of the Dharma by a few does definitely tend to keep up the level of practice, on the whole, by the many. [Pause] There's also the fact ..... Obeyesekere says according to Trevor Ling, "The life of the `bhikkhu', who has given up the comforts of household life as something which he no longer needs, has an important social function." It may well be that he has this social function, but we mustn't confine his significance to that function. "His life exemplifies in exaggerated form the inhibition of natural drives, and such inhibition is a prerequisite for the conduct of all social life". Well this is all very true, but the purpose of the life of the bhikkhu is not to reinforce, or give an example of inhibition of natural drives just for the sake of its social utility. This is almost what seems to be suggested here. If there is any question of the bhikkhu inhibiting his natural drives, it's not in the interests of society merely, but in the interests of his own development as an individual. Otherwise you get a rather grotesque picture of a bhikkhu, as it were leading a very, very strict life, and practising extreme asceticism, not because he believes in attainment of `nirvana' or enlightenment by that means, but just so as to keep up among the people, a certain level of social morality, which is really ridiculous.

Again it's making the individual exist for the sake of the group. The individual does exist for the sake of the group, but as the result of his own free choice, and, as it were, as a sort of by-product of his existing for his own sake as an individual; for the sake of his own further and higher development. So we must resist this tendency, or this temptation to turn the bhikkhu into a sort of parish priest catering to the needs of the lay people, and resist the temptation to regard him as a sort of exemplar of asceticism so as to prevent social morality falling below a certain level. These things may well be there as by-products, but they're not in themselves what the bhikkhu life is all about. [Pause]

Anyway, has anyone got anything to say about all that, or is it sufficiently clear? It's interesting that you felt that the description of the bhikkhu and his day-to-day contacts suggested a policeman. Why do you think that was? To me it doesn't suggest a policeman at all. As I said, it suggested the parish priest going his rounds, seeing that everybody is alright. What was there in that that made you think of a moral policeman or .....

Ratnaguna: The parish priest is a sort of spiritual policeman, isn't he.

S: Is he?

Ratnaguna: In a way. An ethical policeman, a moral policeman.

S: Well, maybe in places like Ireland if it's the Catholic priest. Mm. But I think not so much in this country, surely. He doesn't have nearly as much self-confidence as that any more, does he? But I think the Catholic parish priest in Ireland still has a very large share of this, I mean

in the Republic. I was reading an article in the paper a little while ago about the consecration of some big church costing a million pounds, on top of a hill, with so many Irish Bishops and Irish Archbishop in attendance; and the person describing the great event remarked it was almost like being back in the Middle Ages, and the bishops and priests generally seemed to have so much power and so much influence over the people.

I think still in many a rural parish you just cannot venture, you cannot dare, to disagree with the local priest, if you do you just have to get out. He sees to it that you just have to leave. He rules the parish. And you're soon made to know that. Not in every parish, but still a good number of them are still apparently ruled by the priest; yes, who is the moral policeman. But there's never been anything like that in the Buddhist East.

All right let's carry on - next paragraph.

Text*"Whether the words of Durkheim are true for any other system or not, they are certainly true of early Buddhism. A passage from a canonical text reflects exactly the kind of attitude on the part of the lay-follower that Durkheim has depicted.*

As long as they live, the Arahants ... are abstainers from the slaying of creatures ... they are modest, show kindness, they abide friendly and compassionate to all creatures, to all beings. So also do I abide this night and day ... abstaining from such actions, showing kindness to all beings. As long as they live the Arahants ... abstain from stealing ... they abide in purity free from theft. So also do I myself also abide...

The same formula is repeated for each of the eight precepts which were observed by those lay-followers or upasakas who were aiming at a somewhat higher level of moral attainment, in imitation of the example of the bhikkhus, and especially of the Arahants, who were regarded as having fully conquered selfish passions.

As long as they live the Arahants dwell observing chastity ... abstaining from falsehood ... abstaining from fermented liquor, which gives occasion to sloth ... living on one meal a day ... refraining from going to exhibitions of dancing ... from the use of luxurious beds ... So also do I abide. I also this night and day do likewise. By this observance I imitate the Arahants ... and I shall have kept the sabbath".

[End of Tape 18 Tape 19]

S: So this is a quotation from the scriptures, but does there follow from it the conclusion that Trevor Ling seems to think? I mean, does the bhikkhu, does the arahant exist for the sake of just maintaining that higher level of social morality for reasons merely of social utility? Surely the bhikkhu or the arahant is not simply setting an example: he's doing something for his own sake, and his own good. The example is, as it were, incidental. And also, when he does set the example, or to the extent that he sets the example, he sets it so that others may actually follow, and may eventually practise even as he is practising.

____: What does it mean: "having kept the sabbath"?

S: This is the `uposatha' day. That is to say the full-moon day, the new-moon day, and the two days half-way between each, the `eighths' as they are called, the `asthanis'. So there were these four lunar holy days each month. And, of course, it is the custom in many Buddhist countries for lay people to observe extra precepts on those days, so that on those days they are observing, or practising the Dharma more strictly than on other times, and this is undoubtedly a very good practice, but again it's all geared in the direction of the Enlightenment of the individual, not simply in the direction of the maintenance of social

morality.

So what the arahant or the bhikkhu is doing really, according to this passage, is setting the householder an example as regards his own spiritual development. He's not setting an example for any purely sociological reason. Do you see the difference? So in for instance the Theravada Buddhist countries, the lay people do take upon themselves these extra precepts at the time of the full-moon and so on, or they observe their usual precepts more strictly. For instance, on other occasions they may not be very strict about abstaining from alcohol: they may drink. Only on `uposatha' days they will carefully abstain from alcohol; or for instance, if they are business people, if they are engaged in trade, then they may not always be very particular about speaking the truth, but on the `uposatha' day they will be very particular about that, and make a special effort not to tell any lie. But again this is in the interest essentially of their own, individual, spiritual development, or at least ethical and spiritual development; not in order simply to keep up a certain standard of social life, even though that is a by-product of their own individual practice. [Pause] All right, let's carry on then.

S: (breaking in) Let me just say one thing: I think one should be very careful about, as it were, consciously setting out to set other people an example. Do you know what I mean? It is true that if you do practise sincerely you **will be** setting an example, in the sense that if other people see you practising some of them may be inspired, but to do something for the sake of, or primarily for the sake of `setting a good example' is very dangerous indeed from your own individual point of view, or from the point of view of your own individual development. Do you see that? Why do you think it's dangerous?

Ratnaguna: You're not doing it for its own sake or for the sake of your own development.

S: But it's a good thing to inspire others, surely? And that they should be set a good example. But why is it not so good that you should set out to do this, as it were, deliberately? Or thinking primarily in those terms?

____: You could just be `acting it out'.

S: Yes! If you're not careful you end up simply acting. And this is, unfortunately, what sometimes happens with the bhikkhus in South-east Asia. The laity expect a certain standard of them and the bhikkhus feel under an obligation, as it were, to put on a good act. Sometimes in all sincerity without realising what they are doing.

___: Why are the bhikkhus so attached to the laity?

S: Well the main thing is that they are economically dependent on them: it's mainly this. For instance, I'll give you an example - there is this question which affects every bhikkhu (loud noise obscures words) .... is eating after twelve o'clock: according to the existing `Vinaya', which wasn't always in existence even during the Buddha's lifetime, the bhikkhu is not supposed to eat after twelve o'clock. So in Theravada countries they usually don't eat after twelve o'clock. They do observe this quite strictly. The lay people are very, very keen about the bhikkhu observing it. If a bhikkhu happens to eat after twelve o'clock in many parts of the Theravada Buddhist world, especially Ceylon, he's regarded as absolutely `outside the pale'. It's regarded almost as an unforgivable sin by the laity! But how serious an offence is it according to the `Vinaya'? According to the `Vinaya' it is what is called a (dhukkhata'), which means just `a fault'. So if you happen to be guilty of this fault all you have to do is to confess it to another bhikkhu and that is the end of the matter. It ends there. But the laity regard it as very, very much more serious than that. So there is this discrepancy between the seriousness which the `Vinaya' attaches to this fault, and the seriousness which the lay people

attach to this fault in Theravada countries. So what happens? The bhikkhus know it doesn't really matter all that much, so if they've been busy and they happen to say not have had their meal by, say, twelve-thirty, most bhikkhus are quite happy to eat at twelve-thirty, and finish by that time instead of by twelve, and it doesn't really bother them. They adopt a more commonsense attitude, but they know at the same time that if the laity knew they were eating at twelve-thirty well, they'd be virtually finished.

So what do the bhikkhus do? What do you imagine that they do? They just close the door. (chuckling) They just eat secretly. But at the same time unfortunately although their attitude is very commonsensical they feel a bit uneasy, and even a little bit guilty, and a bit on the defensive with regard to the lay people. Sometimes lay people will sort of enquire: some of the times they're very inquisitorial - they'll ask the servant, `Has the bhikkhu had his meal yet'? ` Oh yes, he's finished it', the servant says. `He finished it by twelve o'clock?' `Oh yes, finished it by twelve o'clock'. (Laughter) They're just trying, you see, trying to find out. And the wretched bhikkhu knows this. So quite often we used to discuss this, others in Ceylon, bhikkhus, and Thai bhikkhus and myself in Calcutta. And usually the bhikkhus would say `Well what does it really matter. It's a very, very minor affair, and in any case the principle is moderation in eating, the particular time is not so important, but what are we to do with these lay people?

Sometimes they used to ask me what I felt. They used to ask me, for instance, whether I thought it was alright for them to eat after twelve o'clock secretly. So I said on one occasion to a Ceylon bhikkhu who was a good friend of mine, who was quite bothered by this issue - because he was a student at Calcutta University - and he sometimes couldn't get back from lectures quite in time to eat before twelve o'clock, so he asked me whether it would be all right if he ate secretly so as not to upset the lay people - so I said I'm not very happy about eating in secret, but it's all right if you eat privately. (Chuckling) So he said `What do you mean by that? What's the difference between `secretly' and `privately'?' (Laughter) So I said if you just eat at twelve-thirty closing the door, that's `privately', but if you locked the door that's `secretly'. (Sound of chuckling) He was quite amused by this. But this just exemplifies to some extent, the attitude of some of the lay people towards the bhikkhus. And sometimes I used to feel very sorry for some of the Theravada bhikkhus, who were themselves very sensible and quite sincere people, but under this constant pressure from their own laity, and especially, sometimes, from their own parents; because sometimes parents would, as it were, give their son to the sangha to be made a bhikkhu. And they believed if he was a very good bhikkhu then a lot of merit would accrue to them, and if he was not a good bhikkhu then not so much merit would accrue. And some bhikkhus really resented being treated in this way as sort of merit-making machines for their families.

So I am quite sure that once we ourselves get really functioning in the West, I'm sure we're going to attract a lot of the more sincere bhikkhus from some of these Buddhist countries, who will appreciate our much more sensible and essentially more principle-based approach to these things.
So, this is all in connection with the danger of setting out to set an example. It just results inevitably, in one, whether consciously or unconsciously, putting on a little act. And sometimes, of course - I also discovered this - the lay people in Ceylon - I mention Ceylon because I had much more contact with them - almost want the bhikkhu to put on his little act. They don't want to know the bhikkhu as an individual. They don't seem to have any sort of conception of the bhikkhu as an individual trying - in Rhys Davids' famous phrase - `to work out his own salvation with diligence'. They really do seem to regard him as a sort of machine for chanting suttas, and accepting alms, and so on and so forth. They don't see him as an individual human being at all. And this sometimes amounts almost to a cruel attitude on the part of the laity towards their bhikkhus. And if the bhikkhu does commit any little mistake, well, the lay people are completely unforgiving, except a few Western educated ones or

young men usually who are more understanding, but the old ladies in particular are completely unforgiving, even about matters which according to the `Vinaya' are quite minor, and just can be cleared up by confession.

So one really does have to watch this, and sincerely do one's own best as an individual to develop. If you happen to set an example that's very good. If people take what you are doing as a source of inspiration for themselves that's very, very good, but you shouldn't, as it were, try to put on any little act for the benefit of other people, even for the **good** of other people, nor should they ever expect that from you: or say, `It's your duty to set a good example'. No, it isn't your duty to set a good example. It's your duty to do your best for your own sake, and ultimately for the sake of others, but it is not your duty to set an example in that sort of self-conscious, deliberate fashion. [Pause] On the other hand don't go to the other extreme and say: `Oh, I'm just going to be myself, I don't care what people think. I'm not trying to set an example for anyone. I'm just being my own natural self!' That is the other extreme. The middle way is to do the best that you can for yourself, and in principle for self and others, **in the long run**: to make the best effort that you possibly can to evolve, to develop, to develop positive emotions. And if it <u>happens</u> to set others a good example so much the better, but you needn't bother about that unduly, or at all even.

Obviously this applies very much in the context of Order members who are, for instance, functioning at or from Centres. You haven't got to set anybody a good example, you've simply got to do `your own thing', as it were, which happens say to be taking the class. All right you will take the class as well as you possibly can, not just to set a good example of how an ideal Order member takes a class, but because you want, for your own sake as part of your own development, to do it in the very best way that you can, even if there's only one person present, or even nobody present. (Laughter) You will take that class, or lead that puja, or recite that puja, in the very best way that you can, - not to set a good example, - because that is, as it were, your practice of the Dharma. Others may be inspired or not inspired, that is secondary. If they are, as I said, so much the better, but at least <u>you</u> are inspired, that's the main thing. [Pause]

But be careful that you don't think: `it doesn't matter if I'm unskilful because I'm not trying to set anybody a good example.' It <u>does</u> matter if you are unskilful, because it goes against your own development. So you shouldn't use that excuse of having not to set anyone an example as a justification for your own unskilfulness. Do you see what I'm getting at?

<u>Lokamitra:</u> At a Centre too - it is a bit difficult, this, because if people are unskilful in, I suppose, making a lot of noise, or just being rude in a Centre, then it puts off people who would come along, so .....

<u>S:</u> This is true. But you should <u>be</u> mindful, and not make a lot of noise, not just because if you were unmindful and made a lot of noise it would put off other people, but because you yourself should be mindful, and not make a lot of noise when you're at the Centre <u>for your own sake</u>, and in the interest of your own development. That is the way you should behave.

<u>Lokamitra:</u> It's difficult sometimes to say to people, `Look maybe you should be a bit quieter from the point of view of your own development, around here.' (Laughter)

<u>S:</u> Why not? Why not just say, `What a noisy, unmindful person, do you think that is the way to Enlightenment?' And there is the additional consideration - What about other people? They've not come here for unmindfulness and noise. They've come here for the sake of peace and quietness, and if you're not going to help provide them with that - not that you're setting a good example, you're just being decent and considerate to visitors.

Lokamitra: Yeah. That's it. Yeah.

S: ..... and you ought to be for your own sake to be decent and considerate, otherwise you're just not a human being. No question of setting a good example, just behaving in your own interest as a decent human being ought to behave.

So if anyone is, say, misbehaving, even any Order member, misbehaving around a Centre, one shouldn't sort of try to correct it by saying, "Oh, what will people think", or "What sort of impression do you think it will produce upon visitors". No! That, I think, is the wrong approach. But this is not the way for you to behave here. It's no good for you. It's not good for you to be unmindful or inconsiderate.

Lokamitra: I find it quite difficult to do that approach. I'm much happier saying, `Well, if you want to be like that please don't do it at the Centre because it does affect other people.'

S: Well, there is that - it's affecting other people it's not a question of not setting them a good example. It's just using the Centre in a way it isn't meant to be used: which is inconsiderate. And if you're inconsiderate it not only inconveniences others, it hinders your own development. But if you bring in this question of setting other people a good example, well, someone may well rebut that in an unskilful way, and say, `I'm not aiming at setting anyone a good example, I'm just being my own natural self'. This is what, sometimes one hears. But it's not one's business to be one's own `natural' self in that sort of sense, but to try and be mindful. O.K. let's go on.

Text*"The particular occasion for the recital of these words was, as the last sentence indicates, the lay disciple's observance of a higher standard of moral discipline during the night and day of the sabbath, a practice which is still followed in Buddhist countries today. The householder who, once or twice a month, undertook this somewhat stricter rule of life would naturally be more disposed to follow the normally required five basic precepts more carefully than if he were not disciplining himself from time to time at a more advanced level. And from his example other householders might also be encouraged to take the Buddhist moral code more seriously. There was thus a widening circle from each local Buddhist sangha, a radiation of heightened morality, whose influence would, as time went by, penetrate more and more deeply into the surrounding society".*

S: This is, of course, all very true, except that we must be careful not to understand it in terms of its social utility, but more in terms of its utility - if that is the right word - for the development of the individual. To have a shorter period of more intense practice, whether it's of the precepts or meditation, certainly does help one achieve a generally, slightly higher level. Do you see this? For instance, if someone observes a day of silence, well, that helps you to be more mindful in your talking during the rest of the week, doesn't it? Does anyone have anything to say about this: this sort of shorter more intensive observance of precepts, or practices? Well, this is what happens on retreats, of course, ideally. Is this how people usually experience retreats? Does one find that after a retreat the average level of one's life is slightly raised, perhaps more or less permanently? And apart from retreats, what other sort of periods, or methods of special, as it were, stricter observance?

___: ? ? in the shrine room.

S: Yes. Right. That's true. So, in a way, this principle provides one with a general pattern. One has achieved a certain general level. Your life as a whole reflects a certain general level, but you want to raise that level, so what do you do? It's difficult to raise it all at once, the whole life in every respect, so for certain shorter periods you have a more intense practice, or a more intense experience, and then, perhaps, you try to make those periods longer and more

frequent. In this way gradually you raise your whole life to a higher level. And then you repeat the whole process, the whole pattern at a higher level still. You see what I mean?

Ratnaguna: I remember Suvratta saying that. He used to do things like whenever he was walking up the stairs be extremely mindful and that would sort of carry on a bit.

S: There is a factor which I mentioned some time ago with regards to the Six Paramitas, the Six Perfections, that is to say, `Dana',or Giving; `Sila', or Ethics; `Ksanti', or Patience, or patient acceptance; `Virya', or Energy; `Samadhi', or Meditation; `Prajna', or Wisdom - that one could devote the first day of the week to an intensive practise of `dana', giving; let's say, Sunday, if you like to begin on Sunday, Monday to an intensive practise of `sila', and so on for six days of the week, and then on the seventh and last day you try very hard to practise all six, all six intensively. I don't know whether anybody has ever tried this, but I've spoken of it, I've suggested it a number of times.

And as Trevor Ling points out, in the Theravada Buddhist countries, in the Buddhist countries of South-East Asia especially, as well as elsewhere, on the full-moon day, or the new-moon day, and perhaps on the two days in between, people try to practise the precepts more intensively, or even take on themselves extra precepts. It becomes a bit more like the vow, doesn't it? As when you take a vow for a limited period: suppose you take a vow not to smoke tobacco for three months. You abstain from tobacco for three months in the hope that eventually you will be able to lift your whole life to that level, and abstain permanently: that is the idea, isn't it? Or when you are especially strict say for a whole week about not telling lies, you hope eventually to raise your whole life to that level, and never at any time tell a lie.

So there is great value in these sort of specific practices, otherwise practice remains something very general and vague and woolly, which means it doesn't `bite', and doesn't really have any effect on one, and therefore that one isn't transformed. So this whole question of observing the precepts for particular periods, or taking vows for particular periods, these things are of great practical importance. I must say, that vows seem to be catching on a bit in `the Friends', which is a very good thing.

____: Are they generally taken fairly seriously?

S: To the best of my knowledge they are always taken seriously. I don't know of a single instance where someone didn't take his or her vow seriously.

Siddhiratna: I think the thing about each Paramita for each day would be quite difficult to observe in fact, because I think during a day there are different circumstances you find yourself in in which you need to exercise individual `Paramitas'.

S: Well, so you may, but you make a special effort each day for that particular one. For instance `Dana' - someone asks you for a loan, all right, that particular day you give them that loan (laughter) ... some other day you might not. Or someone comes to see you, well, some other day you might have chased him away, but all right, you give your time.

Lokamitra: (laughing as he speaks) Let me know if anyone is doing that! (words lost by others speaking and laughing) I'll know when to ask then. (laughter)

S: Then they'll say I'm taking a vow, `giving' - `dana' - every Monday, but don't tell Lokamitra! (Laughter) But you see the practical value of this way of looking at things, or this way of doing things. All right then, on we go.

Text*"In this way, what was referred to above as the unreadiness of the mass of people to*

participate in, and make a success of, the kind of society envisaged in Buddhist teaching, would gradually diminish. Meanwhile, however, there would still be many who were not likely to respond to these influences, and whose attitudes and actions would have socially destructive effects if they were not held in check. In other words, there was the problem of how to deal with potentially violent or anti-social elements, even though it was only for an interim period while the Buddhist prescription became more widely effective in raising the level of moral life and eliminating social conflict and violence. There were, moreover, the monarchies, decreasing in numbers as the larger swallowed up the smaller, but not decreasing in the extent or degree of their power. These would constitute the most serious obstacle of all in the way of any hopes for the gradual establishment of a universal republic with the Buddhist sangha at its heart"

S: There is nothing to show that the Buddha wanted to establish a universal republic, or that monarchy as such was a serious obstacle in the way of the gradual - what shall I say? - ethicalisation of society. [Pause]

Manjuvajra: Ling himself gives his sociological ideology away when he talks about these anti-social elements being - where is it - they would be around until he eliminated social conflict and violence, giving his sort of .... indicating that these anti-social elements would just disappear when you've got the right society for them to grow.

S: Mm. This is probably over-optimistic.

Manjuvajra: He doesn't regard the anti-social elements and the violence as being individually based. **[S:** Yes. Mm.]

Vessantara: Well, to a large extent, bearing in mind what we talking about conditions yesterday: given the right conditions there would be a lot less around.

S: There would be a lot less, that probably is true, but it wouldn't be eliminated completely, would it?

Manjuvajra: I thought the understanding was that even if you set up a positive environment, you still had to have the individual's conscious acceptance and use of that .....

S: (breaking in) Yes ! Indeed ! Yeah.

Manjuvajra: for it to make any difference. So if someone rejects that use then they remain in the previous state.

S: Yes. It may be, of course, that if that sort of thing was very much the exception, and your society as a whole was very positive, well, they would be able to contain that. But still, the possibility of that anti-social element arising would be there. So, in a sense, you would never have a completely perfect society. You'd only have a society in which there were all reasonable facilities for all reasonable people, but you couldn't guarantee that even under those relatively ideal conditions every member of the community would be an ideal person. Things would be certainly very very much better than they are at present, inconceivably so, but still they would not be perfect.

One can't expect perfection of conditioned things. But certainly the possibility of making an effort in the direction of personal development, for those who really wanted to, would be there all the time. [Pause] All right let's go on.

Text*"It may be useful at this point to remind ourselves that the Buddha, when he had*

achieved Buddhahood, does not appear to have abandoned the interest, which his family tradition and milieu had given him, in public affairs and the concerns of government. We may remind ourselves, too, that it was perfectly natural that the public world should come within the scope of the Buddhist prescription. This was not due merely to the need to guarantee the Sangha with political freedom and a sound economic basis, necessary pre-conditions for its untrammelled existence and security though these were. It was due equally to the fact that the private world of the individual, as the 'real' or important world, was denied legitimacy in the Buddhist doctrine. Salvation was the movement away from this private, separate and ultimately false existence to a wider, non egotistical sphere of being. Here, then, we have three very important reasons why there developed in early Buddhism so strong a concern with the wise and beneficent government of human society: the Buddha's own background, the need to ensure optimum conditions for the Buddhist prescription for society to take effect, and - most important - the fact that by its very nature, unique among the ideologies of the time in its denial of the individual soul, Buddhism could never be a 'private salvation'. 'the flight of the alone to the Alone' or any other kind of world-rejecting escapism; by its very nature its concerns were with the public world."

S: So where has he gone wrong?

Vessantara: At the beginning. [**S:** Mm.]

Ratnaguna: Same way as he has before. [**S:** Mm]

Nagabodhi: By leaving out the individual. The prescription is for the individual, it's not for society.

S: Mm. Mm. It's almost as though he considers what he calls `egotism' as any attempt on the part of what we call the individual, to live apart from the group, or independently of the group, or not as a member of the group, or not in subordination to the group. So perhaps we need not press the point, because we've already gone into it sufficiently.

Any other point arises out of this paragraph, or indeed out of this little section? - "The Social Function of the Sangha". So what do you think **is** the social function of the Sangha really, or the social function of the Order, if it has one, putting it for the time being in those terms?

Lokamitra: To make available the teachings of the Buddha for all those who want to practise.

S: Mm. .... But not, as it were, by way of `professionalism'. One's making available is, as it were, a sort of wider sharing of one's own practice: not something that you do for other people but don't do for yourself.

Nagabodhi: Or you could say that the function of the Sangha - the social function of the Sangha is just to exist.

S: Mm. The social function of the Sangha is to ignore society as much as possible. (Sound of chuckling) Well, in a sense, that is so, isn't it? At least to ignore the attitudes, or at least disregard - consciously disregard - or refuse to recognise, or to act upon, the canons of society - the canons of the group. At the same time not to go against the group just for the sake of going against the group: that is highly reactive, that is not the characteristic of the individual. I mean the individual as such has a **positive** attitude towards the group, because he sees the group as a collection of potential individuals. [Pause]

I think it is important to avoid the extreme of thinking that one has a duty towards society, in

the ordinary sense of the term: in the sense that one has to live, as it were, wholly for society, and not for oneself, not for one's own development.

Vessantara: What do you think is the best actual argument, or line to take, with the average person who tries to say, `Well, you have got a duty to society there' - meaning you looking after it etc.?

S: Well, first of all, are they? I mean get that quite straight. (chuckling) - Perhaps one can discuss the question in terms of: well, what is the ideal of human life. What do you think human beings are here for? Why do you think society is here? What does it exist for? For the sake of what does it exist? One can raise that question. One can put a counter question. What **is** the purpose of life?

Manjuvajra: I don't think you're ever going to be free from this feeling that one needs to pay something back to society, as long as there's still something in society that you see as being useful to yourself. [**S:** See as being `useful' ?] ....If you think that you are getting something from society, I think there would be a desire to want to give back to it. Until you've got yourself firmly set on some spiritual ideal [**S:** Mm! Mm! Yeah !] ..... then there will always be that desire to, you know keep in contact with society.

S: Do you think it's a healthy desire that `you have to pay back'? [Pause] I must say that this attitude that `you have to pay back' - that you have `to pay your way' as it were - is more characteristic of Western society. You don't find this in India so much, though you do get much more the idea that you can freely take, or freely receive without any corresponding obligation, not only in the spiritual life, but in other contexts as well. But we seem to have, certainly in this country, an obsessive preoccupation with `paying back', and not being under any obligation to anybody. You know what I mean? That if someone does something for you, or gives you something, then it puts you under an obligation, and you've got to repay them. If somebody invites you for dinner - it's a commonplace of ordinary social life: Mr. and Mrs. Smith invite Mr. and Mrs. Brown to dinner - so it places Mr. and Mrs. Brown under an obligation. And then Mrs. Brown says to Mr. Brown a couple of weeks later, "I suppose we'll have to ask them back". (Laughter) You don't want to but you suppose you **have to**, you're under an obligation, so you feel uncomfortable until you've discharged that obligation, and you're out of their social debt.

Well, why do we tend to think like this, do you think? Someone gives you a present for your birthday so you've **got to remember** their birthday and give them a present on theirs. Why do we sort of feel... or why do we think in this sort of way?

____: Conditioning.

S: Yes. But how did we become to be conditioned in this way, and why? [Pause] Clearly it is conditioning. Why do we not want to be in anybody's debt, as it were?

___: Because it ties us to them.

S: Well, but why do we even think we are in somebody's debt? Suppose someone invites us to dinner, why don't we just think, `They've invited us to dinner' that's that! Why do we have to be in their debt for a dinner? [Several voices at once]

____: They might be able to stay in favour with them in case.... well, that sort of contact is useful, and just remain in favour with them. [Several voices, or echoes]

S: Why not just let them invite you a second time?

____: They probably wouldn't.

S: Ah, yes. So they've got the same attitude as you. But again, why? Why do they think that they must be repaid in that way?

Ratnaguna: Is it something to do with a capitalist society? .... [**S:** Could be]

Lokamitra: It's the basis of the group really, isn't it?

S: Reciprocity is the basis of the group, in a sort of positive, healthy way.

Ratnaguna: Yeah, but why doesn't that happen in India? [**S:** Mm?) Why doesn't it end up in a feeling of debt in India?

S: There is a feeling of debt, but it seems more positive. For instance it is considered that you have a debt to your parents, you have a debt to your ancestors, you have a debt to society at large, but at the same time although there is this sort of even ideology of debt in Hindu society - they speak in terms of the five debts that a man has to pay, and they discharge those debts - but at the same time many people, individually, don't feel at all worried about just accepting, just being on the **receiving** side, especially, for instance, sadhus and sanyassins and so on. So why are we so reluctant to be simply on the receiving side?

Ratnaguna: Is it guilt?

S: I think guilt comes later, when you don't discharge what you think is your debt. But why can't we just be on the receiving side? Why don't we just receive? Why do we want to pay back? It suggests that we want to be equal; to keep our end up. This is quite natural in society, in the group, in the ordinary way: that you want to maintain your equality with your peers; maintain your status. But in spiritual life it's quite inappropriate. It means an inability to receive, doesn't it? If you want to pay back, well then, you've restored the `status quo'. So if you think of what you receive as placing you under an obligation, as representing the incurring of a debt, it means you haven't really received, doesn't it? Why haven't you received, or what prevents you from receiving?

Vessantara: Just a lack of the feeling that you're worth, or worthy of receiving ..... **[S:** Yes. Perhaps it is that too. Yes.]

Lokamitra: It's also though, that you don't want to get caught up in .... the person who's giving it to you may think in terms of reciprocity ... you just don't want to get caught up in that at all. You don't want anything to do with that .....

S: But you do because you pay back.

Lokamitra: So therefore you may not receive. You may just not want to receive it, or .....

S: It seems to me to be bound up with - for want of a better term - `egotism'. It's as though if you receive you are placed in an inferior position, and that makes you feel uncomfortable, so you want to get even, as it were, by giving back, and then you've placed that person in the inferior position, yourself in a superior position, so then you're evens, as it were. Don't you think it's something to do with this?

Manjuvajra: I don't think it's always that. When I first went to Cornwall I had nothing when I was down there: no money or anything. So I received a lot from people around, and I was

quite happy to receive it, felt quite good about it. But after a few months I discerned a kind of resentment in that.

[End of side one side two]

For example, I would visit someone and the Cornish are always having tea and cakes, so you'd always get offered tea and cakes. I thought there was a bit of resentment in that offering, not as though it was really given, but it was expected to be given. So then I had to start and try and arrange things, so that I didn't arrive at those sort of times. So I think, quite often what happens, is that people even in their giving, are feeling a bit resentful about their giving, and maybe you pick up on that.

S: Well, not only do people find it difficult to receive, they also find it difficult really to give. So when you give, you give with expectation of return, very often; and when you receive you receive in the consciousness sometimes, that it isn't really a free gift: that something is expected from you in return. So the chances are that if you are able really to receive, and there the matter ends, you will also be able really to give. If you can really receive without feeling under any obligation to give in return, then you'll also be able to give to others without any expectation of them giving you anything in return. So it would suggest, therefore, that our usual attitude, or what is customary in society, is `give and take': `You give me and I'll give you'. `You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours'. You give me a dinner, I'll give you one, etc. If you don't give me, well, I won't give you. If I give you, but you don't give me, well, I will have learned my lesson, I won't give you again, etc. So that may be quite even normal, even healthy on the ordinary sort of social level within the group, but as soon as one starts trying to be an individual, and to function as an individual, then one must get over that and be able to give without any expectation of return, and just be happy to give; and also to receive. And this should be the principle within the spiritual community. In the spiritual community there should be no reciprocity in the sort of `bargain striking' sense. It will end up as in effect a sort of reciprocity, because everybody will be happy to give, everybody will be happy to receive, but there won't be a tying of an individual giving with individual giving back. There won't be any thought of giving back or doing something in return. You do what you can for others when you can, and you're happy that they should do what they can, what they feel like doing, for you when they can.

So it becomes a bit like, in a way, the Communist principle of: `from each according to his ability to each according to his need', which though enunciated by the Communists, is a very sound principle. So, in a way, it does tie up with capitalist society - this difference - it's not a question of a bargain. It's not even a question of a free exchange. It's not an exchange at all! You simply give, when you can give and when you feel like giving: you receive when you're in that position. You don't try and connect the two in a kind of `bargain-making' arrangement. Everybody gives when they can: everybody takes when they need. You see what I mean? So that should be the principle within the spiritual community.

Vessantara: Do you think it's tied up with our sort of Christian conditioning - the whole thing of Christ died for you?

S: It may be, because certainly this is invoked in order to make people feel guilty. `Well, look what Jesus has done for you! Jesus has died on the cross. He's gone through all that suffering and you - you won't even give up your pocket money to help those poor heathens the missionaries are preaching to!' This is actually said - this sort of thing! Or parents do this as well - `After all I've done for you - I've done everything possible for you. I've been a good father, or a good mother, as the case may be.' Or, `We've been good parents to you. We've given you everything. We've sacrificed our lives for you and now you won't do as we want you to do - how selfish! How ungrateful! How mean! How despicable! What will the

neighbours think!' (Laughter)

So to be able to give without any expectation of return, and to be able to receive without any sense of obligation: these are the characteristics of the individual. [Pause] .... or among the characteristics of the individual. Otherwise with some people, the minute they receive a present they are thinking of what they can give in return, ... (Chuckling) .... or what they have to give in return, or how they'll manage, and so on and so forth. They can't even appreciate the present for thinking of the obligation it puts them under to return a gift of almost exactly equivalent value. People even talk in these sort of terms, don't they? If they receive a Christmas present:` Oh that must have cost three pounds, I must remember that - when we give them a Christmas present next year, or maybe we can get in a quick New Year present, it must be of roughly that value.'

Manjuvajra: There is something you can give back I think, and that's gratitude, and it goes back .....

S: (breaking in) ... but do you really give it back? Or is it something just spontaneous?

Manjuvajra : No. But I think if you're caught up with somebody who's very much involved with reciprocity, if you show the gratitude for whatever they've done or given to you, then in a way, it balances it perfectly.

S: Yes. This is true. Yeh. Or if you show even genuine pleasure. Or you show that the gift has been really appreciated, and is really useful.

Manjuvajra: Because that's what doesn't happen when you're thinking about what you've got to give back.

S: Right! Indeed!

Manjuvajra: Because you've pushed aside the pleasure of the gift, and think of only the difficulties it's going to cause you. [Pause]

S: All right. *"The Buddhist Attitude to Monarchical Government".*

Text*"The Sangha was to provide the growth point, or, rather, a growth multiplicity of growth points, from which would spread the new pattern of humanity, the social restructuring of human life, which had as its aim the elimination of individualism with all its human ill effects".*

S: What he is saying is all right providing you transpose it to a higher plane, if you see what I mean. All right. Go straight on then, and we'll try to do that as we read.

Text*"While this process was going on, it would be folly to disregard the large areas of society which were as yet untouched by the influence of the Sangha, for unchecked individualism and violence in these areas would threaten the peaceful growth of the Sangha, and of what may be called the Buddhistically oriented areas of society. Social stability appears to have been recognized by the Buddha as a necessary condition for the success of social and moral reconstruction. In the existing situation in north India in the fifth century BC the surest guarantee of social stability appeared to be more in the direction of a strong and benevolent monarchy. Moreover, a really enlightened monarchy, sympathetic to Buddhism, might have the further important, positive function of providing those conditions and of helping to create those attitudes among the people which would facilitate the widespread acceptance of the Buddhist prescription. This appears to have been the logic underlying the attitude of the*

Buddha towards the contemporary monarchs of Koshala and Magadha, as it is represented in the Pali Canon".

S: So do you think all this is correct? It seems a bit speculative -"In the existing situation in North India in the fifth century BC the surest guarantee of social stability appeared to be in the direction of a strong and benevolent monarchy." I don't know that there's any evidence for that.

Nagabodhi: You know what all this seems to be a straightforward adaption of is the idea of the `tyranny of the state': that the early years of any new Communist regime, one expects a period of the tyranny of the state, when people's conditioning has been readjusted, eventually the society itself, and the new economic order, will ensure the people work well together but in the meantime there's the tyranny of the state which .....

S: You mean the dictatorship of the Party?

Nagabodhi: Well, that is what in effect it is - it's referred to as `the tyranny of the state'. `The State' being all people together curtailing dissident elements. It seems to be an absolutely straight effort to impose this on India.

S: There's no evidence that I remember anywhere in the Pali Canon for the Buddha trying to enlist large-scale support for the Sangha from any of these kings with whom he was in contact. He seems to have been in contact with them as it were on a purely individual basis. I don't recollect him ever asking any favours of them, or anything of this sort, or going out of his way to meet them. They usually came to him.
For instance if you consider who provided the Buddha with, say, rest-houses and facilities of that sort, it was mainly wealthy lay people. I don't remember that the kings were especially prominent in this respect. They did make some donations, but certainly no more than wealthy householders, wealthy merchants, made, and the Buddha certainly did not go out of his way to enlist their support in this sort of manner. He talked with them just as he talked with anybody else when they happened to come along. He doesn't seem to have paid them any special attention, or paid court to them in any way. There is no record of any such scene as say, the Buddha appearing at Bimbasara's court and people saying, `I wonder what the Buddha wants now, again', or anything like that. (Sound of chuckling)

So this does seem really, not reflecting the evidence as we have it in the Pali scriptures. He seems to be almost imagining things. He does say use the expression: "Social stability **appears** to have been recognised ..." and "the surest guarantee of social stability **appears** to be in the direction of a strong and benevolent monarch." And, "**might have** the further important function ..." So subsequently he drops all the qualifications and just takes it all as actually having been established. So this is very, very hypothetical and, as far as I can recall, not justified by the Pali scriptures at all.

Nagabodhi: All this seems to be circular. He's putting Buddhism as a social prescription so you get a king to carry it out, so that the social prescription is applied, so that the social prescription can be applied.

S: Yes. He never gets on to the spiral. [Nagabodhi: Yeah.] ... he just goes round and round in, admittedly, a quite positive circle, but it's still a circle.

Nagabodhi: Yeah. Just a self-enclosed system.

S: It's simply one kind of group having ceased to exist and another kind of group has to come into existence. All right let's go on.

Text*"Throughout his life, as we have seen, the Buddha was closely associated with the royal courts of his day."*

S: That's an exaggeration anyway.

Text*"Pasenadi, the King of Koshala, and Bimbisara, the king of Magadha, were his life long personal friends and supporters".*
S: It might easily be argued that the bhikkhus who edited the Pali scriptures exaggerated the degree of friendship and support, because don't forget, the Jain scriptures make out - at least Pasenadi - to have been a Jain and a supporter of Mahavira. So there's this question even, to be gone into. No doubt the Buddha had some contact with these kings, there's no need to doubt that, but whether they were really friends and supporters in the sense that the Buddhist scriptures, which were, after all, edited some couple of generations later, make out, could well be, at least, doubted. Do you see what I mean?

Text*"Pasenadi, it is said, frequently visited the Buddha to have discussions with him."*

S: To the best of my knowledge in the Pali scriptures there's a record of seven such occasions. Whether one regards that as frequent or not I suppose is a relative matter; but I think seven occasions.

Text*"It may be recalled that it was in Pasenadi's capital, Shravasti, the majority of the Buddha's discourses were delivered".*

S: Well, a large number of discourses were delivered outside Sravasti, not so much **in** Sravasti, but just outside. Not a very big difference but perhaps of some significance. Perhaps the giving of the discourses had very little connection with the fact that it was near Sravasti and that Pasenadi happened to live there.

Text*"Bimbasara from the time when he first entertained the Buddha, in his palace at Rajagriha, until his death thirty seven years later, was a firm supporter of the Buddhist Sangha, and himself a disciple or upasaka, practising the layman's higher eightfold morality six times a month. It may be recalled, too, that by this time Koshala and Magadha between them covered most of the territory of the lower Gangetic plain, that is roughly the whole extent of the plain between the Himalaya and the Chotanagpur plateau, from modern Lucknow eastwards to Bhagalpur. The Buddha can hardly be said to have been out of contact with the important centres of political power of his day."*

S: The question is whether he was in contact with them as centres of political power, or just as places where there happened to be a large number of people who were receptive to his teaching. I mean, our own Movement is based upon or located in London, but why is that? Is it because we have, or want to have any special connection either with the monarchy or with the Bank of England, or whatnot?! (laughter) I have once visited the Houses of Parliament. (Laughter)

Manjuvajra: A special connection with the Bank of England in terms of a tunnel would be quite good!

S: No. It's just that there are lots of people around and relatively rootless people, and people who are open and receptive to the kind of teaching, or kind of path, or way that we have to show, that we have to offer.

Text*"He may justly be described as a social and political theorist, and indeed this aspect of*

his historical significance has been so generally ignored that it needs heavy emphasis. But he was not only a theorist; in addition to the familiarity with the concerns of government, which his upbringing in Kapilavastu would have given him, he was in constant touch with current problems of government, through the two kings who were his supporters and disciples."

S: Again, this is quite hypothetical!

Text*"Nor was this indirect involvement simply a matter of ad hoc problem-solving; the early Buddhist literature represents the Buddha as one who frequently had something to say on matters of policy".*

S: Frequently?! That's an exaggeration! `Matters of policy'? No. It's matters of ethical principle as applied to social life, yes, one could say, not frequently but reasonably often. All this is very tendentious and very much a case of special pleading on the basis of very insufficient evidence. Anyway, any general point that emerges from this paragraph? [Pause] All right let's go on.

Text*"It is not surprising, therefore, to find one of the most outstanding of historians of Indian political thought, U.N.Ghoshal, observing that 'the most important contribution of the early Buddhist canonists to the store of ancient political thought consists in their "total" application of the principle of righteousness to the branches of the king's internal and foreign administration".*

S: `Foreign administration'? I don't even know that there's any reference at all in the Pali scriptures to the foreign administration of any kings. Is Ghoshal by any chance thinking of Ashoka? But that came a very long time after the Buddha. And there's no question of foreign administration even there.

Manjuvajra: Maybe that was a comment about - in the Parinirvana sutra' that he made about attacking the values.

S: Yes. But would that be foreign? It was all within the Middle Country. Did they even have a conception of `foreign' in our sense? `branches of the king's internal and foreign administration'? Is there even any reference in the Pali texts to the different branches of the king's administration? Say the civil service; or do we ever see the Buddha shown as being interested in any of these things? Not as far as I recollect. All that we have are very general ethical principles in, as it were, a very broad social context - that people shouldn't cheat, they shouldn't steal, they shouldn't tell lies when they're on oath in the law courts, and things like that; or that the king should personally observe the Dharma. Again, he's stretching far too many points, far too far. Let's go on.

Text*"The unwisdom of the multitude, the need for social and economic stability as a prerequisite of the prescription to overcome this unwisdom, the emergence of powerful monarchically ruled states - these things together provide an explanation of why the Buddha, who seems to have regarded the republican sangha as the ideal form of government, nevertheless gave a large place in his teaching to the important role of the righteous monarch. A number of the Jataka stories contain descriptions of the ideal king, and exhortations concerning good government"*

S: Mm. It's very doubtful whether the Jataka stories were actually told by the Buddha. They are very late in comparison with some of the other scriptures.

Text*"The realm of the wise king is one which is free from all oppression, not ruled arbitrarily*

but with equity, where good men are honoured, and where the king and his officials exhibit qualities of selflessness, rectitude, mercy, political wisdom and a sense of equal respect for all beings, including different classes of society, townsmen, countrymen, religious teachers, and even birds and beasts. The importance of the personal righteousness of the king is strongly emphasised. A figure of speech frequently used is the bull who leads the herd aright: 'so should a king to righteous ways be true; the common folk injustice will eschew, and through the realm shall holy peace ensue'.

When kings are righteous, the ministers of kings are righteous. When ministers are righteous, brahmans and householders are also righteous, thus townsfold and villagers are righteous. This being so, moon and sun go right in their courses. This being so, constellations and stars do likewise; days and nights, months and fortnights, seasons and years go on their courses regularly; wings blow regularly and in due season. Thus the devas are not annoyed for the sky-deva bestows sufficient rain. Rains falling seasonably, the crops ripen in due season. Bhikkhus, when crops ripen in due season, men who live on those crops are long-lived, well-favoured, strong and free from sickness."

S: So what does one make of this? [Pause] Well first of all there are just general ethical principles applying to society. But what about this expansion of personal influence? [Pause] And this effect of the righteous king and the righteous society on the course of nature even: what does one make of this?

Manjuvajra: Does it mean that the sort of contented person in society would be contented and so therefore see the natural world as working (? ?).

S: One could interpret it in this way, but I think it's intended to be taken more literally. And certainly most Buddhists would take it quite literally.

Lokamitra: I suppose it's a bit like the law of conditionality as applied to .....

S: Well yes, it is an application of that, but is it a correct application, or an application which is justified by the facts, one may say?

___: .... it cuts across conditionalities - connecting `karma' and I don't know what the other one is called - (?)

S: Mm. Yes. There might be result in the long run, especially if one thinks in terms of collective `karma' - that is, the `karma' of a large number of beings who happen to be following the same kind of actions and therefore find themselves in the same kind of world. But could the collective karma of living beings, say, operate as quickly as that, and change the course of nature even within, say, a few years? Do you think that would be possible? (Several voices speaking all at once -words lost) .....

Nagabodhi: It's happened here! [**S:** Mm?] .... It's happened in the West in a very short period of time. [**S:** Yes.] .... We've radically altered nature, in many ways.

S: But, I mean, here the alteration is envisaged as taking place as a result of karma, as it were, not by means of direct intervention.

____: Doesn't that make the king the lynch-pin of the whole set-up?

S: It does indeed! Yeh. And this is a very traditional conception. It's very much a pre-Buddhist conception. And it, perhaps, goes back to the idea of the king as the `embodiment' - just to use a rather neutral word - of the sort of `spirit of the year', and the sacrifice of the

king. The sacrifice of the king ensuring fertility and prosperity and so on. It may well go back to this very, very ancient line of thought; this sort of mythic line of thought - if I can use that expression. It doesn't seem to me to have very much to do directly with Buddhism. You notice the references here are mainly to the Jataka stories. Jataka stories are frequently taken from Buddhist folklore and adapted to Buddhist ends. Most of them were almost certainly not related by the Buddha. The Jataka book is a much later compilation.

It may well be that these sort of ideas reflect pre-Buddhistic, almost mythic, modes of experience rather than the teaching of the Dharma. Do you see what I mean? It's a very ancient sort of ..... well, you find it in China - the proper conduct of the Son of Heaven, what we call the Emperor is responsible for keeping the course of nature in order.

___: If Buddhists believe it literally, wouldn't it tend to partly justify the whole political thrust and kind of influence the king?

S: To influence the king to live righteously? Yes. It's very important. Just as in many primitive societies who believed that the course of nature depends upon the king, they're very concerned that the king should observe all the appropriate taboos. At that stage it isn't so much a question of moral life - that represents a sort of updating of the conception - but of observing certain taboos; or behaving and living in a certain way, which has got very little to do with ethics.

We mustn't forget there's a whole sort of ideology, not to say mythology, of kingship which has got nothing to do with politics in the modern sense. And maybe we can still hear, as it were, some of those mythic overtones in passages just like this. It is quite notorious that you've had in history kings, who in their private and personal lives were models of morality, but who were `bad' kings. Do you see what I mean? Who were inept, not good administrators, who made wrong decisions, but about whose personal morality and individual integrity there was no doubt. And sometimes they attracted `good' ministers; sometimes they attracted rascals and didn't know it.

No doubt the best kings have been kings who were good as individuals but also pretty wise and circumspect, and knowledgeable as administrators. And sometimes a king who was quite `bad' in his personal moral conduct could be very good as a king, and do a lot of good for the country. But do you think there is any residue of truth in these old sort of mythical, semi-mythical conceptions about the king, the `divine' king, or the ex-divine king?

____: Well there's some parallel in so far as the king is responsible for overall planning, and if he doesn't foresee certain natural crises, or take steps to head them off then everybody suffers.

S: So this being so, "moon and sun go right in their courses" Well, this is a very big claim indeed, Isn't it? That if the king misbehaves etc., then the sun and the moon will not go right in their courses. Is one to take this literally? How did primitive man take this? It is certainly what primitive man, or at least many primitive men, many primitive groups rather, did actually believe. So is there any residue of truth, even `poetic' truth, spiritual truth? I think most people would say it really can't be scientifically true, though perhaps that can even be queried slightly nowadays; but is there any sort of truth in it? - That the personal conduct, as it were, though not `personal' in the more recent ethical sense: the personal conduct, the personal life of the king, who is not just the political ruler, but who is, as it were, the whole tribe, the whole group embodied in a single person, and all the functions of the group.

Manjuvajra: It does mean that if the group functions as a group then everything will go on as it always has done. Tick over in the same old way.

S: But perhaps it conveys a sense that if all is right within the group, all is right with the world. Perhaps it can raise that sort of sense. Just as for instance, there is this line of Shakespeare, *"When poor men die there are no comets seen / The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes."* So what does that mean? That when something goes wrong on earth there is some sort of echo, or reflection, or sign, or portent in the heavens. When things go wrong on earth, when things go wrong in the group, things go wrong in the world, things go wrong in nature, things go wrong in the cosmos. So it's as though the group is so important for you, that if something goes wrong within the group, it's as though something's gone wrong with everything: the whole world is askew, because the group is your world. You see what I mean? - that `the world' or `nature' or the cosmos is just a little frame surrounding your world, your group.

So if everything is all right within the group - if the king, say, is a `good' king, and everything is positive within the group then it's as though the whole of nature is O.K. Do you see what I mean? So maybe this view of nature represents a sort of extrapolation from conditions within the group. Because primitive man lives so completely within the group, that if something went wrong with the group, and his life within the group, then everything went wrong. He couldn't, as it were, leave the group and be alone with nature which was unaffected. He just couldn't think in that sort of way. Do you see what I'm getting at?

So maybe this mythic mode of thinking represents that sort of way of looking at things, or feeling about things: You can't imagine anything being right if things go wrong with your group. Well, people still feel this, as it were, don't they? -In a way.

Manjuvajra: Yes. Apocalyptic sort of ideas.

S: Yes. If the British Empire comes to an end, well, that's the end of the world, virtually, for some people; or if their group, or even their society comes to an end, well, that's the end of the world, that's the end of everything. Or even some people, if their relationship comes to an end, that's the end of the world virtually! There's nothing else worth living for, nothing else is all right, etc., etc.

Lokamitra: Also if things are going bad in the group, then you are much more negatively sensitive to natural happenings around you. Harvest failures or whatever affect you much ....

S: It could be. [Pause] And then of course you start thinking if there is a harvest failure, something must have gone wrong within the group. The king must have broken some taboo. You start thinking like that. For instance the Tibetans even, when Tibet was invaded by the Chinese, they started thinking something must have gone wrong within Tibet itself. I did hear - I was told on very good authority - that the Nechung Oracle was consulted by the Dalai Lama himself on this very point, when the Chinese began to invade, and the Nechung Oracle replied that the Chinese invasion had taken place because of a great sin on the part of the Tibet Government. And the Dalai Lama enquired what that sin was, and he was told, so I was informed, that it was the murder of Retin Rimpoche, which The Tibet government was generally believed to have been responsible for, for purely political reasons, that is to say while the Dalai Lama was still a minor, and not himself in charge of the government. So this reflects the same sort of way of thinking. The Retin Rimpoche died, that is known, but many people believed that he was murdered on the instructions of the then Tibet government.

Lokamitra: Was he the regent?

S: He was the regent for a while, and was superseded by another lama, who became regent.

___: Why was he murdered?

S: Oh, that is a very complicated matter of Tibetan politics. We don't even know that he was. We only know that he died, and he was quite a young man.

But primitive man sees his group, as it were, embedded in the natural context. Primitive man doesn't know how many million miles away the sun is, or how many miles it is across. It's just a big disc rising in the sky, and it seems to rise for his special benefit, to be directly related to him and to his needs, the needs of his group. You find this way of looking at things very vividly exemplified in Egyptian myths and legend, don't you? So this is the, as it were, the `thought' world, and the `feeling' world of primitive man. He doesn't feel that there's this great, big, vast nature with himself as a little tiny part of it, no! - his group is the centre, his group is the world, and there's this little tiny sun here, and that tiny little moon there just like lamps specially provided for his benefit, or the benefit of his group. So when something goes wrong within the group, well it's as though something goes wrong with everything, including what we now call `nature'.

Nagabodhi: This ties in with something I've thought about a bit: often when you talk about what you're doing, and what your plans for life might be, or rather what **lack** of plans you have about life - often the remark that gets directed at you is that what you're doing doesn't seem `natural'. You're not thinking of getting married, that's not natural, and so on - this kind of remark. And it's occurred to me that really what we're doing isn't `natural'; and by `natural' people have in mind the `lower evolution' ... **[S:** Yes, indeed !] ..... the life of the group and what we're doing isn't natural ..... [**S:** Oh, Yes!]... and it's wrong to try and defend it on the grounds that it is.

S: Or indeed, you're just cutting the ground, then, from under your own feet.

___: It isn't normal, but it could be natural.

S: Well again, it depends again what one means by `normal'. `Normal' usually means simply in accordance with the statistically average. To say something is `normal' is to say it's what everybody, or more-or-less everybody, usually does.

____: What I'm saying that the `normal' isn't necessarily 'natural'. **[S**: Ah.]

Nagabodhi: But the group belief is that the norm is natural; that is, in a way, the nature of the group, the group norm.

S: For instance I heard on the radio the other day - a Catholic nursing sister speaking about the convention of their guild, - the Guild of Catholic nurses apparently - and she was asked what they were going to talk about, and she raised various references to `the natural law'. It is a very strong thing with Catholics that they are against anything which is against the `natural law'. But they've got a very, very arbitrary conception of the `natural law', which was worked out in the Middle Ages by scholastic philosophers, and anything which is against that they take as going against nature, but it's actually not so at all! It is just certain local group conventions.

I think, - to go back to the point that you mentioned - we have to be very, very careful that we don't, if we're accused of being `against nature' in the sense of contradicting the whole process, or trend, of the `lower evolution', we mustn't hasten to justify ourselves and say: `Oh, no, we don't '. (Sound of chuckling) We have to admit that `Yes we do'. And then go on to explain further: that there is such a thing as a `higher evolution' in accordance with which one can be, and in accordance with which one can live, as well as a process of the `lower

evolution'.

Siddhiratna: Isn't there also something to be said that nature somehow has a blind sort of instinct, and needs its own kind or something like that. [**S:**Mm.] ..and that you're trying not to be `natural' at all, you're trying to be human. **[S:** Yes.]

S: Well, if you think in terms of nature "red in tooth and claw", well, you're just not trying to be that. [Pause]

Anyway can we stop there, though we are in the middle of a section. There's quite a long way to go to the end of it, and Sona is coming to see me, he said, exactly at twelve o'clock, which is what it is now. Perhaps we can dwell upon the mythic king and of nature and all that sort of thing over our lunch. I mean dwell mentally.

End of tape 19

S: All right, we're halfway through "The Buddhist Attitude to Monarchical Government". This is a very short paragraph.

Text*"Figs, oil, honey, molasses, root-crops, fruits all taste sweeter and better in a country where the king rules righteously, according to another Jataka story".*

S: Mm. Well this obviously can be taken in two ways, either literally or, as it were, metaphorically. We've already talked about that so there's no need to linger over it I think.

Text*"The economic welfare of the people should, in the Buddhist view, be a special concern of the wise king, who is exhorted to take positive, specific measures which will benefit the country, together with or in addition to the effects of his own personal righteousness. In the Kutadanta Sutta we are told of a great king who, conscious of his good fortune hitherto, thought it advisable to offer a great sacrifice, and thereby ensure the continuance of his prosperity, His chaplain, however, tried to dissuade him, and pointed out that there would be greater wisdom in taking preventative action against possible occurrences of crime. This could be done, suggested the chaplain, by removing the economic causes of discontent. To farmers the king should issue a quantity of food and of seed-corn. To merchants and tradesmen he should make available sources of capital which they could invest in their businesses. To those in government service he should give adequate wages and supplies of food. If this were to be done there would be no danger of subversion of the state by malcontents, but on the contrary, 'the king's revenue will go up; the country will be quiet and at peace; and the populace, pleased one with another and happy, dancing their children in their arms, will dwell with open doors.' The king followed his chaplain's advice and all happened as the chaplain had predicted. It will be noticed that the advice given by this 'chaplain' is of a kind that would be offered by a Buddhist rather than a brahman. Sacrifice is a waste of time; the king should concern himself instead with ensuring full employment in the country. The same principle is emphasized in another well known Sutta, which tells the story of the city of Kushinara in its former days of prosperity, under the Great King of Glory."*

S: Mm. What do you think of Trevor Ling's treatment of the Kutadanta Sutta here? [Pause] If you turn back to, in my edition, page sixty-seven, you'll find a brief summary of the Kutadanta Sutta. So if you look at that brief summary you will see that he seems to have done something with the sutra, or used the sutra in a certain way forgetting what he's already said about it. Do you see that?

Vessantara: In the early one he's taken it as just a kind of allegory, whilst here he's simply treating it much more seriously as if it's .... [**S:** Mm. Yes. But even more than that.] ..... the

last one is rather ironic, in a way. It has that kind of `turn' to it. [___: What page?] [___: Eighty-two] [Pause]

S: Do you see any discrepancy between the two accounts - the sort of summary he gives of the sutta earlier on, and the use he makes of it in this particular chapter? [Pause]

Nagabodhi: In the former one: it's clear that everything the Buddha's saying is ..... No - I'm lost!

Lokamitra: They seem to be two different suttas in fact.

S: No, they're not actually. They're the same sutta but it's understandable you should think so.

Vessantara: Looking at it quite literally in the early one there is a sacrifice suggested, whereas in this one the advice is different. He's not bothered about sacrifice to give to the people.

S: No. Actually you're missing the main point - the main point is that here his account of the sutta concludes: "sacrifice is a waste of time; the king should concern himself instead with ensuring full employment in the country" - as though that is the point up to which the whole sutta leads; that the whole sutta really is about that. Do you see that? But actually, if you turn back, you don't see that the sutta actually stops there. The Buddha speaks of higher and higher kinds of `sacrifice', inverted commas: going to the Buddha for refuge, taking the precepts, and eventually even giving up the household life and becoming a member of the Buddhist Order. So Trevor Ling, as it were, stops halfway, or not even halfway, and gives the impression that the Buddha's purpose in teaching this particular sutra, or delivering this particular discourse was simply to assert that `sacrifice is a waste of time, the king should concern himself instead with ensuring full employment in the country'. Well, that is just a very incidental point in the sutra as a whole. It's incidental to the Buddha's illustrating higher and higher kinds of real `sacrifice'. This is the lowest of all, leaving aside the Brahmin sacrifice. The highest sacrifice is when you become a bhikkhu. That is all left out here! So the impression is created that the predominant emphasis of this sutta is on matters of economics, and that it culminates in matters of economics.

So the unwary reader who had forgotten what Trevor Ling had said earlier on would just not know that. It's as though he has forgotten what he's said about the Kutadanta sutta earlier in the book. So - "sacrifice is a waste of time; the king should concern himself instead with ensuring full employment in the country" - as though that is the highest point that the Buddha has come to in the sutta - "The same principle is emphasised in another well-known Sutta", etc., etc. Do you see what I mean? So this is a very misleading way of using this sutta isn't it? [Pause] It almost amounts to sort of selective quotation. All right let's go on then.

Text*"On the other hand, another Sutta tells of a king who failed to make provision for the poor, and of the serious consequences in the life of the state. This king, we are told, instead of going to a holy man to ask advice concerning the proper duty of a king, as his propitious and wise predecessors had done, followed his own devices. 'By his own ideas he governed his people; and they so governed, differently from what they had been, did not prosper as they used to under former kings'. The one thing he had failed to do, apparently, was to make provision to remedy to condition of the poor in his realm. 'And because this was not done, poverty became widespread.' This led to cases of theft. At first the king had dealt with the offenders by making them grants of money, on the grounds that they had stolen because they were poor men and this was the best way to remedy the situation. But in a short time this suggested itself to others as a easy way of making money, and the incidence of theft increased rapidly. The king thereupon changed his policy, and began cutting off the heads of those who*

were caught stealing. But this violent measure only engendered further violence. Thieves now began to say among themselves, Let us also resort to violence: 'Let us have sharp swords made ready for ourselves, and [as for] them, from whom we take what is not given us - what they call theft - let us put a final stop to them, inflict upon them the uttermost penalty, and cut their heads off.' And so, we are told, 'they got themselves sharp swords, and came forth to sack village and town and city, and to work highway robbery. And them whom they robbed they made an end of, cutting off their heads.' Such also, was the sad end of the state itself, whose ruler had failed to make adequate and wise provision for the relief of poverty. From stealing and violence there followed murder, lying, evil-speaking, adultery, false opinions, incest, and perverted lust, until the physical condition of the people deteriorated to the point where their life span was only a fraction of what it had once been".

S: Mm. Well this is all clear and straightforward, the only point is what place it occupies in the overall context of the Buddha's teaching.

Nagabodhi: A very minor place really. Just like turning, you know, like a stage and turning around, maybe, the backdrop into the action.

S: Mm. Yeh. All right let's go on then.

Text*"In these and similar early Buddhist stories, a great responsibility is laid upon the sovereign ruler of the state to act righteously, so far as his own life and conduct of affairs in concerned, and wisely, too, in terms of a social and economic ethic concerning which, it is emphasized, he needs to take advice from 'brahmans'. In the Buddhist literature, as we have seen, 'brahmans' are classed with shramanas and are recognized as such by their character and holy life., not by any hereditary right from having been born of a priestly family. The advice the righteous king needs to take, in other words, is that which, ideally, he will be offered by the Buddhist sangha.*

There is a significant difference between the ethics of the state, with which the early Buddhist tradition was concerned, and the brahmanical idea of the moral responsibilities of the king. As U.N.Ghoshal has observed, the brahmanical royal ethic was the king's own personal dharma or duty, 'conceived in sufficiently elastic terms to provide for the needs of the kingdom and to permit in Manu and still more in the Mahabharata (after Bhishma) the wholesale incorporation of the Arthasastra categories'. On the other hand, 'the Buddhist dharma in its relation to the king involves the application of the universal ethics of Buddhist to the state administration.' The king, in brahmanical theory, is working out his own personal moksha or salvation, by doing his proper duty, or dharma, as a king, just as any other man works out his salvation by doing his own proper duty. The performance of one's personal dharma is the dominating principle of the brahmanical theory. But in the Buddhist view, the king is the agent or instrument through which the eternal, universal Dharma is made effective".

S: Do you see the nature of this distinction? Is that clear? The Brahmanical and the Buddhist conception of `dharma'? The Brahmanical conception of `dharma' was called the `dharma' more as duty as determined by your position in the socio-religious structure. That is to say especially your position in the caste system. If you were a king it was your `dharma' to rule, to punish; it was your `dharma' to fight; it was your `dharma' that you waged war; it was your `dharma' to collect taxes; it was your `dharma' to administer justice - not that you had to do all things in accordance with a higher, more universal principle called `Dharma', but it was as though the doing of those things **was** your `dharma'.

But the Buddhist view was that above the king just as there is above every man, there is a universal principle, a universal `Dharma', and the king, in his own sphere of life, must

manifest that `Dharma', that law of righteousness, as it were, just as every other kind of individual must manifest it in his. Do you see the difference between the two? - though the same word `dharma' is used.

Nagabodhi: In a way it relates to the third fetter.

S: One could say that. They are not explicitly connected in Buddhist literature, but one could make that connection.

Nagabodhi: It's simply doing anything as an end in itself.

S: In modern India some Hindus even go so far as to say that to steal is their `dharma', because they are born into a family whose tradition is stealing, that's their `dharma'. [Pause] And your `dharma' is laid upon you by virtue of your birth into a particular caste, with its own traditions. This is why the Hindu - the orthodox Hindu especially - looks with great disfavour upon change of religion. To him change of religion means giving up your own `dharma' and taking upon yourself somebody else's, and according to the Bhagavad-gita there is fear in another's `dharma'. And this is the basis, of course, of the orthodox Hindu criticism of the Buddha: that being a Kshatriya by birth he gave up the Kshatriya `dharma', which was to fight and to rule, and took upon himself, quite wrongly, the `dharma' of a Brahmin, a Brahmin by birth that is to say, and had the effrontery to teach, which was not his duty, not his `dharma' as a Kshatriya.

So this is why - I quoted this elsewhere - this is why the orthodox Hindu writer, or Brahmin writer actually, (Kumarilla Bhata) who is an authority of the (Purvivimanksa?) school, the ritualist school, says in a work called "Slokavatika", that the teachings of the Buddha, though true, are not to be accepted, just as, he says, because the Buddha being a Kshatriya ventures to teach, so though true, his teaching is unacceptable. He says, "In what sort of way is this? Milk is quite acceptable, but if milk comes to you in a bag made of the skin of a dog, - which is of course `impure' according to orthodox Hindu ideas - then it becomes unacceptable. In the same way the Buddha's teaching, though true, is unacceptable coming as it does from the mouth of a Kshatriya. And that is the orthodox Hindu view in a very, very extreme form.

Some caste Hindus in modern India found fault with Mahatma Gandhi for, as it were, setting himself up as a religious teacher, not being a Brahmin, being an mere Vaishya, a mere trader by birth, by caste. And this goes very deep. I noted for instance, that at school, if there was a question of some celebration which the boys would get up among themselves, and there was a question of some puja, automatically a boy who was a Brahmin by birth would be asked to perform the puja, or just do the little celebration. That was his inherent right; nobody else could do it. It's on this sort of level even in cities. It's very, very strong. It's the `dharma' of the Brahmin to have to do with anything of a religious nature. [Pause]

So, according to the `Arthasastra', the king's `dharma' as king could include all sorts of things that, from a Buddhist point of view, were completely unethical, but they were still part of the king's `dharma'. It was part of the king's `dharma' to conduct espionage, for instance; to have his own private army of spies; it was his `dharma' to execute, even to torture: all this was part of the king's `dharma'. And in doing this he discharged his duty, as it were, and was sure of going to heaven. And in India generally this idea is very, very strong. The merchant will tell you: to make money, that's my `dharma'. I'm serving god by making money, even if his business enterprises are of a very questionable nature - this will still be his attitude towards them. Even if they go into the `black market' and they profiteer, they will say, `well, it's my `dharma' to make money'. That's the `dharma' of a merchant. If I make money then I'm fulfilling my `dharma'. I can use that `dharma' for good purposes, for religious purposes.' This is very much how they look at things. But this is not the Buddhist view.

The Buddhist view is that there is one, as it were, universal moral spiritual principle, or `Dharma, and that this is to be applied by each individual on his own level, in accordance with his own circumstances.

Manjuvajra: Is this why it's got a capital letter?

S: Presumably. At least in English. Don't forget in Sanskrit that isn't possible.

Nagabodhi: Do you think we have any advantage in that we come from a society, or we start out from a group, that does at least have the remains of a universal religion, where there is some notion of a universal moral order? If thing's aren't ....

S: (coming in) Yes, certainly, from that point of view. It is an advantage. For instance there is a Buddhist Movement going on in India. Today there are Buddhists, and there are people who have become converted to Buddhism. Many of the ex-untouchables have become converted. But under the pressure of the Hindu caste system the tendency is for them all to be sort of squeezed into the position of another caste; yet another caste. So the fact that you, for instance, believe this or you believe that, or don't do this, don't do that, is not because that is your `dharma' in the universal sense, that's the `dharma' of the particular caste called `Buddhist', so of course they don't do that, of course they do this, of course they believe in that, that's their `dharma', with a small `d'.

So for instance, for the Hindu, the orthodox Hindu, there can't be any question say, of meat-eating for instance being either `right' or `wrong', no: there are certain castes whose `dharma' includes eating meat, and there are certain other castes whose `dharma' includes not eating meat. In the case of the Kshatriya, yes, his `dharma' includes eating meat. His `dharma' includes hunting, shooting, fishing. But in the case of the Brahmin, his `dharma' does not include those things. So there's no question of a sort of universal ethical principle applicable to all in varying degrees, and according to their different circumstances.

Manjuvajra: Do you think an Indian conditioned by this caste system coming to our country would see a caste system within our social structure, with our class structure?

S: They try to `read' the class system as a caste system, partly in self-justification. Whether they truly see it that way, I don't know, I rather doubt it. But many try to excuse themselves by saying, `Some form of caste system is universal, you've even got it in your class system.' Well, I used to be told this in India by some people: they say, `In England can you go and eat with the Queen?' So I say, `Yes, if she invites me, and there is nothing in our social system to say that the Queen cannot invite and eat with anyone that she pleases'. Whereas under the Hindu caste system you **cannot** invite, you cannot dine with anyone of a lower caste than yourself. So they do try to equate `caste' and `class' in this sort of way, but it isn't really at all tenable.

Nagabodhi: You must have run up against enormous problems more recently with the new complexity of industry and government where people do have to meet people all the time.

S: Yes, but in the cities there are a minority of Western educated people. But what often happens is that there is a sort of compromise in the case of the menfolk especially: they observe caste and caste restrictions at home, but not outside. For instance they'll go out to dinner with someone of another caste in a restaurant, but they wouldn't dream of inviting him home for a meal, if he is a man of a lower caste, because he knows quite well his womenfolk would just not serve that person. They would just refuse to cook. They just wouldn't have anything to do with it. And he can't go against his womenfolk in matters like that. Of course

there are a few educated women who don't mind about these things, but they are very much in the minority, compared with the total population even in cities.

So you get this sort of compromise: caste and orthodoxy at home, and relative freedom outside the home. And certainly it may be said that the men are reactionary enough, but the women are ten times more reactionary, usually, in such matters as this, than are the menfolk even. You quite often find families in which the menfolk, especially the younger ones, are much more lax in their attitude towards caste restrictions, but the womenfolk insist on strongly keeping it up. [Pause] All right, let's go on.

Text*"The point is made explicitly in a collection of sayings concerning kings found in the Pali Anguttara-Nikaya. The Buddha is represented as saying to the members of the Sangha, 'Bhikkhus, the king who rolls the wheel of state, a Dhamma-man, a Dhamma-king rolls indeed no unroyal wheel.' One of the bhikkhus then asks. 'But who, Lord is the king of the King?' The answer given by the Buddha is 'It is the Dhamma, O Bhikkhu!' The Buddhist king - the Dhamma-king or Dharma-raja - that is, the king of king whose rule is envisaged as necessary for the implementing of the Buddhist scheme for society, is the king who rules in subordination to one power only - that of the eternal, universal Dharma (Dhamma). It is this which gives his rule a unique quality; in so far as he rules in accordance with universal Dharma, his rule itself has a quality of universalism; it is not appropriate to any one locality or region or period of time. The corollary of this would appear to be that neighbouring Dhamma-kings will find themselves ruling by the same eternal universalist principles and therefore in harmony with one another. The notion of a single universal Dharma-raja is already to be found in the early Buddhist tradition, as the idea of the one universal monarch, the Chakravartin. In Sanskrit literature Dharma-raja is another name for the Buddha".*

S: This is all very well, but sometimes it seems as though even the Buddhist texts when they speak in terms of the king ruling by `righteousness', by Dharma, and applying the `Dharma' to all departments of state activity, are being, to say the least of it, a little naive. Do you see what I mean? It's all very well to speak in terms of the king being personally `a man of Dharma', practising `dana', `sila', even `samadhi' and so on: this is comparatively easy. But the application of ethical and spiritual principles to social, economic, and political affairs: this is not nearly so easy as it sometimes sounds - do you see what I mean? - even with the best will in the world. Because you need great intelligence, you need a lot of information, you need to understand how things work, you need to understand, perhaps, the laws of economics, and things like that. So I do feel that we need, in this particular field, much more than pious aspirations, or pious hopes, or very broad, general principles, especially in our very complex, modern society.

It's all right to say that society should be just, but in practical terms, what is justice? - and so on.

Manjuvajra: You do get this sort of idea arising when you get this idea of getting rid of the ego in that way, and merging into a kind of collective role, because then this feeling that if everybody is being sort of non-selfish then everything's bound to work out right.

S: There's an interesting thing that I believe, if I'm quoting him correctly, that Marx once said, or wrote, or at least was at pains to make it clear, that when he said that Capitalism was evil he did not mean that individual capitalists were necessarily evil as men. It was the system that was evil - they might individually, if I'm not exaggerating what he said, - they might individually be very worthy men in their private lives, but as capitalists operating that particular system, that they were evil, or the system itself, at least, was evil. He did, as far as I recollect, make that distinction. So your own personal virtue is no guarantee that the system that you are operating is necessarily beneficial to the other people whose lives it affects. Do you see this? Even your personal virtue, your personal goodwill even, is not enough! There

has to be also an understanding of, for want of a better term, the laws of economics, or the principles of economics, and the working out of a system which is actually going to benefit people. It's no use your being a benevolent individual if the system that you are operating, whether you personally wish it or not, is operating to the disadvantage of others.

So this is where wisdom has to come in. The fact that you are individually virtuous is not enough, and least of all in modern times! It has been said, for instance, that Hitler was a vegetarian, he loved animals and was very kind to children, but that isn't enough! The personal virtue of the individual ruler. What about the system that he is operating? [Pause] And sometimes it may well happen that a very worthy person undertakes some great public work with the best of intentions, but the result is only harm and disaster; and sometimes he's quite bewildered and confused as to why it should have come about like that. Do you see the sort of thing I mean?

So it isn't a question of a straightforward extension of your private virtues as an individual into the public sphere. That is hardly possible perhaps. It also requires the devising of a system that will work to everybody's benefit. And there intelligence is needed, proper information is needed. Do you see what I'm getting at? And this isn't an easy matter in the very complex society of our day, where your national arrangements are being impinged upon by all sorts of other national, and international arrangements **all the time**.

Lokamitra: I wonder if that's even possible, whether we can work out a system which is to everyone's benefit.

S: Whether you can work out a fool-proof system, I think, is very doubtful. Whether a better system than the ones we have at present can be devised is, perhaps, another matter. But it's not even enough to say that if everybody becomes virtuous, if everybody becomes benevolent, then all the problems of the world will be solved, because a lot of those problems arise out of say faulty organisation. Do you see what I mean? - and are not to be solved by anybody's individual virtue, at least not virtue in the sense of simple goodwill and benevolence, and good intentions, and wish not to harm others. Intelligence is also needed, information needed, co-operation needed, and so on. Sometimes you find people with the best of intentions end up by doing the most harm.

Vessantara: So this is kind of extending the difference between `good' and `skilful' ..... [**S** Mm ! Yes !] ... to a wider....

S: You need to be skilful in a much more complex and systematic fashion, a much more understanding fashion, a much more informed fashion. Your naive goodwill is certainly not enough. For instance out of your naive goodwill you may invest a certain amount of money in a certain type of business and provide work for a certain number of people, but in the course of so doing you may throw other people out of work, and this was an effect which you did not intend, and had not foreseen. So you end up by doing at least as much harm as good, whereas your intention was only to do good.

Manjuvajra: Would it be impossible to even imagine a situation where all the loose ends could be dealt with?

S: I can imagine it, sort of in the abstract, but the working out of it in detail is quite another matter, and it may or may not be possible, I don't know.

Manjuvajra: That seems to me to be akin to trying to find an intellectual system to describe truth, or ... [**S:** Mm. Mm.] .. a scientific description to describe .....

S: (coming in) Well, we might be able to do it with the help of giant computers into which you feed all the relevant information, and they would at least tell you what you can't do, or they will tell you which action will produce what effects, which perhaps you could not have calculated for yourself, because the factors involved are so numerous and so complex.

Vessantara: This assumes you've got the right information to feed into them.

S: Exactly, yes. But perhaps you have other computers collecting information (sound of chuckling). What I'm trying to point out is that to apply moral principles to public life is not so simple and straightforward a matter as some of these very nice quotations might lead us to suppose. Of course we should try to embody our moral and spiritual principles in public life, in social life; but it's a very difficult matter to do so. It's not just a question of the king or the rulers, or any other group of people being individually virtuous, privately virtuous. Does everybody see this?

Nagabodhi: This little thing that Ananda has prepared as a hand-out, a part of which just goes into the ills of society - what's wrong with society - and it struck me just a couple of days before I came away, that if we attract people from this leaflet, in a way they are going to say, "What is your answer?" , just as a few people wrote to Ananda after his letter went into *The Times*, saying, "Well, come out with it, what are you suggesting?".

S: Did he? Did he come out with it? Apropos of his letter to *The Times*.

Nagabodhi: He sent them *"Mind Reactive and Creative"* - and things ... (chuckling) .... like that. I personally had the feeling, well, that isn't what they wanted to know. That might be something that's good for them, but if we do take that kind of line, that sort of `look at the state of the world' sort of line, for some people, for some listeners, some of us need to think, maybe quite specifically, about society, rather than simply saying ,`Well, it's because of the reactive mind'. That will satisfy certain types, other types might want to follow through the applications.

S: To put it again in those terms: the fact that you personally have a thoroughly `creative' mind does not mean that one can very easily have a `creative' society, as it were, simply by having a large number of `creative' individuals. There are still the complications, organisational and administrative, economic and political, between these `creative' individuals **to be worked out `creatively'.** And there you've put your finger on the real issue. Of course goodwill will help, but it isn't a panacea by itself.

Manjuvajra: Do you think we can even consider the working out of an ideal society. I mean, has it got anything to do with Buddhism?

S: Well, in the sense that the more positively society is organised in the sense of being organised in such a way as to assist the growth of the individual, the more easy it will be for the individual to grow, and the more individuals **will** grow. So we're concerned from that point of view. In the case of those who are really **determined to grow** it's doubtful whether society, the condition of society is decisive one way or the other. But in the case of the majority perhaps, the state of society does count quite a lot and **does** determine whether they become relatively more positive, or relatively more negative.

Manjuvajra: And we have to ask quite seriously what kind of society that will be, because it wouldn't fit in with the normal ideals of society.

S: No, indeed not! There would be a Spiritual Community on a grand scale.

Manjuvajra: Even supposing one was to try and develop a kind of political ideology, or sociological ideology, to give to these people who ask what you're going to do about the ills of the world, then all the current `utopias' tend towards a materially satisfying world, whereas that wouldn't be the Buddhist aim at all.

S: Mm. Well no, not at all, in fact it might be one of our principles that the standard of living should be systematically reduced, at least in the West, at least as regards the affluent societies. I think, possibly, our best approach is the piecemeal approach. That is to say by way of specific projects, which could be seen actually to work, and to be economically viable, and seen to be carried on in accordance with fundamental principles of the Dharma. It could be seen, say, to give people a livelihood, to give them pleasant working conditions, give them the possibility of positive relationships among themselves in the context of their work, and, as I said, to be economically viable at the same time, and to do no harm to society outside. If one can initiate a number of such projects, well, that will at least, make some sense to some of these enquirers. We may even frankly say well as yet we haven't worked out any blueprint for society as a whole, but here are our experimental projects, which we believe point in the right direction. And the projects, of course, will be operated by people who are interested in `right livelihood', in the first place as `right livelihood', so that in earning a living they don't deviate from the Dharma, and who are interested in earning their livelihood, even their 'right livelihood' in such a way as to leave themselves sufficient time for other interests and activities of another Dharma kind. [Pause]

For instance if we can show people a printer's shop and say, `Well, look, we've got, say, six people working here, ten people working here, (laughter) a hundred people working here. These are all members of the Order and `mitras'. As you see, they work together very happily. They have a very positive relationship among themselves. They are producing material which we believe is beneficial for society - in other words, producing `Dharma' material. They don't work fulltime, they work part-time. They make enough money in that way to meet their very simple needs. The rest of the time they're meditating, they're on retreat, they're taking classes, they're studying, and so on. It's in this sort of way that we see the future society. This is how we see people living in the `ideal' society of the future. So at least you've got an individual, specific, concrete project that you can show people. I think this is very good. Well, this is, in a way, what has happened with Sukhavati to some extent. It's a project, something in action in accordance with certain ideals which you can actually show people; that they can come and see and look at. They can even touch the people working and see that they're real! (chuckling) It's not just an idea, it's something practical; something in terms of flesh and blood, and brick, and stone, and mortar.

Nagabodhi: At least half the crunch is this thing of being self-supporting. On the one hand you can look at Sukhavati and say, well, here are people working and a good atmosphere, but at least for the time being the project is supported from outside, which is the missing link. [**S:** Yes. Right.]

S: But that link will not be missing much longer.

_____: Perhaps that's the reason that we work full time.

[End of side one side two]

S: Right! Yes, indeed! - to close the gap. When it's functioning fulltime, those who are working will be working part-time. [Pause]

Manjuvajra: I still find it difficult to envisage, really, where we can apply the principles of

Buddhism to an overall plan for a new society, I mean I always think that it might be better to think in terms of, all right we find ourselves in this society, or any other kind of society, but that we've got these particular aims and ideals, and so we try to put those aims and ideals by forming this little micro-society, which we invite people to come into, from which they can then develop in a sort of spiritual way.

S: In the ultimate analysis you will never save the group - the group cannot be saved. The group is incapable of salvation. You can only `save' - to use that term - individuals. And you can only `save' them by calling them out of the group. The group may be relatively `good', or relatively `bad' at any given period of history. It is your duty to make it as good and as positive as you can so as to help the individuals - the potential individuals - in it; but you will never ever have a perfect group. A `perfect group' is a contradiction in terms. You'll never have a `perfect' society. But a `perfect society' must be your ideal, as it were, so that you are inspired to carry out such improvements as you can to the existing society of which you are a member, to the best of your ability. There's only one perfect society, only one ideal society, and that is `Sukhavati' - not the one `on earth', the one elsewhere. [Pause]

So one has to do one's best to call, as it were, individuals out of the group, or out of the various groups to form them into a Spiritual Community in which they will be in spiritual contact with one another. And then to try to influence, either individually or through the spiritual community as a whole, ... to try to influence the surrounding society in as positive a way as possible. But I think you will never, ever completely transform that society. As I've said, at certain times it's relatively `good', at certain times relatively `bad'. And you just have to do your best whatever the circumstances may be. You may be lucky enough to live, as we live at present, in a reasonably positive society, which doesn't get in our way too much. I don't think we always appreciate this. But even so, let us do what we can to improve the society in which we live, and be thankful we're not living in a worse. There might be other groups, other societies in which one might live, where it would have been very, very difficult indeed for us to carry on - almost impossible. [Pause] I don't think a state of stable equilibrium will ever be achieved as regards society. It will always be in process of either getting a little bit better, or getting a little bit worse; or even getting very much better, or very much worse. It will go up-and-down, up-and-down for the whole time, and the spiritual community will have to do its best to sustain itself - to keep itself afloat, as it were, in the midst of, or on the top of, all these `waves' that keep going up, and going down.

You see the sort of picture I have in mind? The main thing being of course to keep the spiritual community going. Sometimes you may go through a very difficult period, and find yourself in the midst of a society or group which is very, very inimical to you. On other occasions you may find yourself in the midst of a society, or a group which appears for the time being at least, temporarily, to become virtually Buddhist, and then you have a very easy time. On the other hand when you're living, when the spiritual community is living in the midst of a society which doesn't really approve of it, and even tries to eradicate it, well, certain positive qualities are brought out in members of the spiritual community, as individuals, that might not have been brought out otherwise. And similarly when the spiritual community finds itself living in the midst of a society virtually converted to Buddhism, the members of that spiritual community may start slacking off, and taking things easy, and may become corrupted by temptations of worldly power and influence.

So it's not always easy to assess what are the favourable, and what are the unfavourable conditions vis-a-vis society, or with reference to society. I think probably on the whole, we've got it sort of fairly evenly balanced at present in this country. It isn't easy to counteract the negative forces in society, but they don't impinge too violently on us. They're pervasive rather than sort of frontal in their attack - a sort of subtle undermining rather than a frontal assault. But it's as though into the surrounding society we have to as it were, put out

extensions of ourselves into various spheres, which will be in the midst of society, but which will in fact be extensions or outposts of the spiritual community.

___: Would a little analogy being sort of like society is like a big jungle... [**S:** Mm. Mm.] ... and you build within it a little sort of city - which is a small group, a little sort of sub-society, sub-culture, where there are all these little businesses going on, people living in communities and so on. And out of that city grows individuals, and then they can just wander here, there, and everywhere.

S: And establish, perhaps, other cities in other parts of the jungle. But this is why it's very, very important that your spiritual community members should not degenerate into `professionals', and simply start looking after the `jungle' - or servicing the `jungle'. Their business is to hack out clearings in the jungle, to `beat the jungle back', as it were; to demolish the `jungle' even! Not to become the servants of the `jungle'; not to sort of keep the `jungle' going. And this very easily happens, this sort of (thing) The clergy end up by becoming, for instance, a sub-division of the Civil Service. It's a bit like that in some Buddhist countries like Thailand. Anyway let's carry on.

Text*"THE CHAKRAVARTIN AND THE BUDDHA*

It is significant that in Pali Buddhist literature also there is, in many of the references to the Chakravartin, a clear and conscious parallelism between the universal world-ruler and the Tathagata, or Buddha. Beside or behind the Chakravartin there stands the Buddha: the two are so closely linked that they almost appear to be one and the same in different roles. There was a strong tradition that Gotama's Buddhahood was seen as an alternative to his being a Chakravartin. But there is also a suggestion, in many passages, that the Buddha is in every respect virtually identical with the Chakravartin.

Bhikkhus, these two persons born into the world are born to the profit and happiness of many, to the profit, happiness and welfare of many folk. What two? A Tathagata, an arahant who is a fully Enlightened One (Buddha), and a world-ruling monarch ... Bhikkhus, these two persons born into the world are born as extraordinary men. What two? A Tathagata ... and a world-ruling monarch. Bhikkhus, the death of two persons is regretted by many folk. Of what two? A Tathagata ... and a world-ruling monarch. Bhikkhus, these two are worthy of a relic-shrine [stupa]. What two? A Tathagata ... and a world-ruling monarch.

Ghoshal interprets the parallel drawn here and elsewhere in Buddhist canonical texts between the Buddha and the World-ruler as meaning that the World-ruler 'is the temporal counterpart of the spiritual World-teacher, resembling him not only in his outward bodily form (the so-called thirty-two bodily signs of the superman) and the extraordinary incidents of his birth, death, cremation and commemoration, but also in the jointly unique role as universal benefactors."

S: What do you think about this parallel between the Buddha and the World Ruler?

Lokamitra: He seems to have got it a little bit wrong.

S: Well this surely can be a sort of analogical relationship between them just as the king looks after the material well-being of his subjects, so the Buddha looks after the spiritual well-being of his disciples. There is an analogy in this sort of way but that doesn't suggest that the two are to be placed side by side, as it were.

There's also the point that these traditions about the Chakravartin, Chakravatiraja, may well may not go back to the Buddha himself but to have been incorporated in the scriptures a

couple hundred years later when Buddhism was spreading, and when it had secured royal patronage. In the earlier parts of the Pali Canon, as far as I recollect, there are no references to these sort of traditions at all. The atmosphere is very much that of the forest, of the remote hermitage, and the cave, and not that of royal courts and world rulers and all the rest of it.

Vessantara: Can you recommend something which would actually go into which are the relatively earlier and later parts of the Pali Canon?

S: There is a book by Pandey in the Aryatara library, which I brought from India. Mrs. Rhys-Davids of course discusses these things quite a lot in her various works. But Pandey is quite good on the whole. I forget the title of his book, but it's in the Aryatara Order library.

Vessantara: How do you spell his name ? [**S:** P-A-N-D-E-Y]

S: Also, usually, the introductions - Rhys-Davids' introductions to his translations of various Pali texts. He's usually quite judicious in this respect. [Pause] All right, let's go on.

Text*"It is this close resemblance, amounting to virtual identity, between the World-ruler and the World-teacher which has the effect, by implication, of distinguishing the Buddhist conception of an emperor or world-ruler from the Brahmanical conception of the emperor, as the latter is set out, for instance, in the Arthasastra of Kautilya. The political philosophy which this treatise embodies, and with which political practice corresponded fairly closely, is that might is right, or that what is expedient is right. The Buddhist political philosophy was founded, as K.N.Jayatilleke pointed out, on the principle that 'the wheel of might turns in dependence on the wheel of righteousness.' The conflict between the two philosophies was one which, as we shall shortly see, was experienced as a conflict of conscience by the emperor Ashoka.*

Certain clear inter-relationships can thus be seen within the structure of society envisaged in early Buddhist tradition and practice. Three major elements can be distinguished: the Sangha, the king and the mass of the people. Three relationships can also be distinguished.
(1) The Sangha, as the realization in practice, or visible embodiment, of the new wisdom, stood in a special relationship to the king which was a continuation of the relationship which had existed between the Buddha in his day and the kings of Koshala and Magadha. This relationship was in principle of the same kind as that between the World-teacher and the World-ruler.
(2) In the other direction the Sangha was related to the mass of the people. The community of the Sangha arose out of the common people who both provided its recruits and ministered to its needs. Moreover, what the community of the Sangha was now, all humanity was eventually to become; proleptically, the common people were members of the Sangha.
(3) Meanwhile, it was necessary that until all should have fully apprehended the Buddha-Dharma and have entered into the wider realm of consciousness to which life in the Sangha led, there should be a centre of political power to bring an interim unity into what would otherwise be the chaos of multiple units, to maintain law and order and promote the common welfare. From the people, in the Buddhist view, the king derived his authority rather than from any divine source; in their name and for their good he exercised it.

This triangular relationship, Sangha, king and people, provides the basic structure of Buddhist civilization. The introduction of Buddhism into a country meant, therefore, the attempt to establish this structure, and Buddhist civilization may be said to exist where this structure can be found. It will be the purpose of the second part of this book to trace the expansion of Buddhist civilization in those terms, first in India, and then, by way of confirmation, in Ceylon too."

S: In what appears to be, or in what are regarded as, the earlier portions of the Pali Canon, there is no trace of this triangular relationship, or this triangle. You rather get the impression of the Buddha, as it were, at the top - or if there is a triangle let's say there is the Buddha at the top surrounded by his disciples, and his arahant disciples especially, and at the bottom of the triangle there are various groups of other people. The kings and rulers are one group, the traders are another, the village folk are another, Brahmins are another, the followers of other wanderer teachers form another group, and so on. You certainly don't get the impression of Buddha - King - People. You rather get the impression of the Buddha in contact with a number of different groups of which the king and his court represented just one. You see what I'm getting at? No special importance seems to be attached to the king as compared, say, with the wealthy householders, the merchants, or the wanderers who are followers of other teachers, Brahmins, and so on. Later on no doubt, this sort of triangle did develop, you get it especially in the days of Ashoka, but it certainly doesn't seem to have been present at the very beginning. Do you see the difference?

There's another thing I'd like to say, or to talk about: one does find that traditionally very often Buddhism seems to have believed in what we may call `conversion from the top'. Do you know what I mean? - that if you wanted to spread Buddhism anywhere, if for instance the bhikkhus wanted to spread Buddhism anywhere, they went to a new region, they went to a new country, they tended to go very often if they could, to the `man at the top', who was usually the king or the emperor, their idea being to convert him first, and then through his influence, or through his prestige at least, it would be easier to convert everybody else. Don't forget that in ancient times you found more culture, as it were, at the top than at the bottom of society. So perhaps there was a certain rationale in your trying to do this. I've certainly noticed Buddhist organisations, notably the Mahabodhi Society of India, trying to do this in India - trying to get in touch with the people at the top, and to try to influence them. And sometimes Eastern Buddhists coming to the West try to do it here, though usually without any success at all. But it seems to me that whatever justification this approach **might** have had in the past under certain circumstances, has no justification whatever in the present! If anything, one has got to start at the bottom and work one's way up, if you see what I mean.

Has anybody got any thoughts on this? Looking at this way of doing things - starting at the top - in the most say unfavourable light, what does it really amount to?

____: Just making it into a `group' thing.

S: Using power. Yes, it does. And I'm quite sure that sometimes it was just that, and the conversion say, of a regional country to Buddhism had much more of a cultural than of a purely or truly spiritual significance, especially when that particular country had not much culture before Buddhism came along. Buddhism in the organised sense was for that country the carrier of culture, the bearer of culture, and quite rightly so. But that must not be confused with the spreading of the purely spiritual teaching, the purely spiritual message.

So even nowadays the attitude of many Buddhist missionaries, for want of a better term, coming from the East is to try and get in contact with well-to-do people, well-connected people, leading people, rich people, prominent people, and interest them. Most Buddhist missionaries coming to this country are not interested in working with ordinary people. I've seen this sometimes in a quite dramatic sort of way, they are just not interested. They want to get in contact with well-to-do people, and even rich people, prominent people, and, as it were, work their way down. They convert them, and they, as it were, convert those people under their influence. It seems to me that this is completely unrealistic, besides being perhaps wrong in principle.

Manjuvajra: In the older societies presumably the kings and the richer people would have

been the people with the loudest voice.....

S:(coming in) Yes, and not only that but very often then, it might have been impossible to function at all without, at least, their sympathy.

Manjuvajra: Yeah. But my point was that if you converted the king then you would have a much better organ of communication. So what you really want to do is communicate the Dharma, so really the people you would want to convert were the ones with the best ability to communicate, or the sort of most .....

S: Do you mean having themselves the best powers of communication, or having under their control the means of communication?

Manjuvajra: Well, in a way, both; because a means of communication is just a system - whatever you put in one end hopefully will come out the other. So if you can put at least the ideals of Buddhism in one end they get communicated, then that's really what you're aiming for, rather than .....

S: But does this really work? Would it work for instance to have your men in the BBC for instance?

Nagabodhi: Well, look at this book, really, that we're studying. We have a sympathetic writer, it seems, doing his best to give an exposition of the Dharma. He's read the texts, he's.....

Manjuvajra: Yes, but we'd say that maybe he's not really been converted in the real sense. I mean if he had've been, and if he had written this book then it would have been a lot more valuable. And in the same way, if you had a film maker for example.....

S: (breaking in) .... he isn't going to the top: he's addressing the general public.

Manjuvajra: Yeah. I thought we were talking about a way we could have interpreted this ... well, what I was talking about was a way of interpreting this `conversion from the top', seeing it in terms of converting people who have got the ability to communicate.

S: You could to some extent, because Ashoka for instance, after his `conversion', to use that term, did set up, as it were, messages to the people on slabs of rock in prominent places and on columns he erected specially for this purpose. He was the first to attempt virtually a sort of mass propaganda of this sort addressed directly to the people. But this is a very, very exceptional instance. So you could say that Ashoka had the means of doing this: he could order these masses of rock to be smoothed and chiselled in this way, and the columns to be set up all over India, virtually. But this was, as I said, very exceptional indeed.

___: Would it have been best just simply having access to the means, and the facility rather than his influence and prestige being the ruler.

S: Well, if you try to put behind your message the influence and prestige of the king as such, as distinct from merely getting the royal protection so that you can preach without molestation, then you are virtually invoking power.

Nagabodhi: I think we very much have to find our own methods of communication so that we can always communicate on our own terms, from our own terms.

Siddhiratna: What actually is the objection, Bhante, to that idea of invoking power?

S: Because people may listen to you and, say, even pretend to accept what you have to say because they think that the king has accepted it and maybe they **ought** to accept it, or at least go through the motions of accepting it to keep on the right side of the king. And we do find in Buddhist history a lot of that sort of thing.

Lokamitra: There are two aspects really: there's that and there's also being on good terms with the `powers that be', in a way, like we are in Bethnal Green.

S: You need to be on good terms to the extent of ensuring that they don't get in your way. [VOICES: Yeah.] At least that is seen, but of course, in the old days, the king could stop, especially any foreign preacher instantly, by a mere order. So at least, perhaps, you had to go to the king first and make it clear to him what exactly you were doing, that you were not engaged in any subversive activity, and had something positive to say. At least you had to recommend yourself to the king in this sort of way. But to do anything more than that and to try to win over the king with the idea that he should virtually put pressure on his subjects, well, this is completely against the principles of the Dharma. And we see the Buddha himself made no attempt to do that whatever! If he was on such friendly terms with Bimbisara and Pasenadi as Trevor Ling makes out, why should he not have encouraged them to do more for the propagation of the Dharma.

Lokamitra: We don't want the sort of people who come in for those reasons.

S: Yes. Right. So this is why I personally feel that in this country we would do better to start at the bottom, that is to say just be an individual in personal contact, first hand contact, with ordinary people, not try to influence them, as it were, through their bosses. [Pause]

I remember, in some Buddhist circles, in the old days before I started `the Friends', there was quite a bit of talk and speculation as to whether it wouldn't be possible to get Princess Margaret, as she then was, interested in Buddhism, because that would really ensure that Buddhism would get well and truly planted in Britain. (Laughter)
Well, the Maharishi followed much the same sort of method didn't he?.

Nagabodhi: He still does very much! That is their policy.

S: Of course, I mean, Christianity followed that policy when it spread through Europe: You convert the king and the king gives orders, and you disobey them on pain of death, that you're going to be baptised tomorrow - the whole population - that's that! - received into the Christian Church, this is what he's decided for you. And this is how most Western tribes and peoples were converted to Christianity: the king decided it would be a good thing to introduce this Roman culture, and have all these cultured people teaching everybody reading, writing and arithmetic. All right, they insisted on baptism as a price, fair enough, - everyone is going to be baptised. That's how, in most places, people became Christian. [Pause]

To use the current idiom we have to start at the grass roots. [Pause] If some of the individuals who come in have got certain powers of communication, so much the better. [Pause]

Nagabodhi: It's interesting that the Maharishi - his movement - had a lot of exposure in newspapers and on television, yet the ideas that actually got out about it are, in fact, quite distorted, I think, of what they are actually about, or at least quite a few of the people are actually about. And people I've spoken to just individually, have to spend all their time counteracting the harm done by the amount of publicity they get.

S: Oh! I'm rather surprised to hear that. What sort of misunderstandings have arisen?

Nagabodhi: In particular there seems to be a much greater emphasis on the idea of spiritual development, and the existence of some kind of philosophy, or philosophical basis behind it, rather than merely the impression that's given is simply more or less it's all going to do itself.

S: Ah. Because in the early days I remember when I came back from India, I think the Maharishi had just started then, a few years afterwards, a very common criticism was that the Maharishi himself and his movement were interested mainly in money; and this was because of the practice that they then had, which I think they have now discontinued, of offering a flower, a handkerchief and a week's wages or salary, or whatever, at the time of your initiation. I think they modified that subsequently; but there was a lot of criticism at the time about this. The criticism admittedly, as far as I could see, on completely wrong grounds, quite non-spiritual grounds.

Nagabodhi Yes. Like the worst thing that could happen to you is you lose twenty quid.

S: Yeh. But the criticism usually being that spiritual things should be provided for free etc., etc. - that there should be a sort of `spiritual welfare state' that laid on everything for you; that you shouldn't have to pay anything. That was the usual assumption behind the criticisms. [Pause]

Vessantara: What do you think more correct grounds would be?

S: I don't see any reason for criticising them for insisting on this sort of offering. Clearly it can be regarded as a payment, but if you value what you're going to receive, surely you should be prepared to give something. And if you're dealing with the public at large, and if they're prepared to pay for everything else of value that they receive at any level, why should they not be prepared to pay for that? I didn't see that as a very valid criticism of the Maharishi at all. Whether what you receive was in fact of sufficient value, that is in relation to the money - you can't really compare the two - but itself of value in terms of your personal development, that's another matter. But I don't see how one can take exception to his expecting an offering, or even asking for payment.

Nagabodhi: But we uphold the principle, as much as possible, we give the Dharma free. [**S:** Yes.] Why is that? Is that because people are unlikely to give so we have to just give anyway?

S: No. I think certainly we uphold the principle: we give the Dharma freely, but you can't really give to people who are not prepared, really, to receive. And I think being prepared to give something out of gratitude is part of the whole business of being able to receive.

Vessantara: I don't see how that answers Nagabodhi's question, if he's saying .....

S: Well, you give what you can freely, but on the other hand certainly encourage people to give what they can. But I don't think you need make an immediate connection between what you give when you give it, and what they give and when they give it. But I think sooner or later it must be made clear to people that if they really want to receive then they must start giving. Not because you won't give unless they give, but that you cannot give unless they give. The giving shows the receptivity, and how can you give unless they can receive. The giving isn't a one-sided affair, it's a two-sided affair. So the more of the Dharma they want to receive, the more they must be prepared to give **of themselves**, which includes, of course, of their worldly goods. There can't be a one-sided giving, really, beyond a certain point. The initiative comes from you, you give the Dharma, that's fine, without any expectation of anything in return for you; but if the person to whom you are giving the Dharma wants to go

on receiving the Dharma, well then, he must start, as it were, opening himself to it, and that involves **giving** himself, and giving at least part of what he possesses, otherwise you may be giving, and giving, and giving but it may be all the proverbial water off the duck's back - he can't receive, even though you are, in a sense giving. [Pause]

I sometimes wonder whether we ought not, in the early days, to have charged for everything, despite of what people might have thought, or might have said. I sometimes do just wonder! Because after starting up `the Friends', especially in the course of the first two or three years, there was such reluctance on the part of people coming along to give, or to contribute, or help, in any way, which was really quite deplorable from their point of view - from the point of view of their development. Things are very, very much better now.

Siddhiratna: Wasn't there some teaching in Buddhism about not actually receiving payment for the Teaching?

S: This is true in the case of bhikkhus, yes, this is true. But not within the Vajrayana. (Sound of chuckling)

Manjuvajra: Is that for the reason that you've just outlined?

S: I think it is. I mean I've never heard it explained that way, but I think, in fact, that that is the reason.

Manjuvajra: Why was Milarepa refused the initiation? Because he didn't have anything to pay, I mean, he didn't have anything, materially.

S: I don't know. I don't remember the details. But certainly the main point that emerges here is that people must be encouraged to give. We have also found that, perhaps in more recent years, that quite a lot of people if not the majority of people, are happy to pay, and sometimes even feel happier paying. Perhaps not always for completely positive reasons, a bit connected with what we were talking about in the morning - that they don't like to feel under any obligation. For instance, we've never had any difficulty in connection with courses: people seem quite happy to pay for the courses, don't they? [Nagabodhi: And yoga.] .... and yoga, umm.

___: Don't we run the risk of encouraging that sort of negativity by asking for payment?

S: My personal experience within the context of `the Friends' is that, if anything, there was more negativity when you gave things freely. [Pause]

Nagabodhi: It's funny, because I've noticed people, some people, complaining about the price of a weekend retreat and then zooming off to Quiseda for a day which costs twice as much.

S: Mm. Yes. Twice if they're lucky. My eyes were opened quite a few years ago in our Sakura days when we didn't jingle the `begging bowl' much in those days. And there were two or three people who were sustaining the whole show with contributions. And expenses were very small anyway. There was another friend who was looking after my expenses, so we really needed very little. So we didn't bother very much about the `begging bowl'. But we did sometimes mention it, and I knew that there were certain people who really seemed to begrudge putting in ten - what was it in those days? - It wasn't ten P.

____: Two shillings.

S: Well, - two bob! No, they wouldn't put in two bob in those days, very, very rarely! A

sixpence! But some would even put in a penny, and you'd get any number of buttons and foreign coins and things like that! Oh, yes! It was amazing! We used to have all sorts of things like that. I forgot what I was going to tell you - (sound of chuckling) - I knew that several people were in the habit of only putting a penny at the most, at a time; and really, almost resenting it when you suggested that the average expectation was about sixpence a head for a class to help cover the rent. (Laughter) So one of these people one day I heard talking to another person just after the class, and he said, "Went along to hear the `Incredible String Band' last night. It was really difficult to get in. I had to pay thirty bob for a ticket." So I thought,`Well, well, well, he thinks nothing apparently of paying thirty shillings - one pound ten or now as it would be, one pound fifty `P' for a ticket to get in to `The Incredible String Band' but seems to really resent having to pay a few pence for an evening's meditation and puja, with perhaps a talk or discussion thrown in. So I thought after that that, in a way, it is not right to encourage this sort of attitude.

Nagabodhi: It's very difficult to get people out of it! It's ah .....

S: We mustn't generalise too much; but it's a certain kind of people, usually, or was usually, the sort of pseudo-hippy element. Not ordinary, as it were, middle class people with jobs seem not to be quite like this.

Nagabodhi: I found at Aryatara it's really pathetic. It's getting a little better now, but I was really shocked.

S: Why is this, do you think?

___: Has it got something to do with what you said at the beginning, that people feel that they shouldn't have to pay for spiritual fulfilment.

S: I do believe that they're equally bad when it comes to putting something in the plate at church. Clergymen quite frequently complain. I know it's notorious that you get buttons in the collection plate, isn't it?

Lokamitra: It's sometimes quite a sickening feeling that you get - you've had a crowded evening at the Centre, and you've had maybe thirty people there, and you've got one or two pounds in the dana bowl; and maybe thirty-five people or forty there. And it's really been a tremendous evening and you just feel that you've been exploited, that you've just, ah .... [**S:** Mm. Yes.] It's not a very nice feeling.

S: You get the occasional person, say, who habitually puts a pound in. This is really noticeable. Even in those days we used to have this occasionally.

Lokamitra: We have this with two people - one person who always puts a five pound note in whenever he comes, a young lad, a gardener, that's all he is. And another couple who put a pound in. When they're not there it's very little.

S: So does this mean that one must speak more about `dana'? There was one occasion at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, where I gave a very big lecture about `dana' with dramatic results! The `begging bowl' at the door was overflowing that evening; I think about four or five times as much money in it as usual. I hadn't been thinking along those lines at all, actually, but I just happened to be speaking on `dana'.

Lokamitra: We have to be more confident in our approach because often, I mean, I'm experienced as much as anyone, but I find it quite difficult sometimes to talk about money.

S: Well, you have to believe in the value of your product. This is basically what it is, to put it crudely.

Lokamitra: I gave a short lecture on `dana' at the beginning of this series of lectures a few months ago now, on a Sunday evening when we normally get two pounds, three pounds - three or four pound - we had fourteen, fifteen pounds that night. (Laughter)

S: Does anybody remember from their own early days - own up now - a personal reluctance to give ..... [Several Voices: Oh, yeah. Mm.] .... and why? Just look back, don't think about other people, but what was one's own attitude, and why did one feel this reluctance, which, presumably, one doesn't feel now?

[End of tape 20 tape 21]

Ratnaguna: I think I distrusted any organisations, especially what I regarded as religious organisations. I think I was almost testing to see if anybody would say anything for six months or something.

S: Didn't you then appreciate that even religious organisations must cover their running expenses and .....

Ratnaguna: No, I just never thought of that.

S: You didn't. Ah.

Ratnaguna: It was just like a big organisation.

S: I do know that this was said in the very early days, that some people believed that somewhere behind the scenes there was some very rich foundation that was supporting us, and that money wasn't really needed. Whether this was just wishful thinking because we never gave any hint of anything of that sort because it just wasn't so! (Laughter)

Siddhiratna: I think we were almost exceptional in that, Bhante, because as far I know about spiritual groups - Christianity's got Cliff Richards, and Hare Krishna's got George Harrison, and there's always somebody behind it with a lot of money. [**S:** Mm. Ah. Ah] So I think you can more or less guess that if an organisation is `spiritual' in any way, they've always got a kind of person behind there supporting it. And that we haven't I think is quite unusual.

S: But do you think everyone has?

Siddhiratna: Well, you get the impression that there are always people with quite a lot of money in these organisations.

Nagabodhi: Big ones, yeah - ones that are well-known. There may be other small groups like us struggling along on a button.

S: What about the Sufis, have they got anyone behind them?

Manjuvajra: They had "Four Winds" given to them.

S: Ah, well, Yeah. Ah! [Siddhiratna: Cleo Laine] .... Well there you are. Well, maybe it's something to do with that. Anyway, anybody else have any such .....

Lokamitra: I remember I used to give - I was earning quite a bit - ... when I was coming along

I used to give a lump sum occasionally, but I resented the notices put out like a matter of life and death, and I took a very sort of `hippy' attitude - well if people aren't prepared to support it then it ought to close down. (Laughter)

S: Not sort of taking it as that you were one of those who ought to be prepared to support. (chuckling)

Vessantara: I think about the time that I was sort of getting more involved, my getting more involved was also threatening, and so to give much money was like showing I really was involved..... [**S:** Mm. Mm! Yes] . and committed, and so part of me really wanted to hold back from doing that.

S: Money is a very strange sort of thing, isn't it? It's a very tricky sort of business.

Siddhiratna: So much else is tied up in it.

Nagabodhi: For me, I think there were two completely different scales: there was spending money which I didn't like having to pay for things if they seemed very expensive, but on the other hand that was just what I expected to have to do. I wanted something, I paid for it. When I came to `Friends' meetings I knew I didn't have to pay for it, so that relationship wasn't involved, it involved giving, which was something which I frankly couldn't do. [**S:** Yes] And it wasn't as if I would have equated - I never went to `The Magical String Band' or whatever - but .... [S: (loud whisper) "Incredible"] ... What ? ...[S: `Incredible' String Band']... I just wouldn't have even equated that as a relevant correlation. You know, one was, if you like, the world where one spent money, the other was calling on new kind of totally unknown, and unconscious parts of myself with which I didn't really want to have much to do. And it was quite painful.

S: Do you think some people feel the difference between say, giving to an organisation and giving to an individual? [Voices: Mm.] For instance, you're asked to give, say, for `The Friends', or the Movement, or whatever. Don't you think that some people find that difficult, because they find it difficult to think or feel in terms of giving to something impersonal, as it were?

Lokamitra: Would this be a marked difference in giving for `Sukhavati' as it's become more and more remote, or less dependent upon `Pundarika', and they can't relate to it very easily, or so easily?

S: But in what way `more remote'? It's exactly where it used to be.

Lokamitra: Well, at first people used to come across for our festivals and so on. It was dependent upon us still in certain ways but now it's a very strong community and it's just forging ahead, but it is dependent upon us financially.

S: So you're almost suggesting that in order to get contributions from people you have to appeal to their `maternal' instincts.

Lokamitra: Yes!

S: That they have to feel that you are dependent as it were.

Lokamitra: Not exactly that - in the case of something perhaps not immediately related to them, yes, but they have to feel something quite close, I think.

S: I find this, say personally, quite a lot with various women connected with the movement, they are very happy to do things for me, or to give me things, etc. etc., and they like to feel that `poor Bhante' is dependent on me for this - poor Bhante is dependent on me for his chocolates, or poor Bhante is dependent on me for having his pullover mended. And then they are very happy to do it. So maybe you could extend this, and if you feel that you are dependent on them, then they are more likely to give. But if you're not dependent, so they feel, then perhaps there isn't that sort of inclination to give.

Vessantara: I have certainly found that if people can see a specific need it's more likely to be filled. Like recently in Brighton we wanted an electric kettle for the teas we were making, and we announced that in classes, and someone appeared with one the next week which must have been worth several pounds.

S: Well if you go and take even half a look at poor `Sukhavati' it is quite clear that they need quite a lot! You can see the pictures of it that appear in publicity, and Newsletters and so on.

_____: Maybe they ought to issue a sort of wedding list of all the things that they need.

S: Yeah! That's a good idea.

Lokamitra: But if I need something, for example, to continue my work of fundraising, like a typewriter, it's very easy for me to get one because they are relating to me personally. If I'm raising money like doing a sponsored headstand, it's very easy to get money. [**S:** Yeah.] .... because they are relating to me. But that's how it works, I think.

S: Well, maybe, the personal element is quite important.

Lokamitra: I think it is.

Siddhiratna: I've got the feeling that up until just recently that personal element, in fact, has been more or less missing. It's not been very apparent at all, when you think back. [**S:** Mm.] I mean it really is, apart from yourself. There's been no person that you actually relate to - they need this, because without it the thing can't carry on.

S: Well, perhaps you need to adopt a different sort of approach, that Bhante, say, needs `Sukhavati' to work through; or Bhante needs a community which can accommodate a hundred people so that he can carry on with his work: something like that. But actually we've never adopted that sort of line. There is quite a true line to a great extent. This **is true** in fact.

Siddhiratna: I think as people begin to get into the thing, I think they also become acquainted with the way things actually are ... [**S:** Mm. Yes.] ..... especially financially. And I think then, as Lokamitra's saying, they do become more approachable.

Lokamitra: `As they get into things' - I'm not sure. I think we get a large proportion of our - I won't say large proportion of our money but much more than one would expect - from people fairly new to the Movement. [**S:** Mm! Ah.] And as soon as they get used to things, as it were, there's a marked drop in generosity and so on. And then they start to give in other ways after that. [Siddhiratna: Like time.] .... but there is a period when ....

S: Well the Maharishi seems to have been well aware of this because he insisted on that month's or week's - what was it? I forget which - wages or salary at the time of your original initiation. And he had a very, very big turnover but at least the people who were initiated had all paid quite handsomely.

Vessantara: Thinking back, I can remember going through stages of giving: when I first got involved I wouldn't give very much, and then when I began to see what it was all about, and began to appreciate it then I did give quite a lot for a while; then I started coming to maybe a couple of classes a week, or coming very regularly, and so to have kept giving would have been quite a drain ...[**S:** Mm. Yes.] ... and then I gave even less than before for quite a while; then I started getting involved in other ways. Yes, simply a number of different points you reach where all of sudden your giving, maybe, represents more of a deeper commitment; but then it evens out again, or maybe, even drops away a bit.

S: Of course another point I've thought about is that very often people don't know that other people have given. We don't, for instance, publish donations anywhere: a lot of organisations do. And sometimes if people know that others have given, then it creates a sort of confidence in them; and also, sometimes, sparks off their generosity in fact. So I wonder if we should not consider this.

Lokamitra: When `Sukhavati' is completed - the building anyway - I think we should have somewhere, and perhaps publish with a general, finished leaflet about it, a list of all donors with thanks to them, but not of the amounts they have given.

S: Well then you'd need to have three categories: donors in cash, donors in kind, and donors in labour.

Lokamitra: I think you would. You would. You'd have as much as possible. [Pause] But I'm of the opinion that one has to be quite direct and quite clear to people just for `dana', let's keep it at that level - and just make it clear that the Centre, for example, is not something separate from them, they can't separate themselves from us, as it were. It ...it ...

S: I think one has not to say this too quickly, because many people may be just visitors and enquirers, and if it's always, `Your Centre, and it's your duty to support it' it will seem to them rather presumptuous.

Lokamitra: I'm not meaning to beginners, I'm thinking in terms of the regulars class. One can expect a bit of support from them. [**S:** Yeah.]

Siddhiratna: I did agree, I mean, Buddhadasa put a sign up saying this Centre is your Centre and if you pay fifty `P' a week, you know, it would be .... I felt quite good about that; that seemed to involve me in a way that I don't think I'd really felt before.

S: I think a lot of people wouldn't like it ...[Siddhiratna: Mm. Perhaps new people.] ..... they'd feel it was a sort of imposition - as soon as they come along, it's their Centre, and they've got to assume responsibility (sound of chuckling) ... for supporting it. But it does seem, here and maybe as elsewhere in life, that what really counts, what really is effective, is the person-to-person approach.... [Voices: Mm. Yeah.] ....that if it's the organisation appealing to the public, the organisation in general appealing to the public in general - I mean an organisation such as ours - very little will happen. There will be very little response, very little result. but if it's **you**, say, Lokamitra appealing to Mr. Smith, or Mrs. Smith, and saying, `Look, I'm asking you to give this, please can you? We need it, I need it.' Then you're much more likely to get.

Lokamitra: Khema was very good at that. (chuckling)

S: I think, for instance Vajradaka is very good at that. Well, I'm sure quite a number of you are, if you'd only let yourselves go, - shed your inhibitions (chuckle in his voice).

____: I still find it quite difficult.

Nagabodhi: This sort of thing had been castrated by other people's fear.

S: Anyway, we've got a bit off the track. Perhaps it doesn't matter very much, because this is quite important and relative in a way. But anyway we've finished this chapter on `The New Society. Any sort of general point that emerges, or that anyone would like to raise? [Long pause] We've got through quite a good slice of this book, and of course there is only one day left now, believe it or not. So we have a little time for "The Ashokan Buddhist State", at least for the first section which is on "Religion - The Buddhist and Marxist Critiques", which might be quite interesting. But what about this chapter we've just done?

Manjuvajra: It seems to present a rather naive attitude.

S: It's surprising, in a way, coming from an academic, or is that naive of me? [(Sound of chuckling) [Voice: I don't think so.]

Lokamitra: How can you expect anyone to have any understanding of Buddhism ....

S: (breaking in)... but he's intellectually naive! I mean leave aside Buddhism, he's naive in matters of economics, politics, and sociology!

Vessantara: In a way, I almost get the feeling that he's being rather cynical in so far as he seems to fit bits that suit his argument, and put them all together.

S: I didn't feel he was being cynical. If he is, it's really deplorable; (laughter) but I just got the impression he is rather well-meaning and well just naive. His style of writing is just naive.

____: You don't think it's a clever propaganda to try and get Marxists interested in Buddhism - something like that.

S: Do you think so? [Voice: Mm.] ... (Several people speaking at once) .... I think the Marxists are a much too hard-headed lot to fall for this sort of propaganda. Or am I being naive again?

Manjuvajra: They'd put this aside as sort of hippy claptrap I think.

S: Mm. I think they would. I think you're right there. Mm. Mm.

___: Maybe all he's doing is showing how Buddhism fits into that matrix of social change.

S: But why should he want Buddhism to fit into that. It suggests, presumably he's got some attraction towards Buddhism for what it is in itself, in some way or other; otherwise why should he not just rest satisfied with Marxism, or Maoism and forget all about Buddhism? Why go back two thousand, five hundred years to prove that the Buddha said it all before when you've got it in this new, up-to-date, modern, contemporary form? Why not forget all about the Buddha, especially since you're a Westerner. You don't have to think about the Buddha. Why not be just content with Marxism or Maoism?

Manjuvajra: He does seem to have fallen in love with this idea of the big community, no separation between individuals, and all leading a happy and .....

S: Well, perhaps he's got a hankering after this. We found when we went through Suzuki's *"Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism"*, the whole book seems to be a product of a sort of

personal problem, not to say a personal crisis. In his case, a conflict between reason and emotion. So perhaps Trevor Ling himself - on the basis of this sort of analysis - is the sort of person who feels a bit alienated from society, doesn't feel that he belongs to any particular group - as many people of course feel nowadays - and he's looking around for some such ideal, and perhaps finds it in Marxism, in Buddhism, in Maoist China. I doubt if he finds it in Soviet Russia. He's probably not as naive as that. But perhaps he does have this rather wistful feeling for a group. Maybe he knows the old tribal group has gone for good and he rather likes the idea of the Buddha trying to refurbish the tribal group - all the warmth and non-separateness, and non-individuality, just as one doesn't find in the modern world.

Maybe he regards the Buddha as providing a sort of example, as it were. That what the Buddha did two thousand, five hundred years ago is what we've got to do now, possibly with the help of Marxism and Maoism - to establish a new society in which there won't be any individualism. But he seems to go about it in a very round-about sort of way. I would have thought, if I'd been in his sort of position, and thought as he seems to think, I would have not bothered with Buddhism.

Manjuvajra: Maybe Maoism and Marxism is a bit cold for him.

S: Maybe he's just attracted by the East also. Maybe it's a sort of dream. Maybe he doesn't really think in concrete, practical terms. And maybe he's not all that enamoured of Marxism or Maoism in actual practice, but it's rather pleasant to have this sort of dream in a sort of Oriental setting. (Sound of a quiet laugh) Who knows? I'm just speculating. I don't know him, I know **of** him a bit, and he seems a friendly and decent sort of person, well, from what I've heard. He seems to have some genuine feeling for Buddhism. He has been out to Ceylon, he has, it is said, meditated there. Perhaps he does feel some genuine attraction for Buddhism, but it's rather lost, or it gets lost under all these layers of sociology; but maybe that's the only sort of way he can function.

____: We don't know what he's going to say about Ashoka yet, but maybe he thinks that Buddhism is a demonstration that these fuzzy Marxist ideas can really be put into practice....

S: But why look to Ashokan India, why not look to Maoist China?

____: Maybe he doesn't think that is working, or something.

S: Mm. Mm. It could be something.

____: It's not very popular, you know, not very acceptable sort of example to use ..... [**S:** It is in some quarters.] ... Mm. (speaking together) ... not in the academic world perhaps.

S: But is Ashokan India, the Ashokan state, more acceptable in the academic world?

Manjuvajra: It's far enough away to be exotic.

S: Ah! Right! I think there's a lot in that. Yeah. Mm.

Vessantara: Also the Ashokan state is non-violent. [**S:** Mm. That's very true.] .... I sort of get a picture of him as being quite intellectual, and maybe we'll assume (? ?) a bit of a hate type having the usual corresponding underdeveloped, sort of naive feeling for warmth and .....

S: Well that is a very important point, that the Ashokan state was a non violent state, which you can't say about any of the others really. Certainly not about Soviet Russia, or about

Maoist China, or even Tito's Yugoslavia. I mean Ashoka and the Ashokan state, admittedly, offer a very admirable example in that respect.

___: Wasn't it internally tough? You might say Franco's Spain was a non-violent state - they never went to war with anybody - but internally it was just the opposite.

S: Ashoka did go to war, and he made wars of conquest, but according to his royal edicts he felt remorse at the loss of life and changed his policy completely. The cynics say that he didn't have his change of heart until he'd completed his conquest of India, but that's another point. Usually conquerors don't stop even when it seems reasonable to stop, they just go on. But he did stop. He left the extreme South of India unconquered. He didn't touch that. He seems by all accounts, by all that we know of him, to have had a genuine change of heart. And perhaps the Ashokan state, well, of course is one of the quite shining examples of a positive state in India.

____: You do get the impression that this book is working towards the Ashokan Buddhist state - it seems to feel like that.

S: Yes. Well let's get as far into `The Ashokan State' tomorrow as we can, and see.

____: Maybe we are doing violence to Trevor Ling by just only assessing it piecemeal instead of looking at the whole book.

S: But I don't think we can do any violence to what he's said so far as regards the `Dharma' itself. What he will say about the Ashokan state presumably follows from what he's already said about the Dharma. Anyway it's exactly six. Oh, by the way, I had a letter from Asvajit and he sends his love to all. He wonders what we're doing here. (Laughter)

Nagabodhi: Can I just clarify something you were talking about the other day about this whole business of the individual emerging often, or usually, on account of the intellectual faculty, and leaving behind the underdeveloped emotional faculty - one goes about refining the emotions in various ways, one does get this process though whereby the undeveloped emotions periodically react, and on the other hand there is the tendency towards alienation unless one is taking the emotions into account ... [**S:**Yes.] ... What I find I need to do, often, when my emotions seem to be coming on top of me, is not so much **just** try and acknowledge them and refine them, but also to make an extra effort to **think .... [**S: Mm!] ... Is that wise?

S: Well when you say `think' what do you mean?

Nagabodhi: Well to think clearly. I have to make an extra effort to think clearly. In a way, it's a strain. But there's always that temptation to just do what I feel like doing, and stop thinking, and give that faculty a rest, so that I can just `get into my feelings', but I wonder, really, whether in fact ....

S: The more you have them together the better. Even if the emotions aren't in as positive a state as one would like.

Lokamitra: That's being taken over by emotions which is sort of swinging at the other extreme ...

Nagabodhi: Yes. The emotions try and usurp the thinking ....

Lokamitra: They take over, yeah.

Nagabodhi: So, in a way, there's a battle going on because I make an extra effort to try and think more clearly at those times.

S: I think one should while not at the same time actually sitting on the emotions, but let them be recognised by all means, but not let them take over.

Nagabodhi: Because what usually happens with me is just a deluge of neurotic thinking, it's neither feeling nor thinking.

S: But even if one can't keep one's emotions non-neurotic, at least keep one's thinking non-neurotic. [Nagabodhi: Yeah.] (a laugh) ...

Manjuvajra: If you've got any linking in your emotions that link that maybe you can control your emotions by your thinking. I mean for example: when I'm feeling in a positive emotional state I think in a certain way, and when I'm feeling in a negative state I think in another way. If the thinking and emotions get so close together maybe you could sort of think in the right way and then bring the emotions along with it.

S: Well this is the ideal, but sometimes it's very, very difficult. If the emotions get very negative and very neurotic they just won't, or don't align themselves with your clear thinking, even when your thinking is quite clear. When you get upset about something, maybe something that someone has said, and you know perfectly well, you can see it so clearly it is absolutely ridiculous your getting upset, but you can't help it, you get upset. So what can you do? All you can do is not allow the neurotic emotion to overpower the clarity of your thought; to go on seeing how ridiculous it is, and keep to that vision, even though you recognise all the feelings that are coming up - what those feelings are, this is what I feel. I mean it is ridiculous but I'm not going to deny that, I'm going to recognise those feelings, but I'm also not going to give way about those feelings being completely ridiculous. I see that! So sooner or later the feelings will have to come round, I'm not going to see them in any other way than as ridiculous, though I fully acknowledge that they are there.

But if the neurotic emotions start influencing one's thinking, one starts thinking, `Well, it's only natural I should feel like that, there's nothing really wrong in it, etc. etc.' well then, you are lost. But if you can say to yourself,`I'm being completely ridiculous about that. I'm being completely foolish, and **really see it**, at the same time that all these ridiculous and foolish emotions are going on, well, there's great hope for you still then.

Lokamitra: Do you think one could say something like this: that where oneself is concerned, or where one sees oneself concerned, then the emotions tend to determine the thinking more, and where it's something where one doesn't see, or doesn't feel oneself immediately involved, then the thinking can - a wrong view or a right view - can determine the sort of emotion.

S: I think that is true. Mm. If you don't feel as it were subjectively involved, and your thinking gets a chance to look at the situation objectively, then there's more of a likelihood, I would say, that your thinking will affect your emotions, because as yet, your emotions are neutral.

Lokamitra: It could be in a negative way though, one could ..... [**S:** It could be of course.] ....out of complete .... [**S:** & L speaking at same time) .... being confused ....

S: .... whether that is the case will depend on your overall negativity or positivity. All right, let's leave it there then.

BREAK NEXT SESSION

S: All right let's get on to "The Ashokan Buddhist State", and see how much of this we can do today. First of all "Religion - The Buddhist and Marxist Critiques."

Text*9. The Ashokan Buddhist State*

"RELIGION - THE BUDDHIST AND MARXIST CRITIQUES"

"The reordering of human consciousness, and the reordering of human society - these, we have seen, were the two complementary aspects of the Buddha's teaching. If, in the Pali canon, it is the reordering of human consciousness which receives greater emphasis and has the greater amount of teaching devoted to it, this is because it was the primary concern of the Buddhist Order, the Sangha, while the second was regarded as the proper concern of the enlightened political ruler, acting in accordance with the general principles of the Buddha's teaching, and in co-operation with the Sangha, in order to promote what can be called a Buddhistic society. These two complimentary concerns constituted the Buddhist prescription for the curing of the ills of the human condition. Now, there is nothing to prevent anyone from using the word 'religion' to describe this programme of action, just as there is nothing to prevent anyone from applying the same word to the philosophy, political and economic revolution proposed by Karl Marx, but in each case it would be a highly specialized and somewhat bizarre usage. The two ideologies, as it happens, are not dissimilar, in so far as both are prescriptions which owe nothing to supernatural or theological beliefs, and both are critical of contemporary religious practice. In the Buddhist case, this criticism is milder, and the general attitude, so far as popular beliefs and practices are concerned, is somewhat more tolerant, although even here there is a strong similarity between the early Buddhist attitude to popular religion and that of Karl Marx, expressed in his famous characterization of religion as 'the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation'."

S: So what does one make of this paragraph? Especially this complementary nature of the two aspects, as it were, of the Buddha's teaching.

Ratnaguna: He seems almost to change his mind here when he says the reordering of human consciousness was the primary concern of the Buddhist Order, and the second was the proper concern of the enlightened political ruler.

S: Yes. That does almost give the game away, because I've pointed out before, he doesn't handle his sources, i.e. the Pali scriptures, very critically. He accepts the Pali scriptures as being, all of them, the word of the Buddha, virtually, including those suttas which deal with the righteous king. But if we look at the Pali scriptures critically, and if we think in terms of their composition, or rather compilation over a period of years, a period of centuries in fact altogether, then we see quite definitely that those suttas in which the Buddha is represented as presenting this ideal of the righteous ruler, seem to be among the later works in the Pali Canon. And, according to some scholars, reflect later historical developments, even perhaps those of the Ashokan age rather than the Buddha's own teachings. You see what I mean? So Trevor Ling's whole argument rests on the assumption that those suttas - few as they are - and he admits that they are few in comparison with the others - do actually represent the teaching of the Buddha himself, which is to say the least of it, very doubtful. [Pause]
He himself is forced to admit that in the Pali Canon, "it is the reordering of human consciousness which receives greater emphasis." And also he speaks of the ruler, "the enlightened political ruler, acting in accordance with the general principles of the Buddha's teaching, and in co-operation with the `Sangha'" This suggests a sort of highly organised, not to say centralised Sangha such as did not come into existence, really, until after the Buddha's death. The Sangha during the Buddha's lifetime as far as we can see from the Pali scriptures,

and especially what seem to be the older portions, was a very loosely structured affair indeed! [Pause]

But anyway, taking as it were the question on its merits, do you not think that there have to be these two complementary aspects - the reordering of human consciousness and the reordering of human society, at least so far as is practicable in the latter case? Certainly the Buddha did give some hints in this direction, even though he didn't go nearly so far as Trevor Ling seems to believe. But that aspect of things was not altogether neglected by the Buddha by any means. And perhaps it is good that we should be reminded of that even though Trevor Ling's reminder isn't based on a very deep understanding of the Buddha's teaching, or the spiritual life. But there is no doubt that there is that aspect, and there's no doubt that the Buddha gave it some attention.

Nagabodhi: He must have, as one application of the principle of conditionality. But it is not as something that could be legislated for. [**S:** Mm. Mm.]

S: Well, the Buddha did not - as far as we can tell from the Pali scriptures, and despite what Trevor Ling says - the Buddha did not see himself as a social legislator. But perhaps it is of importance that we should think in those terms. One might say that, notwithstanding Trevor Ling's analysis and critique, life in India in the Buddha's day was not all that bad by any means. One gets the impression of prosperity; one gets the impression of material well-being; one gets the impression of developing culture; one gets the impression of developing civilization. It's as though, if anything, the Buddha and Buddhism, if one wants to look at them in these terms, came riding on the crest of a wave. Do you see what I mean? - as though they were the culmination of something, rather than the solution to a problem. One gets rather that sort of impression. [Long pause]

____: So are you saying that the Buddha arose out of what seems to be almost an ideal society and that that was the culmination of society... I didn't quite understand what you just said.

S: No, what I was saying was that Trevor Ling seems to suggest there's a sort of dislocation and breakdown of society etc., etc., and the Buddha and his teaching arose as a sort of response to that, a solution to that, but that isn't really the impression that one gets from the Pali scriptures. The impression that one gets is of quiet prosperity and affluence, very much so. (Pause)

So, looking at it also from another point of view, one of the factors that made for the stability of the society was the presence of certain, what we can only describe as socio-religious norms. The society in the midst of which the Buddha functioned, that is to say, was on the whole a society that recognised certain moral and spiritual values, and those moral and spiritual values were embodied in a great deal of social life, were embodied in a number of social institutions. Do you see what I'm getting at? So therefore the Buddha did not have to legislate on that level. This work had already been done. In India generally, in Hindu society, this work of legislation is associated with the name of Manu. Have you ever heard of the laws of Manu? The laws of Manu is a whole book which deals with the organisation of society, which legislates for society - of course on the basis of certain orthodox Hindu assumptions - probably this law book in its complete form is a bit later than the Buddha, but the outlook it represents and the laws which it codifies, were on the whole very much in operation at the Buddha's time, though perhaps not in that rigid form that they afterwards assumed. So what I'm trying to say is that, at least on the socio-religious level, society was organised, society was already structured in a pretty healthy sort of way. This is the impression that we get, and that therefore the Buddha didn't have to bother very much about legislating for that society. In a way it was already legislated for. It did have a definite

ethical basis, almost a spiritual basis, otherwise it would not have been possible for these wanderers to go about and to be supported. Not only was the wherewithal to support them, there was the will to support them. There was a general and widespread belief in the existence of higher spiritual states to which at least some of these wanderers had attained.

So therefore the Buddha didn't need to be a legislator. He could more or less leave society to look after itself. Society didn't really as it were cross his path more than in a very few instances. Say with regard to Brahminical blood sacrifices and the caste system in its more rigid form, and there he quite definitely made clear his disagreement.

So one might even say that very broadly speaking, without pressing the point too much, the society of the Buddha's day was governed much more by socio-religious or ethical norms than is our secular society in the West today. Do you get the point? So that the Buddha could as it were concentrate on the purely spiritual side of things. He could concentrate on the Sangha, he could concentrate on the bhikkhus. Because all the conditions that they needed for their existence as a spiritual community, for their existence as individuals getting on with their spiritual development, already existed, were already present. The support was there, the public sympathy was there and so on.

So the Buddha didn't need to be a legislator. The legislator, one might say Manu, had already come and done his work. He is by the way a sort of mythic figure, the sort of archetype of lawgiver. He may have been a historical personality, he may not. He probably wasn't. But anyway that work had been done over the centuries and Indian society, in varying degrees, was governed by the socio-religious provisions or even in a sense by certain ethical laws. So there was a reasonably healthy society in the midst of which the Buddha was functioning. A society which gave on the whole a sympathetic hearing to what he had to say, which didn't get in his way, except just on one or two points, and on which on the whole and broadly speaking, he could rely for support for himself and his disciples who had left the world.

[End of side one side two]

So this is not quite the picture that you would get from Trevor Ling, is it? So one could say therefore that the Buddha did not have to pay so much attention to the reordering of human society in his day, not because that was the business of the king - that all came later - but because the traditional lawgivers had already done their work, and society was already reasonably well structured from his point of view. He devoted himself therefore much more to the reordering of human consciousness. But what is the position in the West, even in this country today? Society gets in our way even in this country much more than society got in the way of the Buddha and his disciples in their day. It might not get in their way in a very dramatic manner, but it certainly hinders in many respects and it doesn't actively co-operate, as it frequently did or usually did in his day.

So therefore we here and now it seems, have to pay more attention to the re-ordering of human society than the Buddha and his disciples had in their day. In those days it was for instance easier to get away from society. Now you can hardly get away from it. In those days you could retire into the forest. You could have minimal contact with society, just once a day or even every other day, when you went for alms. You can't do that nowadays, certainly not for years on end. So do you see what I'm getting at?

Nagabodhi: I'm not sure because it sounds a bit as it you're saying that given different conditions, the Buddha might have been more involved with the group, and it seems.....

S: I think he might have been. I think he might have had to be. We can't say definitely but he might have been, he might have considered it necessary.

_____: Therefore even if he didn't have any idea of legislatoring, would it be possible still to adapt his teaching with that view....

S: As I said he gave hints. He gave hints as to what he thought would be an ideal state of affairs. He gave hints on matters of social ethics and so on, no more than hints and general principles, but they are quite enough for us to go by, as to take as a general most fundamental basis, but there's a very great deal of working out in detail and practical application to be done. This all reminds me of an incident from my own experience some years ago with the ex-Untouchables, that gave me a great deal of food for thought. It wasn't so much an incident, it was a remark by a friend of mine. I was spending quite a lot of time and energy some fifteen years ago - was it fifteen? - oh dear it's nearer twenty! - Anyway going round among the newly converted ex-Untouchables, and lecturing on Buddhism, and I was giving all sorts of lectures on the Noble Eightfold Path and Nirvana and the Four Noble Truths, meditation and so on, and I had in those days a friend in Bombay who was a very good friend of mine. He was a very strange man, very interesting man. He was a Pole, he was a Polish Jew and he'd been in his younger days a Jesuit, having been converted to the Catholic Church, and he'd rapidly outgrown that, and he'd come to India many many years ago - by the time I knew him he was about 65, and he had come as an engineer, been converted to the Gandhian movement, become a very strict Gandhian, that is to say spinning his own cotton thread, weaving his own cloth and making his own clothes etc., etc. An intensely idealistic sort of person, and very very shrewd, very sincere, and I got to know him when he came up on a visit to Sikkhim. He was a friend of friends of mine, and I used to stay with him and the friend with whom he was living in Bombay quite frequently.

So he knew all about my activity, he was very very sympathetic, though not actually a Buddhist. He's been with Ramana Maharshi for a time, with Krishnamurti for a time, and he was very very sympathetic to everything that I was doing, and took great interest, especially in the question of the ex-Untouchables. Of course Bombay was the centre of Maharashtra where most of the conversions were going on anyway. So he was quite an extraordinary character, he was a little tiny man about four and a half feet high, and he was a hunchback too, but extremely shrewd and very very interesting, a very sort of spiritual kind of person in a way.

So one day we were talking about all these things, and I was describing my latest tour, and he said to me - he was very very blunt, he said, 'I think you are wasting your time!' So I said what do you mean by that? He said, 'You are trying to be a Buddha for these people, but what they need is a Manu.' Do you see what he was getting at? That they had embraced Buddhism as it were as a group, which certainly isn't the best way, and I was sort of working hard on them, as it were on the assumption that they were all individuals, and what he was saying was that, no, they need a positive restructuring of their group as such first. In other words they need a Manu, they need a social legislator, more than they need a spiritual teacher. And I thought about this and I thought, yes he really has hit the nail on the head - these people need a Manu in a way, they need social legislation and this is something I saw more and more clearly and that I started paying attention to. For instance they needed to be told about the laws of marriage. This is the thing that came up again and again first and foremost - what were the laws of marriage now that they were Buddhists? For instance was divorce permissible, was polygamy permissible, how was the wedding ceremony to be conducted? Anatta and Nirvana, those could wait as it were, but the world has to go on, wedding ceremonies had to be performed, so how were you going to do it. What was the correct Buddhist way? Could Buddhists follow such and such kind of employment? Should Buddhists drink alcohol? etc., etc. They wanted to know quite urgently about these things. So, as I say this gave me great food for thought.

So a not dissimilar situation exists in this country. We have to think in terms of the social restructuring as well as in terms of the restructuring of human consciousness. So this is why we need not only the Order but also the Friends, the Friends as it were representing, in certain respects the Order sort of pushing out into the surrounding world and creating little sort of floating islands almost where the principles of the Dharma are applied in different say social, economic, even maybe eventually, political situations. Though it isn't easy as I said yesterday and the approach probably has to be very piecemeal and by way of individual projects. But we really do need to do this and to pay attention to this.

Nagabodhi: So you're still talking really about a restructuring of the social order within our own sub society. You're not implying.....

S: Yes, to begin with, but your projects will obviously have one or two feet in the world outside. For instance if you have a printing press project well you'll have your customers and you'll come in contact with them, customers from the outside world, and they'll come to know about your way of doing things and your attitude towards your work and so on. They might come to know that the whole thing is not run for private profit, that the profits go to support people (engaged in right livelihood) a very simple standard of living and to be ploughed back into the Movement as a whole, if there's anything left over. So it's as though we need to think not only in terms of spiritual teaching, but also in terms almost of social legislation. Do you see this? Not only a reordering of human consciousness, but a reordering of human society, at least the society of the Friends, because we can't for the time being do any more than that.

What do you think of what he says about the application of the word religion to this sort of double teaching? He says it isn't really applicable, it isn't really appropriate to call Buddhism, with these two aspects, these two (complementary) aspects, a religion any more than it's really very appropriate to call Communism a religion? It's almost as though we're landed with the word 'religion' very often and we just have to make the best use of it that we can.

All right let's go on then.

Text*"The Buddha's attitude to popular, as distinct from priestly, religion was one of mildly tolerant disapproval, coupled with an acknowledgement of the fact that unless other, basic factors in the situation were changed, it was futile merely to try to argue people out of their prejudices and superstitions."*

S: All this is based on this pseudo-scientific attitude, that, for instance to worship tree spirits and all that is superstition and that the Buddha could not possibly have shared it. But anyway that's an assumption. All right, let's go on.

Text*"The Buddhist prescription was a plan for dealing with those other factors, psychological, social and political. Similarly Karl Marx insisted that it was the disease of which nineteenth- century European religion was the symptom which had to be dealt with, not merely the symptoms themselves. Both Buddhism and Marxism are based on a philosophical rather than a theological view of the human situation, and both envisage the solution in terms of 'cells' or growth points, characterized by the respective principles of corporate existence which each sets out, and devoted to the dissemination of these principles in theory and in action. Both envisage a stage at which the growth of these revolutionary cells will enable the centre of political and economic power to be brought within the revolutionary sphere. In the Marxist case this is a clearly defined aim and constitutes 'the revolution' par excellence, to be achieved if necessary by violence; in the Buddhist case it is less clearly defined as a conscious aim of the Sangha's existence and growth, but the conversion of the political ruler to the attitudes entailed in the Buddhist revolution is*

obviously regarded in the early text as highly desirable."

S: What do you think of this? "Both Buddhism and Marxism are based on a philosophical rather than a theological view of the human situation."? Can you say that?

_____: It's true but limited.

Vessantara: If all he means by that is that neither of them acknowledge the existence of a creator God, then that's fair enough, but it depends on how you use the word philosophical.

S: Yes, he seems to suggest that both are rational. Whereas as we saw earlier on, the Buddha's insight under the Bodhi tree was not a rational insight, it was a spiritual one. "Both envisage the solution in terms of 'cells' or growth points, characterized by the respective principles of corporate existence which each sets out..." This is of course very true, though of course different kinds of cells, political cells in the one case and the spiritual cells in the other. Do you see this principle of the spiritual 'cell'? Each of our Centres and each of our Chapters of the Order is a spiritual 'cell' you could say, quite literally. "Both envisage a stage at which the growth of these revolutionary cells will enable to centre of political and economic power to be brought within the revolutionary sphere." Do you think this is correct in the case of Buddhism? (Pause) This raises the question of the individual and power. Can the individual as such exercise any power? This is really the basic question to be settled here, isn't it. Even though you may yourself be an individual, in the sense that we usually understand the term, you are at the same time a member of a group, technically speaking at least, and as a member of that group you have power. Say in this country you at least have your vote which represents a certain quantum of power, doesn't it. So can or should the individual exercise power? Clearly within the spiritual community there's no room for the exercise of power, but the members of the spiritual community are also, willy-nilly, members of group, so should they exercise power as members of the group? Whatever power is at their disposal, or should they even seek power within the group? Or is it even within their capability, even not to exercise power, because under certain conditions, say, even not to cast your vote is in fact an exercise of power, by default. What do you think about this?

Nagabodhi: Is it not a matter of taking responsibility, talking in terms of taking responsibility for yourself and for the situation in which you find yourself and acting.....

S: You mean responsibility for the situation in which you as an individual find yourself, with a quantum of power at your disposal?

Nagabodhi: Y-y-yes, which may include your own inner resources as well as any authority invested in you, but at any time you are in a .....

S: I'm thinking of power in the purely, as it were, external, political group sense. I don't include your own personal capacities under the heading of power.

Manjuvajra: What would that power amount to? Do you mean the sort of power one gets through taking a certain position within an institution say?

S: Within a group? Power pertains to the group. Well suppose, let me give you a theoretical example, supposing here in Norfolk, the number of Buddhists increased. Supposing in a certain area there were hundreds, even thousands of Buddhists - this is not impossible within your lifetime, maybe not within mine - all right, supposing then there was an election, at least a local election, say an election to the West Norfolk District Council, the Buddhists might then be in the position to turn the scale in favour of this or that candidate, so that means that the Buddhists, even though they regarded themselves as purely a spiritual community, would

in fact be in possession of power within the group. So should they exercise that power, or should they, as it were, renounce that power?

Siddhiratna: Doesn't this depend whether the Buddhists in fact all follow the same line as individuals? I mean they may have different outlooks on the policies that the councillors that they can vote for might have or might be pros for Norfolk itself.

S: Yes, but if you are thinking, if you are trying to make a connection between Buddhist spiritual principles and certain say social legislation then it would seem that though there might be difference of opinion about matters of detail, certainly the broad principles of applicability would be agreed upon. For instance supposing there was a proposal to set up a slaughterhouse in that area, presumably all Buddhists would not be in favour of that, and would perhaps use their power against that.

_____: I think they should use their power.

Manjuvajra: I definitely thing they shouldn't.

S: You definitely think they shouldn't.

Manjuvajra: Yes, I don't think they should come together and determine policies. I think they should act individually.

[transcript continues from excerpt on end of tape 27!]

Lokamitra: Are you saying that the Buddhist in the area should come together and decide or they should just.....

S: No, I'm just enquiring. I'm not saying anything! Obviously there are the two possibilities. You can't close your eyes to the fact that if there are a number of Buddhist individuals in a certain area, then they are likely, as Buddhists, to think in the same way on certain practical issues, and therefore, whether you like it or not, you are in terms of the group, a power block, even though you don't even consult one another and you don't tell one another what you are going to support or what you are not going to support, ipso facto you do constitute a power group.

Lokamitra: I'd have thought in such a situation, you certainly wouldn't be able to give allegiance to any one party over a period of years unless they were guided by the idea of say Buddhahood.

S: Well they changed their policies, even their principles so shamelessly, how could one possibly give one's allegiance?

Lokamitra: But on certain individual issues, as it were, there would be a point in involving oneself.

Siddhiratna: You mean exercising power?

Lokamitra: Well in voting and so on and in fulfilling those duties, if you like, you have as a member of the group.

S: As a citizen.

Lokamitra: Yes, but it would seem to happen more on the basis of individual issues.

S: It would be a coincidence of views.

Manjuvajra: I don't think that's what Lokamitra is saying, actually. You're saying that.....

Lokamitra: Yes.

Manjuvajra: Oh, it is.

S: Though again on the other hand, certain individuals, knowing that they shared certain views, might well decide to get together for concerted action within the group. They might well decide to do that.

Siddhiratna: Lobbying.

S: They might well decide, yes.

Siddhiratna: If I've understood the argument they're almost sort of bound to exercise that power on those principles.

S: Well as I said even if you don't vote, you exercise power by default, at least to some extent. Anyway let's hear the other point of view if there is the other point of view. Does anybody think that the Buddhist individual as such should quite deliberately and sort of consciously not exercise power within the group, sort of not have anything to do with the group and all its ways, or have as little contact as possible?

Manjuvajra: As an individual?

S: Hm. (Yes)

Nagabodhi: It may be that by just becoming involved in that kind of activity, some people would find it hard to resist the gravitational pull.

S: Yes, well let's hear what there is to be said against it. This is very true. You know very well what that sort of world is like.

_____: If you did sort of (deal in it?), willy nilly as a form of block, it would be a temptation to do the same thing again for another policy. There would be a temptation to use that political muscle in some other situation.

S: I think temptation, the possibility of temptation is no argument really, because there's the possibility of temptation in every situation. You could say if you don't take an interest in the group and the affairs of the group, well there's the possibility of individualism in the unbuddhistic sense, and not caring about other people. There is that temptation, you could argue.

_____: I was thinking that would just sort of leave you open to sort of overtures from all manner and all sides of political.....

S: Oh, it certainly would. If it was known that the Buddhists as such had a certain amount of political power, of course there would be overtures.

Lokamitra: It would mean very much, if one did form a block as it were, it would be very

hard not to operate on the level that other political parties do, and getting caught up in that.

S: Oh, yes indeed. Well one might consider thinking whether there are other ways of functioning. Whether one would have to either support a party as such or be a party. For instance I saw in the case of the ex-Untouchables, Doctor Ambedkar, who was their leader and who sponsored and led the mass conversion, set up two organisations, one religious and one political, the religious one was the *Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha* and the political was the Republican Party of India. I personally had a great deal of trouble with the Republican Party of India because, as far as I could see, it was just a political party. Unfortunately Ambedkar died six weeks after the mass conversion ceremony and the people who were in the Republican Party, who were technically Buddhist, and had who had formerly been members of the Scheduled Caste Federation which was the political organ of the ex-Untouchables, or one of the leading ones anyway, certainly the leading one in Maharashtra, were just politicians in the ordinary sense and though, maybe they'd become Buddhists sincerely, one could see at the very least their political life and activities had certainly not yet been pervaded by a Buddhist spirit!

They were also mostly the office bearers in the *Bharatiya Bauddha Mahasabha*, so they tended to try to use the religious wing for political purposes. For instance if there was a religious meeting, say a conversion ceremony, which was purely religious, these people would want to take the platform to urge their policies or even to appeal for votes for themselves personally. Or even to attack their opponents, even Buddhist opponents, that is people who differed from them on matters of policy, in a very unbuddhistic sort of way, and then, when the bhikkhus came along and when I came along, they would want to try to make out to the people, who had very great regard for the bhikkhus, that we were on their side, that is to say on the side of this particular politician or that particular politician, and parties soon developed within the party, and I think the only reason that I survived whereas quite a lot of other bhikkhus didn't, was that I was extremely skilful in not identifying myself with any party; at the same time not giving offence to any party, which required sort of the real wisdom of the serpent at times, but I managed it. So many times the different political leaders among the ex-Untouchable Buddhists would try to win over my support.

So I saw then what happens when you just get a Buddhist political party which is Buddhist only in name. This is no good at all. I'm not suggesting anything like that would happen in this country, because that was a very sort of peculiar situation there, but what I saw I just didn't like at all.

So one might have to consider other ways of doing things, maybe lobbying on specific issues or supporting specific causes. Rather than sort of lending support in a very general way to any political party or even having one's own political party which would then be exposed to all sorts of overtures etc., etc. One might decide to take up a specific issue and a number of one's members would support that and work for it and lobby for it in various ways and when something had been achieved, well the whole organisation which had been set up for that purpose could just be dismantled, because you would have achieved your objective. I think any sort of large scale issue and large scale party is so complex and includes so much of bad as well as of good that you can't give your support to anything as general as that. The political parties are a case in point. So perhaps if one does decide to exercise any sort of power within the group it will be perhaps in this sort of way, or say taking up specific issues which you feel are definitely Buddhistic and putting one's weight, or such weight as one has behind that particular issue.

Siddhiratna: Presumably that could reach quite far in the sense of a Buddhist Party or something like that campaigning for defence cuts and things like that, or their taxes not going

into arm making industries and things like that, and that would have quite an effect I should imagine on the social economy.

Manjuvajra: You started using the term there, 'Buddhist Party', I understood that that wasn't the point. The point was that supposing there was a campaign to cut defence, then as a Buddhist you might go along and join and support that campaign and work for those defence cuts with really no mention at all that you were a Buddhist. Just putting your energy into trying.....

S: Yes, you need not it clear that you are a Buddhist even, no. One might choose to say so but presumably it wouldn't always be necessary.

Lokamitra: It would be very hard to get involved in national politics at all, because if you're moved by one issue to support a party, there are so many other issues which.....

S: Well this is what I'm saying. I doubt very much whether it would ever be a question of supporting a party, but only an issue. If a party happened to be supporting that issue, well all right, you are fellow supporters on that issue, but nothing to do with party. Because quite often in certain issues you get people supporting from different parties, who are in conflict over other issues, but at least are united on that. You might even think, it might be preferable, if something like this does come up, just to take an interest to begin with in purely local issues, rather than national issues.

For instance again say in a place like Norfolk, well you might have a Buddhist on say the West Norfolk District Council and there might be an application say for planning permission for a battery hen farm, so you might as a Buddhist strongly oppose that, and you might go around getting quite a lot support for your opposition. Not saying that 'well I am a Buddhist, please support me', but 'I do not believe that this is a right sort of thing to do.' So you might get the support of vegetarians and Quakers and maybe the odd sympathetic Anglican priest and so on. But the fact that you are a Buddhist would not necessarily come into it overtly. You would just be campaigning for that issue, and getting whatever support you could, and when you had achieved your objective, or perhaps when you'd failed, well that would be that. You'd just withdraw, that campaign would have ended in success or failure, and you turn your attention to something else. This is probably more the sort of thing that will happen if anything of this sort does happen at all. But I think the word that Nagabodhi used is probably the appropriate one, the relevant one, that is responsibility. I think that's the operative word. One should think very carefully at every step, especially where the question of the relationship between the individual and the group is concerned. Whatever one does should be done responsibly, whether one decides to do something or whether one decides not to do anything.

For instance it occurred to me that, look at New Zealand, what is the population of New Zealand?

Vessantara: Three million.

S: Three million! And it's a country bigger than Britain. If you had a large number of Buddhists there, even a few hundred or a few thousand, they'd be in a position to influence the national life on certain levels if they chose to do so, and perhaps you begin to get the beginnings of a Buddhist society. So we have at least from time to time to consider things of this kind, and don't forget the percentage of Order members there in relation to the population is much higher than it is in Britain. That's quite a thought isn't it. We've got here in this country well it's now I think more than one Order member to every million of the population, but there they've already got one Order member to about two hundred thousand of the

population. So that makes you think doesn't it.

Manjuvajra: That's the same as in Cornwall, so maybe we can.....

S: Ah! (Laughter) One feels even in a county like Norfolk which is thinly populated - I'm told it's 600,000 population of Norfolk, well we've got already quite a few Buddhists in Norwich - Devamitra and his friends are becoming quite well known - so in the end the Buddhist point of view, even perhaps without any question of power, becomes something to be, if not taken into consideration, at least something that is known. At least on an individual to individual basis.

One or two further points that arise here. There is the question of the 'cell'. Yes, the revolution in Marxism is "to be achieved if necessarily by violence; in the Buddhist case it is less clearly defined as a conscious aim of the Sangha's existence and growth, but the conversion of the political ruler to the attitudes entailed in the Buddhist revolution is obviously regarded in the early texts as highly desirable." This is quite correct except that the Buddha didn't think so much in terms of the political rulers as Trevor Ling seems to think. And of course the Buddhist attitude would clearly be one of non-violence. This is probably the biggest issue that Buddhists have to make up their minds about - whether they wish to participate in, or accept responsibility for, or a share of responsibility for, any violence perpetrated within or by the group. This is one of the big issues isn't it. The question of defence expenditure was mentioned. If you pay taxes indirectly you contribute to that etc., etc. No doubt the Buddhist community as a whole has probably paid for maybe one billionth of an atom bomb.

There's also the question of the attitude of Buddhists to National Service.

Manjuvajra: As far as I'm concerned that question is quite clear cut. I remember someone once said that if somebody gave me a gun I'd use it against the guy that gave it to me. I think if it went as far as that, that would be my attitude. Sort of instant karma.

Siddhiratna: I think you can perhaps get involved in military service in the sense that if you see something - it's very hypothetical isn't it - something which is undermining what you're trying to achieve and which you can see the result of, is the cause that is entirely negative and that it's come to a conflict, as it were, you could in fact enlist at least in the medical aspect of it, so therefore you're not exactly fighting against it but you're trying to relieve some of the suffering caused by that conflict. At least in that way.

S: It is worth considering that there are these Buddhist States in the East that are technically Buddhist States, that is to say Buddhism is the, as it were, State Religion, for instance Thailand, Ceylon, that is Sri Lanka, to some extent, but every one of these has got an army, has got a police force, is quite oppressive - the government is quite oppressive, and uses all sorts of methods which would seem to be quite unbuddhistic. We don't really have an example of a Buddhist state anywhere in fact.

Siddhiratna: Even Tibet had its army didn't it. (Laughter)

S: Well that was laughable. Seven hundred men armed with bows and arrows and a few out of date rifles. Well in principle yes it wasn't unbuddhistic but they didn't allow it to go any further than that as it were. They had this almost token army which was more like a sort of glorified bodyguard for the Dalai Lama.

Vessantara: Didn't they have two cannons or something as well?

S: Something like that.

Siddhiratna: That's not bad.

S: So Tibet was the nearest but that's the old Tibet which has now gone under.

Lokamitra: What about Bhutan and Sikkim to some extent?

S: Well the Maharajah of Sikkim had a palace guard. There were some very colourful ( ) in red coats with little sort of Tyrolean hats with feathers in them. They carried rifles. Whether they knew how to use them I am very doubtful! And they were frequently found drunk on duty. (Laughter) There weren't more than twelve or fourteen. I think during the emergency the number was raised to twenty. (Laughter) They had a jail for instance but they never had anybody in the jail. Yes, except the odd drunk. (voice obscured by laughter) .... abolished years and years ago at the beginning of the century. They never executed anyone within living memory.

_____: They had no one in their prisons in the whole country?

S: Well there was only one jail, that was in Gangtok, the capital, and that only had, I was told, two cells and they had the odd drunk there but (Laughter)..... The population of course was only half a million.

_____: But even so that's pretty good.

S: They hardly had a police force. They had a few people but nothing really very much to speak about.

Siddhiratna: They must have had law and disorder but presumably it gets sorted out amongst.....

S: Yes, it gets sorted out among the people themselves. This was the case in India itself to quite an extent. The Nepalese had this feeling very strongly. I have heard Nepalese say after a fight, that is a fight with knives, between themselves in say Kalimpong where they might have wounded one another and the police came along and they'd say, 'Well what do the police want to come along for? What's it got to do with them if we have a fight?' and that was their attitude. 'What's it got to do with the police? It's just between us.'

Lokamitra: That seems fair enough.

S: But the police of course, this was India, didn't agree and they'd be arrested and hauled off to the lock-up. Many things that in our society are dealt with by the courts, especially domestic affairs, things like marriage and divorce, custody of children, are dealt with by what they call (Panchiads?) just gatherings of the village elders nominated by the parties concerned who agree to abide by their decision, and there are no expenses. You have to feast them while the proceedings are going on, give them food and beer. This was among the Nepalese that is - but that's all. You don't go to court over these things.

So, as you say, a lot of things get sorted out among the people themselves. You don't need to go to law, you don't need to go to court.

Manjuvajra: That's the great advantage of a non centralised society.

S: Indeed yes.

Manjuvajra: Maybe we should be thinking in those terms.

S: I used to say to the ex-Untouchables, never go to court, never go to law about say civil matters. Criminal matters you've no choice, the police intervene, but about civil matters Buddhists should not go to law. They should settle among themselves by way of a (Panchiad?) if necessary. Or if necessary calling a bhikkhu in to adjudicate and agreeing to abide by his decision, but not go to law. And some of them did abide by this. For instance if it's a question of divorce, well first of all Buddhists shouldn't have a legal marriage anyway. If you want to have anything at all you just have a little ceremony among your Buddhist friends, so if by any chance the relationship comes to an end and you want to formally separate, well there's no question of legal proceedings, you just call together the same Buddhist friends and say well this is just to inform you all that we're no longer together. Then, so far as the Buddhist community is concerned, and that's effectively your community, you are now divorced and that's that.

So the same procedure could be followed with regard to quite a number of other sort of civil matters. It shouldn't be necessary for a Buddhist to take another Buddhist to court over a civil matter. It should be settled within the community itself. This sort of question hasn't arisen yet just because we are so small and we virtually know one another personally.

Manjuvajra: It does arise in certain contexts. I mean for example I've just had a reminder to say that I've got to pay some money for insurance for the Centre in Cornwall, and this is obviously just a legal requirement that one has to do that, and I can't really see any point why, and yet we've already started getting involved with legalities and the legal system in that way. How far do we....

S: That's another matter, because this is not between Buddhists. I'm referring to civil proceedings between Buddhists. This is something we can avoid, but if say we enter into the public sphere, well then we have to abide by the laws governing that sphere don't we. We have to pay rates for instance. If there is any sort of reduction possible we just have to apply in the ordinary way and get the reduction if we qualify for a reduction. We can't simply not pay unilaterally, can we? Or not unless we decide on a definite policy of non-co-operation with the state, which is quite a big thing to take on.

Manjuvajra: I don't like to foresee but I can foresee these things really tending to sort of stifle. For example you take on a bigger concern, you then load upon yourselves more and more paperwork and.....

S: Well then you have to make the decision. You don't take it on. But then you also have to forfeit being able to function in a certain way. You have to make up your mind which you want. If you want to remain completely free with no ties, no responsibilities, well fair enough. That enables you to do certain things but it prevents you from doing certain other things. In much the same way if you take on say the responsibility of a property, with paying the rent, paying the rates etc., etc., and keeping it in repair, well that's certainly responsibility and that limits you but in another way, at the same time, it gives you a great freedom to do certain things, so you have to decide personally which you are going to have. But you can't have both! You decide according to your own individual temperament and your own particular sense of responsibility and so on. But I think at every step whatever we do or don't do, we have to think really carefully, and I think the piecemeal approach is better and the more concrete the issue, the better, and the more local, and the nearer home it is, the better, at least for quite some time to come.

All right let's go on. 'The Ashokan Realisation of the Buddhist State'

Text*"THE ASHOKAN REALISATION OF THE BUDDHIST STATE*

It took about two and a half centuries from the decease of the Buddha for this to come about in India. It is true that the two great kings of the Buddha's own day, Pasenadi and Bimbisara, were very sympathetically inclined towards the Buddha, his teaching, and his new community, but there does not appear to have been, either in Koshala or Magadha, a serious and systematic effort during the Buddha's lifetime to make the life of the state conform to the principles of the Dhamma like that subsequently made in the Mauryan empire under the emperor Ashoka in the third century BC. For the Sangha so to grow in influence and public esteem that eventually a monarch was entirely convinced of the rightness of Buddhist social and ethical principles, and dedicated himself to their practical realization, took two and a half centuries, but this was, nevertheless, the logical and proper consummation of the Sangha's growth in popularity and influence during that period. Inherent in the Buddha's prescription for society was the Buddhistic world-ruler or Chakravartin, and the adherence of Ashoka to Buddhism was not just an unexpected and unhoped-for stroke of luck; it had, since the Buddha's day, clearly been potential in the situation in north India, given the gradual growth and influence of the Sangha."

S: This on the whole seems quite acceptable, doesn't it, bearing in mind the limitations of Trevor Ling's general approach.

Nagabodhi: Can I just ask, it seems a bit that the implication is that Ashoka was more or less jostled into his position because of the weight of public opinion. It sounds a bit like that, rather than the story as I've heard it that he as an individual undertook to follow the Dharma.

S: Well there's no doubt that his own personal conversion, for want of a better term, was the crucial factor, but the Sangha was there to give advice, and he called upon the Sangha for advice quite quickly as far as we know. All right let's go on then.

Text*"The intervening period had been for the Buddhist Sangha one of gradual expansion in spite of difficulties and, occasionally, hostility. In the kingdom of Magadha dynasty had succeeded dynasty, and the power and extent of the kingdom gradually increased. About a hundred and sixty years after the decease of the Buddha, a man named Chandragupta Maurya established himself as a ruler of Magadha, displacing the Nanda dynasty. The Nanda kings had, during the previous forty years, built up an empire in Northern India that extended up to the frontiers of the Punjab. The empire of Chandragupta was even more vast. He began by fighting a war of liberation in the north-west of India, to rid the Punjab and Sind of the Greek army of occupation left by Alexander the Great. He then marched south-eastwards to attack and slay the rich, proud and tyrannical king of Magadha. Dhana Nanda, in his capital at Pataliputra (Patna). Contemporary Greek writers testify to the vastness of the empire which Chandragupta established in India, from the borders of Persia to as far south as modern Goa, and as far east as the edge of the Ganges delta. This empire was inherited by his son, and later by his grandson, Ashoka. It was left to Ashoka during the early years of his reign, which began about the year 268 BC, to extend the empire's boundaries south-eastwards to the Bay of Bengal by a violent campaign against Kalinga, an area roughly corresponding to modern Orissa."*

S: That's down South from Calcutta roughly. All right, that's clear enough. That's just historical resume isn't it, so let's go straight on.

Text*"Chandragupta had been guided and advised by a brahman minister, Chanakya. This brahman is identified with Kautilya, the author of the treatise on statecraft known as the Arthasastra. It was he who was the architect of the Mauryan empire. In the principles of*

government which he had laid down, and in which he had first instructed Chandragupta, the latter's son and grandson, Bindusara and Ashoka, were also trained. Ashoka thus entered upon his career as emperor of the greater part of the Indian sub-continent, heir to a brahman tradition of statecraft, in which he, as a young prince, had been educated, first in theory and then in practice, since the age of about ten.

He was exposed, however, to other traditions. The new movements of thought and practice, of which Jainism and Buddhism were the two major representatives, were particularly strong in eastern India, and brahmanism as a social and ceremonial system was, as yet, correspondingly weaker. There is evidence that Chandragupta was an adherent of Jainism, at least towards the end of his life. Ashoka's mother, according to a Buddhist tradition, was strongly attracted to the doctrines of the Ajivakas. His first wife, Devi, was a lay-supporter of the Buddhist Sangha, and the two children he had by her, Mahinda, his son, and Sanghamitra, his daughter, entered the Sangha themselves, as bhikkhu and bhikkhuni respectively, in the sixth year of Ashoka's reign, according to the Pali canonical tradition. It was inevitable, too, that Ashoka himself, as he grew up, would have become familiar with the doctrines and practices of the Buddhist fraternity, which had by then been in existence and growing steadily in eastern India for more than two hundred years.

The turning point in Ashoka's life appears to have come immediately after the conquest of Kalinga, where victory had been gained only at the price of a great human slaughter, which in Ashoka's own account of it ran into many thousands. In the Kautilyan theory of statecraft it was the monarch's duty to expand the bounds of his realm by military conquest. The difference between the brahmanical concept of kingship and the Buddhist was, as we have already noticed, that in brahmanical theory, the king was working out his own personal salvation or moksha by the correct and due performance of his own personal dharma, that which was proper to him personally as king, whereas in the Buddhist conception of monarchical government, the king was the necessary instrument through which universal Dharma or righteousness, found expression. The enlargement of his domain by violent conquest was not required of a king in the Buddhist conception of monarchy, but rather the cultivation of peace, both with his neighbours and within his own realm.

ASHOKA ADOPTS THE BUDDHIST VIEWPOINT

It was from the brahmanical, Kautilyan theory of statecraft to the Buddhist conception that Ashoka turned, after the awful human massacre which his campaign against Kalinga had entailed. Exactly how this change of heart came about is unclear. There is a possibility that this third-generation member of the Mauryan dynasty was already predisposed to react against the brahmanical statecraft of his father and grandfather by the time he succeeded to the throne. Other philosophers were prominent in his empire and, as we have seen, were probably well-known to him, personally and through his own family. It may therefore have been as the result of his own knowledge of the Buddhist social ethic that Ashoka, reflecting on the necessary consequences of the kind of statecraft in which he had been trained, came to the decision to forsake the path of violent conquest and personal royal aggrandizement and devote himself instead to the realization of the Buddhist ideal of the righteous and peaceful monarch. A recent study of Ashoka suggests that, while he had fully mastered the Kautilyan theory of statecraft, he felt it to be inadequate for the needs of his own situation and his own time. 'For Ashoka the state was not an end in itself but rather a means to an end higher than the state itself, namely, dharma or morality ... if for Kautilya the state was a primitive instrument, for Ashoka it was an educative institution. For the dichotomy between force and morality, between Kautilya and Buddha, had existed for a long time. Ashoka felt that his most glorious mission was to resolve this dichotomy and endow the mechanism of the Kautilyan state with a moral soul. Professor Gokhale has, in these words, indicated that the perspective in which the Buddha-Dharma is properly seen is that of a 'public' (that is an

ethical-political) philosophy rather than merely a private cult of religious satisfaction or 'salvation'. Exactly at what point in his career Ashoka consciously arrived at this decision is, however, difficult to establish. It is not impossible, or even improbable, that it was reached as the outcome of his own reflection"

S: What do you think of this sentence, "Professor Gokhale has, in these words indicated that the perspective in which the Buddha Dharma is properly seen is that of a 'public' (that is, and ethical-political) philosophy rather than merely a private cult of religious satisfaction or 'salvation'". Doesn't that epitomise his whole misunderstanding? It doesn't really seem to follow from what he's been saying at all. It leaves out of account what he says himself about the Sangha having as its primary concern the re-ordering of human consciousness.

Vessantara: It doesn't even really follow from the quotation above.

S: No, it simply says something about Ashoka. That was the use, as it were, that Ashoka made of Buddhism. It is a very sort of worthy use, but whether that use exhausted the potentialities of Buddhism, that's quite another matter. All right let's go on. I think we've seen how Trevor Ling misunderstands these matters clearly enough already. Go straight on.

Text*"On the other hand, we have to remember that while Ashoka may have found himself in the position of an emperor in search of a new ethic, ...*

[End of tape 27 - back to tape 26!]

.... there is also the fact that the Buddhist movement had been for two centuries a potential civilization, pragmatically oriented towards monarchy, but needing a Buddhist monarch to convert the potential into the actual. Circumstances until then had not been favourable. Chandragupta, in so far as he was not entirely of orthodox brahmanical outlook, had been inclined towards Jainism. What little is known about Bindusara suggests that he was conventionally brahmanical in his policies, although an inquiring mind may be indicated by the story told of him, that he wished to purchase a philosopher from Greece, but was told that it was not the Greek custom to sell philosophers. Ashoka may from the time of his accession have appeared to the Buddhist Sangha as an altogether more promising candidate for the role of Buddhist king. Certainly the traditions suggest that some initiative in the matter of securing Ashoka's adherence was taken by members of the Buddhist fraternity. According to the Theravada tradition preserved in Ceylon, Ashoka inherited from his father the practice of a daily distribution of food to large numbers of brahmans, 'versed in the Brahma-doctrine'. After a while, however, Ashoka became disgusted at the greedy manner in which they grabbed at the food and decided that in future he would find other, more worthy, recipients. Standing at his window he saw a bhikkhu, Nigrodha, passing along the street, and, impressed by his grave and peaceful bearing, sent for him to come at once. Nigrodha came calmly into the king's presence. The king, still standing, invited the bhikkhu to sit down. Since there was no other bhikkhu present, says that narrator (that is, since there was no one present who was superior in rank to him) Nigrodha sat down on the royal throne. When he saw this, we are told, Ashoka was glad that he; being uncertain of the order of precedence for a king and a bhikkhu, had not made the mistake of offering Nigrodha an inferior seat. 'Seeing him seated there king Ashoka rejoiced greatly that he had honoured him according to his rank'. This episode is interesting as an illustration of the evidently accepted principle that any member of the Sangha takes precedence over the king, and that the king, therefore, is, in Buddhist theory, subordinate in status to the Sangha. The chronicler then goes on to tell how Nigrodha, after he had received the king's gift of food, was questioned by Ashoka concerning his doctrine, and how, in response, he expounded to Ashoka some verses on the subject of 'unwearying zeal'. Ashoka was greatly impressed by this exposition of Buddhist doctrine, and undertook to offer food regularly to Nigrodha. The next day, accompanied by other bhikkhus, Nigrodha

again received food from the king, and again expounded the doctrine. As a result, Ashoka thereupon became a Buddhist lay follower. Another account of the manner in which Ashoka became an adherent of Buddhism is found in a collection known as the Divyavadana; one of the sections of this is 'The Book of King Ashoka', a work which possibly originated in Mathura, in north India, in the second century BC. According to this source, it was a bhikkhu named Upagupta who was the agent of Ashoka's conversion."

S: All right, what does one think of this paragraph? Any point that arises in anyone's mind.

Manjuvajra: It strikes me as a bit unusual that Ashoka who must have been fairly aggressive and fairly kinglike, perhaps fairly proud, would have rejoiced at the fact that a monk came down and sat on his throne. One would have expected him to have got maybe a little bit annoyed.

Lokamitra: Sometimes confident people rejoice in the confidence of others.

Vessantara: I think Nigrodha's approach is - well maybe it's traditional and that was why he sat on the throne - but even if it weren't it seems a very good approach. He's got a lot of confidence. He talks to the king about unwearying zeal, which seems to be a really good thing to talk to a ruler about, somebody concerned with.....

S: One mustn't forget the general Indian background of respect for holy men, even on the part of kings and very wealthy people. You still find this in India, this kind of respect, and you certainly find it of course in the Buddhist countries.

Nagabodhi: It illustrates the importance of first impressions.

S: Mmm, that too, yes.

Nagabodhi: If Ashoka just simply saw this man walking down the street and was impressed by him.

S: Yes. (Pause) I think I've told before the story from my days at Hampstead when I had a young Buddhist staying there with me and somebody came to see me one day who had never been to the Vihara before - we'd been in correspondence but hadn't had any contact with the Buddhist movement - so he came to see me at the Hampstead Vihara and this young man who was staying with me opened the door. So after his interview with me the visitor said to that young man, 'Do you know, when you opened the door, you were the first Buddhist I'd ever seen.' and that chap was really sort of shaken by that, and was thinking, 'well how much depends on that. As I open the door, the way I look at that person, the way I speak to him, the way I greet him, is all part and parcel of his first impression of a Buddhist. I'm the first Buddhist that he sets eyes on.' It certainly gives one food for thought, doesn't it.

It doesn't mean of course that one should be careful to keep up appearances. It means one should always be mindful, and always try to have a genuine communication with people. So that visitor afterwards became fairly regular, so he never forgot his first impression of a Buddhist, luckily it was a good one. This young man opened the door in a quite sort of friendly and cheerful fashion. I remember similarly an experience myself, again when I was at Hampstead. People used to ring up often on Sunday afternoon to ask whether there's be a lecture in the evening, and if so what time it was and what the subject was, and I used to generally answer the 'phone, and one day a woman spoke to me after the lecture and she said, 'Oh yes I was so happy, the way you answered the 'phone today when I rang and asked about the lecture. You just gave me the title of the lecture and the time so nicely.' So I said 'well of course, what else does one expect?', so she said, 'Oh, no, before you came along sometimes

when we used to ring up the Vihara they'd tell us in a very surly and unfriendly way as though we were a real nuisance ringing up and asking what time the lecture was.' 'Sometimes', she said, 'we'd hesitate even to ring up and ask, but it was such a pleasant surprise when you answered the 'phone and gave the information in that manner.' So again this gave me food for thought.

I'm sorry to say that once or twice, some months ago, I used to ring Sukhavati and sometimes in fact it was Pundarika, and the 'phone would be answered by some either would-be comic or someone most unmindful, and had it been a member of the public they'd have got a terrible impression of Sukhavati or Pundarika as the case might have been. So one really must watch that. Or someone just gruffly saying, 'Yes!' and then you have to ask, 'well is that Sukhavati?', they don't announce the number or the place, they just say, 'Yes!'. Is that Sukhavati or is that Pundarika, who is that speaking? I spoke to Subhuti about it so things are better now, but one must really watch these things. But this is someone's first impression. So perhaps the main lesson of this paragraph is the importance of first impressions. If you are somebody else's first impression of Buddhism, whether when you open the door or answer the 'phone, well watch out! (Pause) Anyway carry on.

Text*"The evidence of the Buddhist Chronicles, in the form in which we now have them, however, dates from the sixth century AD."*

S: Yes, sixth century AD. That's eight hundred or more years after the time of Ashoka. In other words it rather like a Victorian history of the Norman Conquest, if that had been based entirely on oral tradition.

Text*"The do of course, embody material which has been transmitted from generation to generation of bhikkhus with that scrupulous accuracy which is characteristic of Indian memorizing."*

S: I think he's idealizing a bit actually. Why these different accounts? Why does one account say that it was Nigrodha who converted Ashoka and the others Chandragupta? Why these differing accounts if these memories are so accurate? Anyway we won't press that point. I suppose it's very necessary for Doctor Ling that the tradition should be accurate because he's going to base quite a bit on it! (Laughter)

Text*"The tradition which is embodied in the Pali chronicles may well go back to within less than a century after Ashoka's time."*

S: Yes, it may very well do so. All right. (Laughter)

Text*"But Ashoka himself provided contemporary evidence of the events of his life in the imperial edicts which he causes to be inscribed on rock faces and on specially erected stone pillars at various important centres throughout his realm."*

S: We're on much more reliable ground here of course.

Text*"A number of such edicts were promulgated throughout the course of the reign, and each was inscribed in a number of different places."*

In one of the earliest of them, Ashoka expresses his desire that serious moral effort should be made by all his subjects:

Thus speaks Devanam-piya [beloved of the gods], Ashoka: I have been an upasaka [Buddhist lay-follower] for more than two and a half-years, but for a year I did not make much

progress. Now for more than a year I have drawn closer to the Sangha, and have become more ardent. The gods, who in India up to this time did not associate with men, now mingle with them, and this is the result of my efforts. Moreover, this is not something to be obtained only by the great, but it is also open to the humble, if they are earnest; and they can even reach heaven easily. This is the reason for this announcement, that both humble and great should make progress and that the neighbouring people should know that the progress is lasting.

The inscription from which the above is an extract is known as the Minor Rock Edict, 'From Suvarnagiri' (the first words of the inscription), the southern provincial capital of the empire, in Hyderabad. The inscription includes a reference to the wide extent of its publication: it is to be inscribed 'here and elsewhere on the hills, and wherever there is a stone pillar, it is to be engraved on that pillar'. Moreover, the officers of the state are directed to 'go out with (the text of) this throughout the whole of your district'. The words which have been quoted raise a number of interesting questions. Ashoka refers to himself here, as in every of the thirty-two inscriptions except three, by the title Devanam-piya, 'Beloved of the gods'. This might suggest that he was consciously asserting the importance of the gods in whom he believed and whose special instrument he felt himself to be. But it is unlikely that the title held this kind of significance; it was a conventional epithet, meaning roughly 'His Gracious Majesty', and was used by other kings of the time without apparently implying any distinctively religious attitude. So far as Ashoka's moral attitude is concerned, this inscription is of interest in the present context for the evidence which it provides concerning his own progress towards his present state of moral zeal. What is not clear is whether the war of conquest which Ashoka waged against Kalinga came after his first, rather formal, adherence to Buddhism as a lay-follower, (i.e. the first year, concerning which he says 'for a year I did not make much progress') or before it. If he had already become a lay-follower it might seem strange that he should then embark on such a violent and bloody campaign of conquest. On the other hand, if one adopted the view that he first became a lay-follower after the Kalingan war, out of a feeling of revulsion for war and an attraction towards Buddhism, some explanation would then be necessary for what would have to be regarded as the subsequent change of his attitude, from moral lukewarmness to zeal. No even is known to have occurred and no experience is mentioned by Ashoka which would account for the sudden zealousness. "

S: Well sometimes it just happens like that. There is just no definite assignable cause. People aren't completely rational and logical and systematic.

Text*"However, Ashoka has left a record of the profound moral impression made on him by the Kalinga campaign:*

'When he had been consecrated eight years Devanam-piya Piyadassi conquered Kalinga. A hundred and fifty thousand people were deported, a hundred thousand were killed and many times that number perished. Afterwards now that Kalinga was annexed Devanam-piya very earnestly practised Dhamma and taught Dhamma. On conquering Kalinga Devanam-piya felt remorse, for, when an independent country is conquered, the slaughter, death, and deportation of the people is extremely grievous to Devanam-piya, and weighs heavily on his mind. what is even more deplorable to Devanam-piya, is that those who dwell there, whether brahmans, shramanas, or those of other sects, or householders who show obedience to their superiors, obedience to mother and father, obedience to their teachers and behave well and devotedly towards their friends, acquaintances, colleagues, relatives, slaves, and servants, all suffer violence, murder and separation from their loved ones. Even those who are fortunate to have escaped, whose love is undiminished (by the brutalizing effect of war) suffer from the misfortunes of their friends, acquaintances, colleagues and relatives. This participation of all men in suffering, weighs heavily on the mind of Devanam-piya. Except among the Greeks,

there is no land where the religious order of brahmans and shramanas are not to be found, and there is no land anywhere where men do not support one sect or another. Today if a hundredth or a thousandth part of those people who were killed or died or were deported when Kalinga was annexed were to suffer similarly, it would weigh heavily on the mind of Devanam-piya'"

S: What impression does one get from these quotations that are apparently Ashoka's own words?

_____: Sort of remorse and guilt.

S: Yes. And also that he takes immediate action to put it right. All right carry on then.

Text*"Undoubtedly, the Kalingan war brought about a decisive change in Ashoka, and set him in active pursuit of the Buddhist goal of morality: 'afterwards ... he very earnestly practised **Dhamma**' (emphasis added) This agrees well with the statement he makes in the Minor Rock Edict, quoted above, that after making no moral progress for a year (after he had become a Buddhist upasaka), he has now 'for more than a year' been very ardent in his practice of morality. Since he tells us that the total length of time since he became an upasaka was 'more than **two and a half years** (emphasis added), and his account of his 'lack of progress' followed by 'much progress' covers altogether ('a year' plus 'more than a year') something over two years, this leaves a period of about six months during which, presumably, he was engaged in the Kalingan war.*

This reconstruction of the story from the evidence provided by Ashoka's own words carries with it the implication that his advance towards full enthusiastic acceptance of what it entailed to be a Buddhist was gradual. This accords with what we have already observed concerning Ashoka's background. It is difficult to say that he was ever entirely ignorant of Buddhism; he did not suddenly turn to it after the Kalingan war, as to something unknown to him before; he had known of it, had been sufficiently attracted by it to become a lay-follower and to take the first steps in the direction of the renunciation of self and the interests of the self. But Buddhist teaching takes account of the fact that men usually advance by degrees towards this goal, even after they have set out in its pursuit; and so it was, apparently, with Ashoka."

S: That seems to be a pretty fair conclusion, doesn't it.

Vessantara: I still think it's more likely that the Kalingan war happened before his two and a half years. It would be understandable if he made no progress in the first year, if he was very ( ) down by the remorse and feelings from the war.

S: Anyway you've got then to work out the chronology of events in a different way. There are quite a number of books by the way on Ashoka and his inscriptions. I don't know if anyone had every read any of them. There's one at least in the Order library at Aryatara which I brought from India. All right, go straight on then. We're going rather rapidly. We may possibly get through this whole chapter today.

Text*THE PUBLIC POLICIES OF ASHOKA AS A BUDDHIST RULER*
"What is presented to us in the evidence of most of the inscriptions, however, is the picture of an emperor who is now seriously, actively and effectively pursuing the kind of policies which are appropriate to a convinced Buddhist ruler. It is interesting to notice where the emphasis was laid. In order of the frequency with which they are mentioned, Ashoka's principal preoccupations in the creation of a Buddhist realm appear to have been, first, exhortation of all the citizens of the state to moral effort, and, second, the implementing of measures

designed to improve the quality of public life and facilitate the universal pursuit of Buddhist moral principles."

S: Whether Ashoka was actually preoccupied with the creation of a Buddhist realm has been questioned by some scholars. Some scholars think that by 'Dhamma' he meant no more than simply principles of public morality, and that he was not concerned as regards the life of the state in propagating anything distinctively Buddhist.

Text*"Ashoka himself declares, in the Seventh Pillar Edict that 'The advancement of Dhamma amongst men has been achieved through two means, legislation and persuasion. But of these two, legislation has been less effective, and persuasion more so. I have proclaimed through legislation, for instance, that certain species of animals are not to be killed, and other such ideas. But men have increased their adherence to Dhamma by being persuaded not to injure living beings and not to take life.*

'Dhamma' is mentioned frequently in Ashoka's edicts, and it is to this that he seems to be devoted. At an earlier stage of historical study of Ashoka's India, doubt was sometimes expressed whether the Dhamma to which he so often refers was identical with the Buddha-Dharma, or Buddhist doctrine, as it is found in the canonical texts. The word dhamma was used widely, not only by Buddhists, and could bear a quite general meaning, such as 'piety'. But when the whole range of the Ashokan inscriptions is taken into account, there seems little room left for doubt that when Ashoka used the word he meant Buddha-Dhamma. In the First Minor Rock Edict he says, after greeting the Sangha,

'You know, Sirs, how deep is my respect for and faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. Sirs, whatever was spoken by the Buddha was well spoken. And, Sirs, allow me to tell you what I believe contributes to the long survival of the Buddhist Dhamma. The sermons on Dhamma, Sirs...'

and then he gives a list of Buddhist discourses which he considers the most vital; 'These sermons on the Dhamma, Sirs, I desire that many bhikkhus and bhikkhunis should hear frequently and meditate upon, and likewise laymen and laywomen.' His reverence for the Buddha is also clearly testified in the Second Minor Rock Edict, set up at Lumbini, the birthplace of Gotama, 'the Shakya sage'; this edict records the fact that in the twentieth year of his reign, Ashoka 'came in person and reverenced the place where Buddha Shakyamuni was born' and 'how he caused a stone enclosure to be made and a stone pillar to be erected.'"

S: This is clear, is it? This shows quite clearly that Ashoka was personally an adherent of Buddhism, but it certainly isn't sufficient to establish that he is trying to create a Buddhist realm, except in the more limited sense of a realm which embodied those ethical principles which were part of Buddhism, though not the whole of it. Go straight on.

Text*"In view of the fact that it is very clearly the Buddha, Gotama, of whom Ashoka regards as the great teacher, supremely to be reverenced, and the Buddhist Sangha to which he pays special and most frequent respect, it might seem surprising that, in his exposition of what he understands to be the essence of the Dhamma, which he mentions so much, there appears to be very little in the way of specifically Buddhist doctrine"*

S: Well, it's only surprising if you assume that He was preoccupied with creating a Buddhist state. Anyway, go straight on.

Text*"For the Dhamma, says Ashoka, is 'good behaviour towards slaves and servants, obedience to father and mother, generosity towards friends, acquaintances and relatives, and towards shramanas and brahmans, and abstention from killing living beings.' There are*

broadly two kinds of virtue mentioned here: first, various role-responsibilities: to servants, to parents, to friends and relatives, and to shramanas and brahmans; and second, abstention from killing. This basic pattern in the exposition of Dhamma occurs elsewhere in the inscriptions. For example: 'It is good to be obedient to one's mother and father, friends and relatives, to be generous to brahmans and shramanas; it is not good to kill living beings ...' This is how the Dhamma is expounded in the Third Major Rock Edict. But in this instance, a further item is added, concerning economic activity: 'It is good not only to spend little, but to own the minimum of property'. Again, in the Fourth Major Rock Edict, Ashoka reminds his subjects of the 'forms of the practice of Dhamma': they are, he says, 'abstention from killing and non-injury to living beings, deference to relatives, brahmans and shramanas, obedience to mother and father, and obedience to elders'. Non-injury of living beings, and abstention from killing are mentioned in the Seventh Pillar Edict as the characteristic ways in which public adherence to Dhamma has shown itself in Ashoka's realm: 'Men have increased their adherence to Dhamma by being persuaded not to injure living beings and not to take life. In two other contexts of the inscriptions Ashoka explains Dhamma in slightly different terms. The opening sentence of the Second Pillar Edict reads: 'Thus speaks Devanam-piya, the king Piyadassi: Dhamma is good. And what is Dhamma? It is having few faults and many good deeds, mercy charity, truthfulness and purity.' Again, in the Seventh Pillar Edict, he says, 'The glory of Dhamma will increase throughout the world, and it will be endorsed in the form of mercy, charity, truthfulness, purity, gentleness and virtue.' And he adds that 'Obedience to mother and father, obedience to teachers, deference to those advanced in age, and regard for brahmans and shramanas, the poor and the wretched, slaves and servants, have increased and will increase.' If these various ways of expounding what Ashoka meant by Dhamma are set out synoptically, it becomes clear that the item which occurs most frequently is abstention from killing: this is mentioned as a way of practising Dhamma in four of the five inscriptions which explicitly explain what Dhamma is. The other most frequently occurring items are obedience to parents (four out of five) and good behaviour towards friends and relatives (three out of five). Taken together, the catalogue of social responsibilities mentioned in the inscriptions corresponds closely to the well-known list in the 'layman's code of ethics' the Sigala-vada Sutta of the Buddhist Pali canon. Together with the prominence of the injunction to avoid taking life, this gives an unmistakably Buddhist flavour to the Ashokan Dhamma. The important point to notice is that this is layman's Buddhism; it is not Dhamma as doctrine, or philosophical analysis of the human situation, for that is the concern of the professionals, the bhikkhus. This, rather, is an ethical system whose primary characteristic principles are non-violence and generosity. As we shall see later, this code of ethics has remained, down to modern times, the essence of Buddhism for lay people."

S: What do you think of Ashoka's conception of `Dhamma' as exemplified by these quotations from his edicts?

___: Quite limited.

S: Quite limited, yes. So, really, could one say therefore that to propagate `Dhamma' in that sense constituted preoccupation with creating a Buddhist realm?

Nagabodhi: A healthy group.

S: A healthy group. For instance it says, "The important point to notice is that this is laymen's Buddhism; it is not `Dhamma' as doctrine, or philosophical analysis of the human situation, for that is the concern of the professionals, the `bhikkhus'." So is such `Dhamma' even `laymen's Buddhism by itself? Would you even be a lay Buddhist simply by practising `Dhamma' in that limited sense? .... [_____: No.] ..... Not really. Not, if by Buddhist you mean someone who `goes for refuge', and is thinking of some kind of higher development. But of course it must be said that many lay Buddhists in Buddhist countries are Buddhists

just in that sense, which means, really, not Buddhists at all, just as you may say that say in this country the ordinary decent citizen who doesn't kill or steal is a Christian, well, to a limited extent, because Christianity says that you should not kill or steal, but that is not sufficient to make him a Christian in a real sense if he doesn't go to Church, and doesn't believe in the teachings of the Church, and doesn't take part in the sacraments, etc. etc.

So really, this is not even laymen's Buddhism; and I think that the whole conception of a Buddhist layman as one who merely is moral in this sort of social sense is almost a sort of betrayal of Buddhism.

Nagabodhi: Is it not simply taken for granted that they would know about the `Three Jewels', and that they would live like this, but within some kind of context, at least, of that?

S: Well, you could go so far as to say that probably the majority of Ashoka's subjects were not Buddhists, and perhaps he was thinking to find common ground for Buddhists and non-Buddhists - and certainly there's common ground here. Ashoka himself clearly was a Buddhist. He did `go for refuge', but the `Dhamma' that he presented isn't Buddhism. It's a part of Buddhism, or an aspect of Buddhism, but there's nothing distinctively Buddhist about it.

So it's as if to say there's nothing distinctively Buddhist about the Buddhist layman: he's just a layman; he's just a decent citizen.

Vessantara: Presumably if one was aiming towards a Buddhist realm to do this would be quite a skilful way to go about it. It's almost like, just as we were talking earlier about there being Order, Friends and general society, in a way much the same, you are just working on general society to create better conditions.

S: Yes, a positive group - even a group that was positive with regard to the spiritual community, does not have to be a Buddhist group. Just as was the case in the Buddha's own day. You could say that the group is not necessarily Buddhist in the more specific sense simply because it does not get in the way of the Buddhist spiritual community, or even simply because it contributes to the support of the Buddhist spiritual community. In other words society doesn't have to be Buddhist in the full sense for it to be possible for the individual to be a Buddhist in the full sense. But it is certainly helpful if society is based upon certain moral principles, and is at least sympathetic to anyone leading the spiritual life; or at least recognises his freedom to live that life if he so wishes.

____: Is there any point really in talking in terms of a Buddhist realm?

S: Well, a Buddhist realm as I understand it, would only be when the whole of the group has become a spiritual community, and the whole population consists of individuals. I doubt if that is possible. Maybe that's just a lack of imagination on my part, but certainly not within the present cycle of evolution as far as we can see it.

___: But I mean even then any kind of social relationship between individuals.....

S: You could have a nominally Buddhist society, a nominally Buddhist state, but that is quite another matter. A Buddhist nation is really a nation made up of individuals all of whom `go for refuge' and are actively concerned with their development as individuals , and who relate to one another as individuals. Whether you will ever have such a state on this earth, I very seriously doubt. I think that the most that you can have is rather a large number of rather large `cells', which exert quite an influence on society as a whole in certain favourable epochs. I don't think you can have more than that. Not within the next few tens of millions of

years. I think we need not look beyond that.

You notice already, if Trevor Ling's account does correctly represent the situation, this distinction between the professional, that is to say, the bhikkhu, who knows the doctrine, is familiar with the philosophical analysis of the human situation, and the so-called `lay' Buddhist, who observes merely matters of social morality, and who perhaps respects the Sangha and supports it but does not participate in Buddhism to any greater extent, or who is not expected, even, to participate to any greater extent. What do you think of this sort of division or distinction? What is the way in which Trevor Ling sees it? [Pause] Presumably these people are all technically `upasakas'. Presumably they've all at least recited the `refuges and precepts' as still happens in Buddhist lands. But one would seem to be left with a very nominal adherence to Buddhism indeed on the part of the `lay' follower as conceived of here.

Nagabodhi: It seems by our own definition of the Dharma, or our own approach to the Dharma, it really does seem that we're moving to some kind of standpoint where the idea of the Buddhist layman is a contradiction in terms, in that unless one is stretching oneself, unless one is trying to grow out of old habits....

S: Well one could even say that one should not aim at the creation of a Buddhist realm, because that would confuse the issue. At best you would get a nominally Buddhist administration, or a nominally Buddhist state, and a nominally Buddhist population. It would be better, perhaps, to keep the distinction quite clear cut - that this is just the social group, healthy, no doubt, happy no doubt, observing social ethics, and providing a very positive environment for the spiritual community, **but not identical with the spiritual community**. Otherwise you get situations in which a Buddhist government declares war, and you have a Buddhist army then, you have Buddhist soldiers then, etc. etc. This is the essence of Kierkegaarde's criticism, in the case of Christianity, in his famous "Attack On Christendom". Anyone familiar with that? [Pause]

He says in the old days, - the beginnings of Christianity - you observed things like non-violence, peace, chastity, and so on, and the Christians were a minority. And he said `Now of course everyone has become Christian. What a glorious victory! Everyone is Christian! Everything is Christian!' You've got a Buddhist (sic) government, a Buddhist (sic) state, you've got Buddhist (sic) police, ... sorry, Christian police, and Christian lawyers, and Christian gaolers, and Christian executioners, you've got Christian shopkeepers, and Christian thieves, and Christian prostitutes - everybody is Christian now!' (sound of chuckling) (Pause)

So no doubt one can have a spiritual community, you can have extensions of that spiritual community via certain projects perhaps, into the surrounding non-Buddhist society, but that you can ever have a Buddhist state? A Buddhist administration? A Buddhist nation? A Buddhist people: that, I think, is extremely doubtful. At best you can educate society to develop a healthy respect for ethical principles and a tolerance of the spiritual community in its midst; and a tolerance, if not an understanding, of those individuals who want to lead a spiritual life. If the state leaves you free to do that, perhaps you shouldn't ask any more of the state.

____: In view of that then could you say that there's no better climate for Buddhism than the climate which exists today?

S: Where? [____: Here in Britain.] .... It's not bad. We don't need official recognition; we don't need the whole nation to become Buddhist for us to be able to be Buddhist, not really. But it would help if certain moral principles were observed in society, but they need not be specifically `Buddhist' principles, just the principles of a positive society, a positive group.

Manjuvajra: What do you think is particularly lacking ..... [**S:** Lacking ?] .... in our society? Yeah. Where are the particular areas? I mean presumably if .....[**S:** You mean vis-a-vis Buddhism?] .... Yeah. Presumably if we had a nice grant from the government that would be quite good, but you mentioned certain moral ..... **[S:** I don't think it would be necessarily. Anyway we'll leave that aside.] ..... you mentioned certain moral bases were unsatisfactory. [Pause]

S: I don't know. I must say I haven't given this systematic thought, so I'd rather not just sort of reply `off the cuff'. I haven't thought about it. I think it's quite good at least we're allowed to survive, and that we're just not interfered with, which is what has happened so far. [Pause] I don't think one should be in any hurry to increase the number of nominal Buddhists. [longish pause] It really is so ridiculous to talk in terms of, for instance, that in the world there are five hundred million Buddhists, and eight hundred million Christians, and things like that. It's completely meaningless really. [Long pause] Anyway time is more than up. Maybe we'll break off there for the time being. Any final comment from anyone? [Pause]

What Ashoka did for his state seems to have been remarkably good. He certainly propagated the principles of social ethics; and that was indirectly of great benefit to the Sangha. But the propagation of social ethics does not amount to the creation of a Buddhist realm, though it certainly helps in creating favourable conditions for the spiritual community, or the Sangha. [Pause]

So the fact he propagated `Dhamma' in that sense doesn't mean that he really created a Buddhist society, as Trevor Ling seems to be thinking. I mean, you could say Charlemagne did just as much without being a Buddhist at all, but by being a Christian. You could say many secular governments today do just as much without being Buddhist, even without being `religious'. So to strengthen the ethical foundation of society, as Ashoka undoubtedly did, is not to create a Buddhist realm, Buddhist state, or Buddhist society. A Buddhist society, if you take the word `Buddhist' seriously at all, is something quite other, which is not to belittle the healthy, positive group, which is based upon, or which is the embodiment of moral principles - it is just to refuse to confuse even the positive society with the spiritual community. [Pause]

All right, leave it there for now, then.

END OF SESSION NEXT SESSION

S: All right, we're still in the middle of `The Ashokan Buddhist State.'

Text*"If non-violence and generosity are the essence of Buddhist morality for the common people, they are also, in the Buddhist state, the minimum requirements of morality for the king and for the corps of professional Buddhists, the Sangha. Buddhist has no clear cut, twofold standard of morality, one for laymen and one for religious orders or priests; such differences as are recognised are of levels of attainment, the transition from one level to another being gradual and imperceptible rather than clear and distinct."*

S: So what does one think of this? [Pause]

____: Seems to be a bit of a contradiction there.

S: Mm. One couldn't say, with regard to the Theravada, that non-violence and generosity was the minimum requirement of morality for the `professional' Buddhists, the Sangha. For the Sangha, a lot more than that is considered the minimum. In fact `dana', in the ordinary sense, is not expected of the Sangha, because there is nothing to give of anything material. It is true

that there is "no clear-cut, two-fold standard of morality" - the basic ethical and spiritual principles are in common - but there are different levels of practice. But if you think in terms of the Sangha devoting itself to spiritual development, and aiming at `nirvana', and the lay people observing merely a social ethic, well then, the idea of a continuum really collapses, doesn't it?
Trevor Ling is able to speak in terms of a continuum, on his own terms, only by making the Sangha practise the same minimum social ethic as the people. If there is to be anything in common as between what he calls the lay-people and what he calls the `professional Buddhists', then they must all equally aim at Enlightenment even though they are severally at different levels of attainment, and observing less or more demanding sets of precepts. Do you see this?

Siddhiratna: Is that not the case then ? [**S:** What ?] ... that.... isn't it such that lay-people are following a sort of reduced version of the what the bhikkhus.... ?

S: That is true, but then they can only be regarded as occupying, as it were, the lower end of the continuum if there is something which is continuous, and it can't be just social ethics, as he seems to think. In other words, the practice of the lay-people can really be continuous, on their own level, with that of what Trevor Ling calls the `professional Buddhist', only if the lay-people also have ultimately a truly spiritual aim. In other words only if ultimately they have the same aim as the bhikkhus. But if they are practising, really, social ethics, and if the bhikkhus are thinking in terms of Enlightenment and `nirvana', then what continuity is there between the two ways of life?

So Trevor Ling seems to make them continuous by speaking in terms of non-violence and generosity for the `professional Buddhist' as well as for the lay-people. The only difference seems to be that the bhikkhus practise a slightly higher level of social ethics, which makes nonsense of the whole idea of a spiritual community. Actually, in the Theravada countries today, what you find is definitely "a two-fold standard of morality, one for laymen and one for religious orders." This is what it has come to. You don't find the idea, or you find it very little, of continuity between the lay life and the life of the `professional' Buddhist or the bhikkhu. You **do find** that sense of continuity in the Mahayana countries where everybody equally aims at fulfilling the Bodhisattva ideal, whether they're living at home, or whether they're living in a monastery. But in practice, the continuity of practice as between the layman and the bhikkhu in Theravada countries tends to break down. Some Theravada lay people would regard it almost as an impertinence if lay people tried to practise meditation, for instance. It is just not expected of them. Some of them might even say, `If you want to do that sort of thing you become bhikkhus, and go and stay in a monastery. [Longish pause]

It is true that there are `levels of attainment and the transition from one level to another is gradual and imperceptible' - this is quite clear. This is quite correct, but the continuity is with regards to different levels, all of which are aiming, ultimately, at Enlightenment, really. [Pause] All right let's go on.

Text*"The overall structure is one of progression through a continuum.*

Certainly Ashoka himself appears to have accepted his own ethical obligations. Both in matters concerning himself and his court, and in those concerning the public welfare, he appears to have undertaken in various ways to fulfil his responsibilities as he understood them, as a Buddhist ruler.

Non-violence to living beings was interpreted to mean that, as far as possible, the slaughter of animals for food should cease. 'Formerly in the kitchens of Devanam-piya Piya-dassi [Ashoka] many hundreds of thousands of living animals were killed daily for meat. But now,

at the time of writing this inscription on Dhamma, only three animals are killed, two peacocks and a deer, and the deer not invariably. Even these three animals will not be killed in future'. In another inscription, he records that 'the king refrains from [eating] living beings, and indeed other men and whosoever [were] the king's huntsmen and fishermen have ceased from hunting ...' In yet another, much longer, inscription he records the ban which he has introduced on the killing of a wide variety of animals, birds and fish, and even on the burning of forests without good reason. As a result of his instructions to the people, 'abstention from killing and non-injury to living beings', as well as various forms of generosity and piety, 'have all increased as never before for many centuries'.

The time which kings had formerly spent on hunting 'and other similar amusements' Ashoka devoted instead to the promotion of the moral condition of the realm. In the past, he records, kings used to go on pleasure tours. But in the tenth year of his reign, the year after he had begun to be a more ardent follower of the Buddhist way, he visited the scene of Gotama's Enlightenment at Bodh-Gaya.

From that time arose the practice of tours connected with Dhamma, during which meetings are held with ascetics and brahmans, gifts are bestowed, meetings are arranged with aged folk, gold is distributed, meetings with the people of the countryside are held, instruction in Dhamma is given, and questions on Dhamma are answered.

He adds that he finds this more enjoyable than any other kind of activity."

[End of side one side two]

S: It would seem from the context that the `Dhamma' in which he gave instruction and on which he answered questions, was `dhamma' in the sense of social ethics, rather than `dhamma' in the sense of distinctive doctrine. But we can't be completely sure of that.

Vessantara: Not his meetings with Brahmins and ascetics for instance, they'd be more than that probably.

S: Possibly; though immediately afterwards he does say `gifts are bestowed' - he might have met them simply to bestow gifts. [Pause] Let's go on.

Text*"But as well as the royal entourage's use of time in this way, in the interests of public ethical instruction and philanthropy, the resources of the state were devoted to various works for the common good. Throughout the entire realm, records of the Second Major Rock Edict, two medical services have been provided. 'These consist of the medical care of man, and the care of animals' Moreover, 'medicinal herbs, whether useful to man or beast, have been brought and planted wherever they did not grow.' Other public works mentioned in this inscription include the introduction of root crops and fruit trees where they were not grown formerly; the provision of wells at points along the roads, and the planting of trees for shade, to make travel easier for man and beast. These things are recorded in the Seventh Pillar Edict too, where it is mentioned that provision of wells and of rest houses was made at regular intervals of eight kos along the main roads, and the trees which were planted to provide shade are specified - banyan trees. The purpose of these public works is here said to have been 'that my people might conform to Dhamma'. That is to say, it was considered that the improvement of the general quality of public life and health in these ways, and the enhanced trade that would follow, would help to create the conditions in which the Buddhist ethic could best be practised. Another measure taken by Ashoka with this end in view was the appointment of welfare-officers, known as 'commissioners of Dhamma'. This new office was instituted by Ashoka in the twelfth year of his reign; appointments to the office were made throughout the whole realm.*

Among servants and nobles, brahmans and wealthy householders, among the poor and the aged, they are working for the welfare and happiness of those devoted to Dhamma and for the removal of their troubles. They are busy in promoting the welfare of prisoners should they have behaved irresponsibly, or releasing those that have children, are afflicted, or are aged."

S: Mm. Any point that arises in connection with this ? Seems quite straightforward - Ashoka's more or less personal practice extending into the field of administration also. But it still is very much on the social level. Alright. Go on now to *"Ashoka's Attitude to Religion"*.

Text*"In the extracts from the Ashokan inscriptions which have been considered so far there has been virtually nothing that could unequivocally be called 'religious' in the emperor's concern and policies. That is to say, there has been no mention of the sacred, or of sanctions for behaviour derived from the sacred. But we are not altogether without evidence of Ashoka's attitude to contemporary beliefs and practices associated with belief in gods and sacred beings. His total opposition to the sacrificial offering of any living being is clearly expressed in the First Major Rock Edict, and his disapproval of the kind of assemblies associated with such sacrifices. In another of the rock edicts he deals with various kinds of rites, practised by the common people on such occasions as the birth of a child, or at the start of a journey. Women, in particular, he says, 'perform a variety of ceremonies, which are trivial and useless'. The one 'ceremony' which is of great value is the practice of Dhamma. The attitude which is revealed here - strong opposition to animal sacrifice, mild disapproval of useless and superstitious rites, together with commendation of the practice of the Dhamma - is characteristically Buddhist and recalls, in particular, some of the Buddha's discourses in the Digha Nikaya."*

S: Mm. It depends, of course, on what one means by `Dhamma' in this context. [Pause] All right, carry on then.

Text*"Ashoka appears to have shared contemporary cosmological belief, with notions of various layers of existence one upon the other. Below the earth were various hells; the surface of the earth was the abode of men, and above the surface of the earth were realms of increasingly refined and rarefied atmosphere, the various heavens, where lived the spirit beings or devas, sometimes called 'gods'. These denizens of the upper regions were regarded as a 'natural' feature of the universe, as natural as any other beings, and subject to rebirth, but they enjoyed a more blissful present existence in heaven as a result of good karma in previous existences, according to the prevalent Indian view. Improvement in moral conditions on earth could attract them, however, and it was believed that in such happy circumstances the devas appeared from time to time among men. Such a condition of things Ashoka believed to have been brought about as a result of his strenuous efforts on behalf of Dhamma. Referring to his own increased moral ardour during the year that he had been a more active Buddhist he comments that 'The gods, who in India up to this time did not associate with men, now mingle with them'. The same inscription endorses the contemporary popular idea that by living a good moral life any man could achieve a more blissful existence on some higher plane: 'This is not something to be obtained only by the great, but it is also open to the humble, if they are earnest; and they can reach heaven easily.'*

One further point of interest which arises from a study of the inscriptions is that Ashoka looked with strong disfavour upon sectarianism when it led to the disparagement of the views and attitudes of others. Like other rulers, before his time and since, Ashoka had a powerful interest in peace within his realm, in harmony among his subjects. True progress in essential truth, he says, will enable a man to control his speech 'so as not to extol one's own sect or disparage another's on unsuitable occasions'; rather, 'one should honour another man's sect,

for by doing so one increases the influence of one's own sect and benefits that of the other man; while by doing otherwise one diminishes the influence of one's own sect and harms the other man's.' In Ashoka's case, this concern with social harmony is all of a piece with his very evident and earnest concern for the general welfare of his subjects. He himself honoured with gifts and attended to the affairs of Ajivakas, Jains, and brahmans as well as Buddhists."

S: Mm. So what do you think of this principle laid down by Ashoka - that "one should honour another man's sect" - what do you think this means? Or do you think this is correct? .... "for by so doing one increases the influence of one's own sect and benefits that of the other man". Do you think this is true?

___: It's probably true for a king.

S: Mm. It's true within this context of social order.

Vessantara: I suppose it depends on what you mean by `honour'.

S: Mm! Indeed! Yeah. What do you think it might mean, or appears to mean? [Pause]

Vessantara: Having a certain amount of respect and ....

Ratnaguna: Tolerance?] .... and tolerance; some kind of appreciation.
S: It's more than tolerance. .....

Lokamitra: Making offerings. ....

S: Possibly. [Pause]

___: It's more like eclecticism.

S: Mm. It does smack a bit of that. Clearly, as Trevor Ling says, the ruler has got a powerful interest in peace within his realm: he doesn't want various sectarian differences to become inflamed to the point of conflict. But is it therefore true that one should **honour** another man's sect? You might think that the other man's sect is completely mistaken. And Ashoka himself clearly disapproved of the brahminical sect's practice of animal sacrifice. [Pause]

Clearly the ruler would like to see the followers of all the different sects living together harmoniously and honouring one another, but is that always really possible, if you believe that someone is following a path which is, say, the opposite to yours? You can be tolerant or you can not interfere with them and you can not quarrel with them, but can you really honour them, or respect them? To me this is a bit reminiscent of different followers, or representatives of different religions all being invited to get together on the same platform and just - what shall I say? -just exhibit mutual harmony and tolerance, when actually, very often, they just don't feel like that at all.

Manjuvajra: Wouldn't it then be a matter though that the things which would cause conflict between the sects may just be two different opinions?

S: That is true, but then if one conscientiously holds a certain opinion which one believes to be right, and one believes the opposite to be wrong, should one **honour** those who hold the other opinion? You can be tolerant. You can even say they have a right to their own opinion, but honour? - this is quite a strong word.

Manjuvajra: I mean, for example, within our own Order, if there were tow people with different opinions, one could still honour the other person's .....

S: Yes, but here there is a fundamental basis in common ... [Manjuvajra: Yes.] ... which far transcends any point of difference, but by `the sects' Ashoka seems to mean, say, the Buddhists, the Jains, the Ajivakas. For instance, can you honour, or could a Buddhist honour really, those who believed in materialism; or could he honour those who believed in fate; or honour those who did not believe in the importance of individual effort? You might say, well, they are entitled to their own view, but are you obliged to honour them? So it seems to me that Ashoka is going too far in the interests of social stability. He seems to be speaking more as the king interested in the preservation of social order, than as a Buddhist interested in the Truth. [Pause]

Perhaps it's sometimes a fine point: one shouldn't be rude, or shouldn't be discourteous, but I don't think that means that one should **honour** those whom one sincerely believes to be profoundly mistaken. [Pause]

Nagabodhi: I find sometimes at beginners' classes we get people coming along, sometimes devout Christians, or, in a way, even more difficult, followers of other Eastern religious set-ups, and you can go on being quite polite, but the crunch always comes, or I think you almost have to make it come politely .....

S: Well, sometimes they make it come, because my experience is that they demand from you an endorsement of their particular stand, or their particular teacher. Sometimes they do that in a very provocative fashion. I had quite a bit of experience of this in New Zealand, not so much in England. But it happened there on several occasions. Someone says, `Don't you think that Guru Maharaji is the greatest teacher who ever lived ?' They ask you things like that. So what can you say? You just say, `No.' (sound of chuckling) [Pause]

So tolerance, yes; even social harmony, yes; but respect is too much to ask for in such cases - or `honour' is too much to ask for. I don't know what the word is in the original; it could even be `puja'. Might be worth looking up.

Siddhiratna: Bhante, to go back to the paragraph before - the thing about being born on a higher plane, `devaloka' - I remember from `the seeds' thing, that the gods had less seeds than any other realm, as it were, on the .... I actually thought it was not a good thing to actually encourage somebody towards that end, (words lost as **S:** speaks) .....

S: This is, of course, from the standpoint of the ordinary man who just wants a better lot within the conditioned - Whether that better lot within the conditioned is a better lot from a spiritual point of view he isn't, apparently unduly concerned with.

Siddhiratna: I should have thought that if the teacher of that person knew the difference, what's his justification in aiming that man towards that end, as it were?

S: Well presumably, aiming him at the highest of which he is capable, or in which he can be interested.

Siddhiratna: So the teacher, then, has to be pretty certain that the man can't go further, before he .....

S: I'm personally very doubtful about this whole business of the double standard, as it were, for the laity and the bhikkhu - that is to say, the layman is to be directed only to aim at `heaven', which is very often the case in Theravada Buddhist countries. If someone aims

only at Heaven he can't really be a Buddhist. You can be a Buddhist only if you `go for refuge', and are thinking, at least ultimately, in terms of Enlightenment. If you are thinking in terms of Enlightenment, well, you won't be concerned about rebirth in Heaven, because from the point of view of Enlightenment that isn't a very favourable state of affairs.

Siddhiratna: Yes. It's only second best, or worse.

S: But there is this tradition, especially in the Theravada countries, that the layman should aim only at a happy, heavenly rebirth. But one doesn't find this of course in the Mahayana countries. There, as I said a little while ago, everybody accepts the Bodhisattva ideal, everybody aims to be a Bodhisattva, and finally, a Perfect Buddha. [Pause] You could even argue that, speaking in terms of `Heaven' and rebirth in Heaven as a result of your good deeds here on earth, is simply, in effect, giving a sanction - a somewhat supernatural or at least supernormal sanction - to matters of social ethics. [Pause]

The aim and object of dangling the carrot of Heaven in front of your nose is to get you to observe social ethics here and now. That is really the purpose of the exercise, even though it may be true, that if you do fulfil your duties, do fulfil your social ethics, you will be reborn in Heaven; but Ashoka's interest seems to be just to get people observing social ethics here and now, on earth in his kingdom. So rebirth in Heaven is held out as an additional inducement. [Pause]

Vessantara: The idea of heaven not being a very good place from which to attain Enlightenment in the Buddha seeds is a Chinese tradition. Would the Theravadins necessarily even look at things in that light?

S: I think they would if it was put to them, they probably would agree, yes, those who knew their doctrine anyway, yes.
All right let's carry on.

Text*"From this survey of the evidence of Ashoka's fairly numerous inscriptions, what emerges is the picture of a ruler who was converted from one ideology of government to another. He was, throughout his life, both before and after his adherence to Buddhism, first and foremost a king; he did not give up the affairs of government for the affairs of some other, spiritual realm. He became a Buddhist because it seemed to him that to do so was to become a better king' pursuit of the Dhamma would ensure that the realm over which he ruled was a better, happier and more peaceful place."*

S: Well it seems almost to be the Maharishi's point of view, doesn't it? But did Ashoka become converted from ideology of government to another? Was it simply that? He does say himself that he `goes for refuge'. So was it really a switch from one ideology of government to another? That, no doubt, was involved, but **why** did he make that switch? He might truly have been first and foremost a king, but he still was an `upasaka'. He still was one who had `gone for refuge', and its true he didn't give up the affairs of government, but to contrast that in this sort of tendentious way, with the affairs of some other spiritual realm is quite incorrect. I mean, Ashoka, for all we know, might have meditated every day and led quite an ascetic life. "He became a Buddhist because it seemed to him to do so was to become a better king" - there's no evidence for that whatever. He became a better king, no doubt! But there's no evidence to show that he became a Buddhist just in order to be a better king. Or simply that: "pursuit of the `Dhamma' would ensure that the realm over which he ruled was a better, happier and more peaceful place." Well surely it would have been. But his conversion to the Dharma would seem to have been the result of a profound personal conviction. [Pause] All right, let's carry on.

Text*"Ashoka has been compared to the Emperor Constantine, who made the Christian religion the official creed of the Roman Empire, and established the Church as the ecclesiastical arm of the state. If we start out with the idea that there is such a correspondence, that Ashoka was an Indian Constantine, then we soon find ourselves referring to the Sangha as the 'Buddhist Church', and calling bhikkhus not merely 'monks' but even 'priests'."*

S: Which is, of course, done in Ceylon.

Text*"But what Ashoka promoted was a system of public morality and social welfare which was itself the logical working out in a socio-political sphere of a sophisticated and radical analysis of the human situation."*

S: Don't you think that's true? - that Ashoka's simple prescriptions of social ethics **do** represent "the logical working out in the socio-political sphere of a sophisticated and radical analysis of the human situation." Isn't that a bit of an overstatement? [Pause] Anyway, carry on. I think we're prepared for almost anything by this time. (Sound of chuckling)

Text*"The basis of the appeal of this ideology was not to be found in any theistic sanctions, but in the self-evident attractiveness and value of the kind of life which it tended to produce when it was seriously adhered to and practised over a sustained period. The corps of professionals set the ethical and existential goal so high (nibbana) that in their pursuit of it, they enhanced the moral quality of life of those around them. To support such men, to heed their philosophy, to facilitate the realization of their ideal by the proper ordering of society - this was Ashoka's primary concern from the time he became an enthusiastic Buddhist."*
S: Well that's true enough! But then what becomes of your social ethics as an end in themselves? All right, on we go.

Text*"As far as `religion' was concerned, if by that were meant priesthood and sacrificial system, Ashoka was, like any other Buddhist, opposed to such institutions, as socially dangerous and intellectually deceptive. If by religion were meant popular rites and ceremonies other than sacrifice, he saw no great harm in these, nor any great usefulness either. Occasionally a ceremony or an ancient custom might have something to be said for it, as inculcating reverence for good traditions. But one should never be too dogmatic about such things, Ashoka held; certainly not if it were at the cost of fraternal goodwill and social harmony."*

S: Mm. When one is talking about honouring other sects, one isn't surely referring just to putting up with customs like dancing round the maypole, one is referring to a far more fundamental difference of opinion, surely. So it seems to me a lot of woolly thinking here. All right, let's go on.

Text*"Nevertheless, it was in the general area of mildly beneficial ancient customs that 'religious' forms of activity prospered in Ashoka's reign. The indigenous, non-brahmanical elements of popular belief were stimulated by the tolerance which they enjoyed, and so, together with the growth and influence of Buddhism there went a growth of non-priestly beliefs and customs."*
S: I don't know whether there is any evidence for this at all.
"The indigenous, non-Brahminical elements of popular belief were stimulated by the tolerance which they enjoyed." - This is pure speculation I think. You notice he doesn't cite any references here. All right, let's go on.

Text*"Perhaps the most significant of these was the cult of veneration of stupas, the stone or brick cairns in which were enshrined the reliquary remains of great men and heroes. The*

growth of this cult during Ashoka's time is clearly attested by the number of stupas in India which have been identified as dating from this period."

S: This is true, of course, but this has got nothing to do with brahminical beliefs.

Text*"It was this, associated as it was with Buddhism, which more than anything else marks the beginning of the characterization of the Buddhist movement in religious terms. By Ashoka's time the seeds of the attitude of bhakti, or reverential, living devotion, had been sown, seeds which in later centuries were to bloom luxuriantly in the worship by lay people not only of the Buddha Gotama, but of countless other potential Buddhas, or Bodhisattvas, heavenly beings of such exalted and potent spirituality that they were in function and status indistinguishable from gods."*

S: Ah! You notice here that Trevor Ling changes his definition of religion. Do you see this? He refers to the cult of the `stupas' which definitely did increase in Ashoka's time - and he says that - "This more than anything else which marks the characterisation of the Buddhist movement in religious terms. By Ashoka's time the seeds of the attitude of `bhakti', or reverential, loving devotion, had been sown". Here he equates religion with `bhakti', or reverential, loving devotion. Do you see that? But surely this was present in the Buddha's own time? Surely that `bhakti' was felt towards the Buddha by his disciples? After his death, by the time of Ashoka it became directed towards the `stupas', which were, of course, associated with the Buddha. And also he refers to the worship by lay people of the Buddha, and countless other Buddhas. Well, the bhikkhus also participated in this worship. Even though perhaps it was more popular among the lay people. [Pause] Anyway, let's carry on.

Text*"But in Ashoka's time all this lay in the future. Ashoka was no Constantine, discerning the growing popularity and power of the cult of a divine saviour; nor did Ashoka, as Constantine did, hasten to identify himself and his realm with the name of a new god that before long would be above every divine name, throughout the Roman Empire. Nor did he, as Constantine, graft this new faith on to the old religion of the state, continuing himself to function as pontifex maximus of the old priesthood. In contrast to all this, Ashoka was attracted to a social philosophy, and was attracted all the more strongly as his awareness of the problems that attend and emperor's task grew. The more he was drawn to this philosophy of the restructured society and restructured consciousness, the farther he moved from the old, priestly statecraft of the brahmans, while still paying respect to popular traditions. If there is any useful historical parallel with the Buddhism of Ashokan India, it is not the Constantinism of imperial Rome but the Confucianism of imperial China. And it has long been doubted whether that can be called a religion."*

S: This whole discussion seems rather confused. [Long pause]

All right, any general point with regard to that section? [Pause] Anyway, let's go quickly through these sections, and then try to summarise and wind up. Perhaps we've understood by this time, pretty well, exactly where Trevor Ling goes wrong. So maybe we can go straight through these sections, dwelling only on those points which are new, or raise any that we haven't yet really discussed. *"The Effects of Indian Religiosity on Buddhism."*

Text*"The fact remains that by the end of Ashoka's reign, Buddhism had come to be very much more closely and intimately associated with popular religious practice than had formerly been the case."*

S: Mm. There is no evidence for this apart from these special cases of the `stupa' worship. [Pause]

Text*"It may be useful at this point to remind ourselves that the essential features of Buddhist practice, as they are portrayed throughout the Pali canon, are morality and mental discipline, leading ultimately to wisdom or enlightenment. At the higher levels of the Buddhist movement both morality and mental discipline were equally important and equally emphasized as the proper concerns of the Buddhist professional - the `bhikkhu'."*

S: There's still this reference to the `bhikkhu' as the `professional'.

Text*"But at the lower levels of engagement, among those who were living the lives of householders and workers, it was expected that the major preoccupation would be with morality."*

S: There were many exceptions to this - there are quite a number of instances in the Pali scriptures of householders, while continuing to remain at home, becoming at least `stream entrants'.

Text*"This is implied, too, in the Ashokan inscriptions, as we have seen. Morality, or, in Ashokan terminology, Dhamma, consisted of generosity, expressed in various social relations, of non-violence, and simplicity of life. So far as any cultus of worship is concerned, there would appear to be nothing in the nature of Buddhism itself to require it or justify it. It was on aesthetic grounds, apparently, that the Buddha admired the various shrines in the city of Vaishali; his words to Ananda on each occasion when they visited these shrines had to do with the practice of mental discipline. The value of such shrines appears to have consisted in the opportunity which they provided, as the text of the Mahaparinibbana Suttanta has it, for developing, practising, dwelling on, expanding and ascending the very heights of the four paths to iddhi. Iddhi is a word which had various connotations, according to the context for which the most general or comprehensive translation is 'glory' or 'majesty'. The 'glory' to which the 'four paths' here mentioned lead is that of the Buddhist who has attained the goal of emancipation from bondage to 'self-hood'. The four paths are those of will, moral effort, thought, and analysis in the context of each case of the struggle against evil."*

S: Mm. He goes rather off at a tangent here. I don't quite know why. The Buddha did admire the (?) shrine, and it was at one of those shrines that he mentions that one who has one developed the four `iddhipadas', could if he wished to, prolong his life, but that is quite a long way from saying that "the value of such shrines appears to have consisted in the opportunity which they provided" to practise those things. There's no reference to that at all in the text. Anyway we need not bother with that.

___: What were the shrines? .....

S: Apparently shrines to `devas', and so on. We assume so. We don't know definitely. Might have been just little piles of stones, or little grottoes, such as you find all over India even today. But sometimes the word is used just to refer to a tree, at the foot of which there were some stones daubed with vermilion, and little offerings.

____: Is `iddhi' linked to the word `siddhi'?

S: Yes. `Siddhi' is the Sanskrit form; also `riddhi'. [Pause]

Text*"So while there was nothing in the nature of early Buddhism to require worship as an essential activity, as there is in theistic religion like Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Vaishnavism, there was a tendency, dating back apparently to the earliest period, to associate mental discipline, in certain circumstances, with the aesthetically helpful setting provided by an already existing shrine."*

S: This is a gross over-generalisation! Just from this very speculative interpretation of just one particular passage from the `Mahaparinibbana Sutta'. And what does one mean by worship? I mean, the Mangala Sutta says: (Pujajapujaniyanam(?)) - `the worship of the worshipful', and surely the attitude of the Buddha's disciples towards him was one that we can only call worship; certainly `reverential, loving devotion'. [Pause]

Text*"Beyond this use of a shrine early Buddhism had no reason to go: certainly not in the direction of any kind of public ceremonial or cultus. So far as the bhikkhus were concerned, the Buddha was represented as having explicitly forbidden them to engage even in the reverencing of his mortal remains after his death."*

S: No, he didn't say that. He said that the bhikkhus should not concern themselves with arrangements for his cremation. [Pause]

Text*"That, he said, could be left to pious men among the nobles and householders."*

S: Because obviously, various material resources would be required.

Text*"bhikkhus should concentrate on making progress in moral and mental discipline. It was for noblemen and householders who were supporters of the Buddhist movement to supply the land, the resources and the labour for the building of stupas, so that the remains of the Buddha should be treated in the same way 'as men treat the remains of a Chakravartin', or universal monarch. The cremation of the Buddha's body and the enshrinement of the bones and ashes was, as we saw earlier, carried out in exactly the manner that was used for the cremation and enshrinement of the remains of a great emperor. We also saw that this was one of a number of ways in which the Buddha and the Chakravartin are regarded as counterparts, spiritual or philosophical on the one hand, and political on the other.*

It has been suggested that the building of a mound or stupa in which to enshrine relics was, in fact, and old custom put to new use in early Buddhism. The old custom, says the exponent of this view, was the veneration of certain hemispherical mounds as sacred, and was a feature of ancient religious practice in a number of cultures. This custom was then given a new meaning by the use of such solid brick or stone mounds as receptacles for Buddhist relics; thus, what was originally simple mound-worship developed into relic worship. There is no certainty about this, however, and the argument is based largely on the existence of 'traces of mound-worship in the Vedic age among the Aryans of India'. While it is conceivable that some kind of cult of sacred mounds may have preceded their use in the early Buddhist period as reliquary shrines, there is no clear evidence of this. What is clear is that in the Ashokan period, large numbers of Buddhist stupas were constructed, in the course of what appears to have been a widespread popular movement. What was expressed by this practice was devotion to the Buddha, and the desire to reverence him."

S: This is, of course, quite correct.

Text*"It is possible that Ashoka himself was responsible for making the cult into a popular movement. It must be emphasized that in the Ashokan period the 'Buddha-image' or 'Buddha-statue' (properly called a Buddha-rupa) had not yet appeared on the scene; this was a devotional usage which did not develop until about the first century BC, somewhere in north-western India. Until then it was the stupa which served as the focus of reverential feelings for the great man who had first gained supreme enlightenment, who had first taught the eternal truths of Dhamma, and had founder the Order of those who guarded, practised and transmitted this eternal Dhamma. In India the tendency to pay elaborate respect and reverence to great men, to the point of deifying them, is well attested, from the modern period*

back to antiquity. It combines with another well-attested and widespread emotional attitude - the desire to surrender oneself in self-abnegating adoration. In India this attitude is known as bhakti, well described as the experience in which 'mind and body are flooded with an overwhelming sweetness, the Rasa, or Raga, which is the experience of being in love not with a human lover but a divine. The religious mood of utter surrender of the self to one who is thought of as saviour or lord, makes its appearance in a variety of forms and in diverse cultures outside India, from the Amida-cults of medieval Japan to the Jesus-cults of modern America. In India the cult of the bhagavata, the beloved or adored one, has often focused itself round an historical figure whom subsequent generations have invested with divine qualities."

S: Do you think there is, in fact, any difference between the kind of devotion which is directed toward the Buddha, say, in the Pali scriptures and the kind of devotion, the kind of surrender that he's attributing here to the Amida-cults of medieval Japan and the Jesus-cults of modern America? Is devotion necessarily a sort of falling in love with a divine object instead of with a human one?

Nagabodhi: I think it's quite different, because the one, in a way, involves a surrender of your conscious faculties - a kind of blind trust.

S: So does devotion necessarily imply this?

Nagabodhi: Not as we understand it in `puja'.

S: But he seems to believe that simple devotion in the theistic religions takes this sort of extreme form, therefore there could not have been any devotion in early Buddhism. But he seems here to overlook quite a number of texts where individual disciples expressed themselves with regard to the Buddha, very, very fervently indeed!
One could even, in a way, if one wanted to push the point, speak of the `going for refuge' in terms of surrender, couldn't one? [Pause] It seems to me he's leaving out quite a lot from early Buddhism even as described in the Pali texts - there's certainly a place for devotion, even if not of the extreme type that we find in connection with a theistic cult.

What about this word `bhagavan'? After all the Buddha is addressed by his followers as `bhagavan' throughout the Pali scriptures. It's the usual mode of address. For instance, *the Sutta Nipata* is a very ancient text, one of the most ancient portions of the scriptures, but we find several devotional effusions there, on the part of disciples -the brahmin, Sela (?) for instance. [Pause]

But of course, if Trevor Ling is making out that the Buddha was preaching merely, or predominantly, a social ethic, well, clearly, there isn't much room for devotion towards him in early Buddhism. Because the sequence of development seems to have been quite obvious, that during the Buddha's lifetime, his disciple had the Buddha himself as object of devotion, and for several generations there was the memory of the Buddha transmitted from master to disciple. But after a few hundred years you can understand that they wanted a more concrete symbol of the Buddha's presence, as it were. And the `stupa' came into existence, and became very popular, and after that the Buddha image, which has remained the most popular focus of devotion in Buddhism ever since. But you can't argue from the fact, well, there were no `stupas' and images in the Buddha's day, therefore there was no place for devotion. Well, they had the Buddha in person, and devotion was directed quite naturally and spontaneously towards him. And you feel this throughout the Pali scriptures - the great respect and devotion which the disciples had towards the Buddha, sometimes amounting to quite an extreme form of devotion. So it's not so much a later development as Trevor Ling seems to think. [Pause]

And what about the emphasis on faith? We find this too in the Pali scriptures, don't you? `Faith' is one of the five spiritual faculties. And `faith' is not just `belief'. `faith' is a definite feeling for, an emotion, directed towards, something which is spiritually higher. And very often that is, as it were, personified by, or embodied in the Buddha. [Long pause] All right, let's carry on.

Text*"This merging of various strands of folk religion was made considerably easier by the encouragement which Ashoka gave to it by his insistence on the meeting and mingling of the inherents of different religious and philosophical sects."*

S: Did he insist on their meeting and mingling? Anyway, carry on.

Text*"The Twelfth Major Rock Edict commands that different sects should listen to one another's principles, honour each other, and promote the essential doctrine of all sects, and adds that the carrying out of this policy was a special responsibility of the state-appointed `commissioners of `Dhamma'.*

S: It's almost as though he was trying to make, according to this account, a sort of eclectic system, which wouldn't seem very much in accordance with the Buddha's original teaching.

Manjuvajra: It's beginning to sound a bit as though Ashoka was a diplomat rather than a Buddhist.

S: Well, if this is a correct account of him. [Pause] Anyway, carry on.

Text*"That the Buddha had come to be the object of a popular bhagavata-cult in the Ashokan period is clear from the opposition expressed by those bhikkhus who adhered to earlier, simpler concept of the Buddha. The Kathavathu, one of the seven books of the Abhidhamma collection in the Pali canon, is generally regarded as having been compiled during Ashoka's reign. Its main purpose appears to have been the correction of various errors which had developed with regard to the Buddha"*

S: That's not correct: it opened with a lengthy account of `pudgalavada'. Anyway, carry on.

Text*"..and the Buddhist way; the very production of such a work by more orthodox `bhikkhus'....."*

S: He says : `the more orthodox' - well, this is prejudging the issue.

Text*"...of Ashoka's time is itself an important piece of evidence regarding Buddhist development during that period. As Sukumar Dutt has pointed out, there would have been no need for a work of this kind unless grave misconceptions regarding the Buddha and his teaching really had developed, and unless, too, there existed in the community a sense of the importance of preserving the earlier tradition in its pure form, and a feeling that this was now being seriously threatened. Among the points dealt with in the Kathavathu was the idea that the Buddha had not really lived in the world of men, but in the 'heaven of bliss', appearing to men on earth in a specially created, temporary form to teach the Dhamma. Together with this virtual deification of the Buddha there went also a tendency to deny him normal human characteristics, and on the other hand to attribute to him unlimited magical power."*

S: Well clearly, it's possible to feel devotion towards the Buddha without subscribing to these particular doctrines about him. Trevor Ling seems to confuse the two. [Pause] Anyway, carry on.

Text*"Such views of the Buddha were still being refuted by the Theravadins when "The Questions of King Milinda" was composed, probably in the first century of the Christian era."*

S: This is generally supposed to be a Sarvastivadin work, not a Theravadin work, though at present extant in Pali. Anyway that's a minor point.

Anyway, what does one get from this section? - `The Effect of Indian Religiosity upon Buddhism'. Basically he seems to consider devotion towards the Buddha personally as somehow incompatible with the Buddha's teaching, and a later development, but there is really no evidence for this if one looks at the Pali scriptures, because there, there are clear instances of quite intense devotion to the Buddha during his own lifetime. And the development of the `stupa' cult can't be taken as the development of devotion in the sense of devotion not having been there before - the `stupa' merely replaced the Buddha. The early disciples were devoted to the Buddha, or the memory of the Buddha, and later on to the `stupa' which enshrined the relics of the Buddha, and later on to the Buddha `rupa', which represented the Buddha ideal in human form.

All this seems to be in the interests of a sort of rational interpretation of early Buddhism. [Pause] All right, let's go quickly through this last section, and see what we find there. *"The Development of a Religious Buddhism"*. You notice by the way, he is now using the word `religious' in the sense of `devotional'.

Text*"It is possible to see that during the Ashokan period a number of different but related factors were at work in Indian society, which, interacting upon one another, were tending to produce an amalgam of philosophy, meditational practice, ethics, devotional piety and folk-lore which can justifiably be described as 'religious Buddhism'."*

S: Mm. Well maybe it can be justifiably so described. But you had that amalgam in the Buddha's lifetime, at least if you can trust the evidence of the Pali scriptures. There was philosophy, yes, if you can call it that, meditational practice, yes, ethics, devotional piety, yes, and folk-lore - plenty of it in the Pali scriptures, with apparently the Buddha himself subscribing to a great deal of it. So nothing new in the amalgam. Anyway, carry on.

Text*"In this process the cult of the stupa was possibly the crucial item."*

S: No. The `stupa' occupies, in the amalgam, the place which the Buddha himself in the flesh had occupied during the Buddha's own lifetime.

Text*"Royal support for the Buddhist movement meant the devotion of royal resources for the meritorious work of stupa-building. The general economic prosperity which Ashoka's internal policies helped to foster, by providing a reasonable degree of peace within the empire and good facilities for communication and transport, meant that other prosperous citizens could afford to follow the royal example of stupa-building. The growth in the number of stupas would, among the mass of the people, lead very easily in the Indian cultural atmosphere to a cult of the bhagava, the blessed one, the Buddha, in whose honour these stupas had all been raised. Given this virtual deification of the Buddha as the blessed one,, the Lord, there would be no difficulty at all in relating him to the pantheon of Indian folk-religion as one of the great beings, possibly the greatest, to whom adoration and worship were offered."*

S: There's this bugbear of deification again. The fact that the Buddha becomes, or is, or was, the object of devotion doesn't really mean that he is being deified. This is only within a Western context - we're accustomed to thinking of worship as being directed towards `God',

so if you worship, whatever you worship you're regarding as `God'. This is not true for Buddhism. You worship the Buddha as teacher, as an enlightened human being. And worship is considered to be appropriate to such a being, so there's no question of deification you've not made the Buddha into `God', or even into a god.
Anyway, let's go on.

Text*"Nor would the members of the Sangha be likely to discourage the building of stupas and their use as popular shrines, since there was, as we have seen, a tradition that the Buddha himself had spoken of the value of the shrines as places for fruitful mental discipline."*

S: This is begging the question of whether the `stupas' were the same kind of shrines as the shrines the Buddha had spoken about. If you've got a big `stupa' with lay people marching round it day and night, chanting, and lighting candles, and offering flowers, it doesn't seem to be a really suitable place for fruitful mental discipline - (Sound of chuckling) - in other words for quiet meditation. You might just as well try to sit down in the middle of church and meditate at `harvest festival' time. Anyway, carry on.

Text*"It is possible that it was the development of Buddhism from a socio-political philosophy to a popularly based religious cult which was one of the chief causes of its eventual decline and virtual disappearance from India."*

S: You see how hypothetical this is! First of all it's very hypothetical that Buddhism was, to begin with, associated with political philosophy, and it's very, very hypothetical that it became later on "a popularly based religious cult." It's even more doubtful - he himself(?) it is possible that this development was "one of the chief causes of its eventual decline and virtual disappearance".

Lokamitra: But in that time, from Ashoka's time, it came even more into prominence didn't it?

S: It did, actually, indeed.

Text*"Once it had come to be regarded as a religious system, it could be thought of, and indeed was thought of, as a rival by those who adhered to, and whose interests were vested in another religious ideology, notably the brahmans.*"

S: Well, the brahmans regarded the Buddha's teaching as a rival even in his own day! You don't have to wait until the time of Ashoka for that to happen.

Text*"Ashoka himself seems to have moved his position in this respect during the course of his roughly forty-year reign, from the earlier attitude of equal tolerance and encouragement of all sects and ideologies, to a more pronounced affinity for the Buddhist movement in his later years. His prohibition of the slaughter of animals would not have been altogether welcome to those who were the guardians of the tradition of sacrificial ritual."*

S: Well clearly, he wasn't honouring that sacrificial ritual.

Text*"His measures aimed at restricting or banning popular festivals of which he did not approve would have also have diminished to some extent his public image as a man of complete religious tolerance. When, in addition, in the latter part of his reign, it was seen that the emperor was increasingly associated with the Buddhist Sangha and its affairs, at a time when Buddhism was taking on the characteristics of another, rival religious system - rival, that is, to the system of ideas and practices which the brahmans believed it was their sacred duty to uphold and preserve - some kind of conflict between the two would appear inevitable."*

S: Well, we saw that conflict during the Buddha's own lifetime.
Anyway ...

Text*"There has been some debate among scholars regarding the extent to which the opposition of the brahmans was responsible for the decline of the Ashokan Buddhist state."*

S: One can be pretty certain they weren't in favour of it!

Text*"Those who deny that there was such opposition have not, in the opinion of the author, produced reasons for this view sufficiently convincing to match the strength with which they appear to hold it."*

Manjuvajra : Wouldn't it be true to say that if there was a lot more devotional activity going on this would impinge on the brahmans more? Because in the Buddha's case presumably the devotional activities were only going on round the Buddha, and so it became very much a personal matter but when you've got `stupas' popping up all over the country... [**S:** Yes, this is true.] ..... and lots of ceremonies going on ..

S: It could well be that many people took to `stupa' worship and didn't patronise the brahmans and their ceremonies any more. This is quite possible - that the brahmins were sort of alerted and alarmed over a much wider area than before. This is certainly possible. [Pause]

[End of tape 26 Tape 27]

All right, carry on.

Text*"Without doubt, Ashoka's rule was autocratic. The Ashokan state was in no sense a democracy. Within the Sangha itself there was, as we have noted, a democratic system of self-government, but so far as the general run of men were concerned the Buddhist view was that men who by nature were dominated by passion needed strong, morally wholesome, autocratic rule. it was such a rule that Ashoka saw it to be his duty to exercise. In doing so, while he must have had the tacit consent of the mass of the people, he would also have incurred the dislike and even enmity of any sections of the community whose interests were not compatible with the public promotion of Dhamma."*

S: This is very likely of course.

Text*"Ashoka suppressed what he believed was not in accordance with Dhamma. In doing so, he incurred an intensified opposition to Dhamma, as well as to himself and his dynasty. The Mauryan dynasty decline rapidly after his death, and survived him by barely half a century before it was superseded by the re-established brahman state under the Sungas. Buddhism managed to survive, partly because of its now increasingly popular basis and its marriage to folk religion ....."*

S: What about the appeal of its philosophy? (sound of chuckling)

Text*"....and partly because the political power of brahmanism was not everywhere sufficiently great to allow the enforcement of that policy towards Buddhism which is stated clearly and unequivocally in what the Law of Manu has to say concerning the treatment of heretics: 'Men belonging to an heretical sect..."*

S: That is to say a non-brahminical sect.

Text*".... [classed here together with gamblers, dancers and singers, cruel men, those following forbidden occupations, and sellers of spirituous liquor] let him [the king] instantly banish from his town.' Similarly, 'ascetics (of heretical sects) are lumped together with 'those born of an illegal mixture of the castes' and 'those who have committed suicide' as classes of men to whom no honour should be given."*

S: One can see from this the orthodox brahman attitude towards everything that was non-brahminical. So the hostility of the brahmans towards Buddhism both during the lifetime of the Buddha and afterwards, and throughout Indian history, in fact, right down to the present time, is not to be wondered at! I mean, it frequently surprised me that ... I mean, I went to very remote parts of India where people knew nothing about Buddhism, and Buddhism had not been heard of for many, many, many centuries: I found among many brahmans a strong living tradition of hostility towards Buddhism - almost instinctive, as it were, for they had absolutely no personal contact with it until, maybe, they met me. [Pause]

Manjuvajra: He makes a comment here that doesn't tie in what he said before: he says that, "Ashoka suppressed what he believed was not in accordance with the Dhamma."

S: Yes, presumably towards the end of his life when he became more identified with the Dharma in the Buddhistic sense. He's probably referring to Ashoka's suppression of the `samajjas - Scholars disagree as to what these were - They seem to have been popular festivals of a somewhat orgiastic nature, perhaps even with erotic features, and he clearly suppressed these. Though they were sort of, as it were, popular religious festivals, `folk festivals', often taking place on hill tops. So he regarded them as, one could say, well, either not in accordance with the Dharma, or not in accordance with the requirements of public order and public decency. [Pause] All right, let's go on.

Text*"By the end of Ashoka's reign, the structure of dual relationship which the Sangha had evolved, between the king on the one hand and the people on the other, was beginning to display some of the inherent disadvantages which it entailed, particularly in the Indian situation. The close ties between king and Sangha which Buddhist polity seems to require had, as an inevitable effect, the antagonizing of the brahmins."*

S: You'd antagonise the brahmins, anyway. I mean, the mere presence of Buddhism antagonises the brahmins.

Text*"In order to function properly, the Buddhist political arrangement which was pragmatically to be preferred, namely the securing of the king's adherence to Buddhist values, had also to exclude his adherence to brahman values and policies."*

S: This is true, of course.

Text*"By implication the scheme had to be exclusive to the Sangha. Ashoka's occasional declarations of goodwill towards the brahmans could not ultimately disguise the facts of the situation. The hostility of the brahmans, which exclusion from their former position of political influence would engender, gave the Sangha a vested interest in the continuance of royal patronage.*

On the other hand, the Sangha did not and could not rely entirely on royal support, for this by itself was not sufficient. It is true that Ashoka, and after him, in a similar manner, Buddhist kings of Ceylon, gave generously for the supplying of the Sangha's needs, of food clothing and housing. But these donations were, in the total perspective, symbolic and exemplary. Economically, the major support for the Sangha, on a day-to-day basis, would have come from the local people of the towns and cities of the Ashokan empire. Hence there was a

strong economic motive for an attitude of tolerance towards popular cults and beliefs, in order not to antagonize unnecessarily those on whom the Sangha depended for its daily needs."

S: This was not always necessarily the case, because for many of these popular beliefs, for instance in the existence of the `devas', which the Buddha himself appears to share.

Text*" This attitude of tolerance was not difficult to accommodate for, as we have seen, it accorded well with the Buddhist view of the operation of reason and argument. But such and attitude towards popular belief and practices, arising out of both theory and economic requirement, had as its penalty the danger of the subversion of the Sangha by the all-pervasive popular cults of India, and particularly by the `bhagavata' cult."*

S: Trevor Ling isn't exactly right, but at the same time there is something to be said for the fact that Indian Buddhism was too tolerant. You see what I mean? Not that I'm suggesting that it should have been intolerant; but it does seem that quite often it was much less forceful in the presentation of its distinctive teachings than it could, or perhaps should, have been. It just allowed the ... well, the growth, virtually, of wrong views. And did not, perhaps, go sufficiently out of its way to check and correct those wrong views, of course by peaceful persuasion and argument. It's as though very often, so long as the people holding those views wrong views continued to make alms available to the bhikkhus, the bhikkhus didn't bother all that much what they were actually thinking.

There seems to have been some tendency of this sort: a sort of not very positive tolerance, but a lazy sort of tolerance. It does seem as though this was, of course, a weakness in Indian Buddhism; or source of weakness in Indian Buddhism. Do you see what I mean? [Pause] So he has, in a way, if you sort of correct him slightly, a sort of point. [Pause] I mean, you could well imagine the attitude of, perhaps, the average, even well-informed, well-meaning bhikkhu: `Well, just leave the lay people to their own devices, even if they do indulge in all of these silly cults, and practices, and beliefs. What does it really matter? They are good people, they lead reasonably moral lives, and they support us, so why should we interfere with their wrong beliefs, and their mistaken practices? Just leave them alone.'

So this sort of pseudo-tolerance, as I would call it, was a source of weakness as regards Indian Buddhism. In other words it was a sort of neglect of the laity, and thinking, in a way, that provided the laity conformed reasonably well to social ethics and supported the monks, that was enough. But if one does accept this line of thought, the history of Buddhism in India did show that it wasn't really enough. [Pause] You've got to have even the laity fervently, and actively on your side; and clearly understanding what the Dharma is all about. Not just supporting the bhikkhus and going their own way, as it were, doctrinally. You see what I mean? [Pause] Obviously you didn't want to engage in an argument every time you went for alms. (Sound of chuckling) But the bhikkhus seem to have gone, in many cases, to the opposite extreme. Not **always**, but it seems there was this tendency to leave the lay people alone, and not bother too much what they were thinking, or believing, or practising, provided that they were reasonably ethical, and provided that they filled your alms bowl. [Pause] All right, carry on then.

Text*"The end of the Mauryan dynasty and the restoration of brahmanical statecraft of the Kautalyan kind to its former position of dominance might have seemed to signal the end of the Buddhist experiment to which Ashoka and, with less distinction, his successors, had devoted themselves. It might look as though Buddhism was now to survive in India merely as another of the many bhagavata cults of which India seems never to have had any shortage. Gotama the Buddha and his teaching, the quiet social and ideological revolution which had for three centuries been making steady progress in northern India and beyond, were now, it*

seemed, destined soon to be forgotten as men gave themselves instead to a cult of a heavenly lord, while brahman priests who advised the rulers of the state took good care that Buddhism should never again be allowed to achieve the political and social influence which it had under Ashoka."

S: We don't really know. We've no knowledge at all about the extent to which Ashoka's policy really did modify social and political life in India. We just don't really know anything about that. It's rather interesting: there must have been tremendous Brahminical hostility because hardly any record of Ashoka at all has survived in Sanskrit non-Buddhist literature. It's as though the brahmins wished to completely wipe out the memory of Ashoka. The name of Ashoka is barely mentioned; very, very rarely indeed! So all we have are references in Pali Buddhist literature, and in works translated from Buddhist Sanskrit into say Tibetan or Chinese, and Ashoka's own inscriptions. We know nothing about Ashoka whatever from Hindu sources. That's quite a point, isn't it? There is no account of his reign; no account of his life at all! The name is mentioned just very, very rarely indeed - the bare name, and that is all. [Pause] All right, carry on then.

Text*"That is how it might have seemed, and to some extent that is how it was; but not entirely so. For while, in some place, the Sangha was swayed by the increasingly influential cult of the heavenly lord and its diverse developments, in other places it maintained the tradition of Gotama, the sage of the Shakyas, the man who had completely destroyed all attachment to the notion of the individual self, the man who was 'cooled' from all passion, and fully awakened, the Samasambuddha, who had also inaugurated the company, the Sangha, of those who followed him on this path, the company which, as the embodiment of the same selflessness, was to be the prototype for humanity as a whole. So long as there was a stream of Sangha life where **this** tradition was maintained, even though the actual structure of the Buddhist state had been dismantled, there was always the possibility that what had happened when Ashoka succeeded the throne of Magadha could happen again, and that another monarch, adhering fully and confidently to the Buddhist tradition, might, in cooperation with the Sangha, bring back into being the Buddhist pattern of society. So long as the Sangha survived, somewhere, in its earlier form and with its earlier perspectives, that tradition would be preserved out of which the Buddhist state and the Buddhist ordering of the common life might once again emerge.*

The Sangha did so, survive, in the school of the Theravadins ....."

S: This is not to say, as he seems to suggest, that it **only** survived in the school of the Theravadins. [Pause]

Text*".....or those who adhere to the doctrine of the elders, and it was this school which preserved the tradition of the Buddhist state, in south India, north-east India, and most notably and most continuously, in Ceylon. It is to the story of the planting of the Buddhist civilization in Ceylon, that we now turn our attention."*

S: Mm. Well, I'm afraid we won't be able to turn **our** attention, except, perhaps, individually.

Anyway, what does one think of this last section - "The Development of Religious Buddhism"? [Slight pause] He seems to mean a `devotional' Buddhism, but, as I said, devotion was an element in Buddhist life from the very beginning. [Pause]

Nagabodhi: This really ties in with his theory that he expounded at the beginning of the book: religion as the remnants of a civilization. [**S:** Mm. Yes.] ..... you know, what .....

S: Yes: you lose political power therefore you're just left with devotion, just with private

worship.

Nagabodhi: Yes. [Pause] But it simply fits in with his theory. It doesn't really seem to have anything to do with what happened or what I understand to be the Dharma. [Longish pause]

S: Well, since we've reached the end of all that we intended to study anyway - any sort of general thoughts or conclusions? What do you think we've gained positively from this study? What do you think we've learned that, perhaps, we didn't know before, or didn't sufficiently appreciate before?

Nagabodhi: I feel an appreciation for the absolute centrality of the principle of `the individual'. [**S:** Mm ! Mm !] ..... And if you lose sight of that you lose sight of everything.

S: That's a very good point. Yes. Mm. Yeh.

Lokamitra: And it's made much clearer how we relate to the group, and how we as a Movement do.

S: Yes. Right. I think perhaps, not only has the centrality of the individual emerged, but also the over-riding importance of the distinction between the group and the spiritual community. And also, something of the true nature of `anatta' even. [___: Yeah.]
[Pause]

Perhaps we should listen again to that, some time, to that lecture I gave on *`The Individual, the Group and the Spiritual Community'*. Has that been heard recently?

Voices: (unclear) (Pause)

Nagabodhi: In terms of .... I have reflected a few times about plans for future publications, and just thinking generally in terms of what we should be putting across .... [**S:** Yes. Yes.] ... it seems that there are certain features of our approach to things which are so important that we communicate them, that ..... like our feelings about the individual, and our feelings about `anatta', our feelings about the group and the spiritual community. In a way, they are absolute priorities, and those are the things we really must put across, because, in a way, they enshrine - or whatever - what we actually are about.

S: Have they been put across in Order members' talks and lectures recently, would you say?

Nagabodhi: [Pause] I haven't really heard many recently.

Manjuvajra: Whenever I talk about them I always talk in those terms.

S: What effect you find it having?

Manjuvajra: Well, immediately effective.

S: They do, and act upon it? (Laughter)

Manjuvajra: Yeah.

S: Are you sure they are not understanding you in terms of individualism?

Manjuvajra: I don't know.

S: It ought to be evident from the way they speak, or the way they behave, whether the point has really got across.

Manjuvajra: Well, I don't even think ..... I mean, most of the people still act in a `group' way.

S: Ah. Which means then in an individualistic way.

Manjuvajra: **In** an individualistic way? [**S:** Yes.] I wouldn't have even said that. [**S:** Mm. Mm. Just in a `group' way?] Yeah.

S: At least they intellectually understand the principle of individuality.

Manjuvajra: Yeah. They sort of get to like the idea of that. [**S:** Mm.] [Longish pause] I mean, `in an individualistic way' do you mean being, ah ....

S: No. I'm thinking `individualistic' representing a sort of a portion of the group just broken off, as it were, and functioning on its own.

Manjuvajra: No. I don't think so. [Long pause]

S: Of course one thing, no doubt, that we've learned, or at least have underlined, is the prevalence of `micchaditthi' among people who write books on Buddhism. (Laughter) And the sooner we can put out works of our own the better. We will look, no doubt, towards those with literary gifts, and all that sort of thing. We might see quite a number of people rushing into print. I think we really do need more literature. Putting across these basic fundamental points. We need more literature: articles, booklets, pamphlets, up to full-sized books.
(Break in recording - clattering noise)

Nagabodhi: ..... the sort of things that we should be putting out .....

S: Just let me interrupt you for a moment - I feel that even my own old writings don't really meet the needs of the case.

Nagabodhi Yes! Right! I've been thinking of the books that are, at the moment lying in wait, and I even think, in a way, `The Three Jewels' - although that's got to come out sometime, and will soon - It's like we are so utterly different to anything, in a way, that people will expect of us. We are so utterly different, I think, to what society's about, and a lot of ... and most, if not all, of the alternatives that are about. We need to assert ourselves in a very straightforward way - a very direct way.

S: Yes. We are not just another Buddhist group.

Nagabodhi: Yeah. We really ought to be concentrating our resources in putting this across. [Pause]

Lokamitra: We don't have a booklet which puts across these things sort of in between sort of two covers, as it were. **[S:** We don't really.] ..... and we really do need something, yeah.

Nagabodhi: We need something quite `hard hitting' really.

Lokamitra: It could be quite short. [**S:** Yeah.]

S: And no doubt the *`Newsletter'*, as it becomes more of a magazine, as it will do, I hope, very shortly, should feature articles, and comments of this kind, from this sort of point of

view. And, as you say, be quite `hard hitting'.

Nagabodhi: I think we need to be much more so than we have been.
As I said to (? ?) one of the things I've felt is often I've felt a kind of mood of depression during the study, and analyzing it - it's almost like just feeling daunted by the task ahead, not just on myself, but in terms of communicating, getting across.

S: Mm. I remember in the very early days someone took me somewhere - was driving me somewhere - and we happened to pass through the City of London, so I said to the person who was driving, as we were looking around the City of London, I said: `Look! This is what we're up against.' (Sounds of chuckling) This was perhaps a few months after `the Friends' was started.

_____: It seems the difficulty is just putting across the Dharma as a Transcendental truth, just the fact that there can be something Transcendental, a universal law. Ling seems to have missed it.

S: He seems to have missed that completely, just as Rahula missed it.

_____: I mean, how do you even speak of that to ordinary people?
S: Well, I think one has to work one's way up to it gradually. One has to establish communication first. You can't sort of lay it down as a postulate. You have to try to give them some sort of feeling for that, or at least give them the feeling that there's some sort of mystery beyond everything they can understand; something that they haven't fathomed, that they don't know anything about. Even if they don't have any clear idea about it at least they know that there is a sort of unresolved mystery lying there. At least try to communicate that sort of sense, that sort of felling: that they haven't understood it all, that the modern world hasn't understood it all, that science hasn't understood it all; there is something left over which is un-understood, which belongs to some quite different dimension, as it were. [Longish pause] Just try to communicate to them a sense that we don't know all the answers - [pause] - by `we' meaning people of the modern world. [Longish pause]

Manjuvajra: What do we then suggest? I mean, it seems to me ..... you know if you're suggesting that the modern world doesn't know all the answers, I think most people will be easily convinced of that, But.....

S: No, I didn't mean simply as a matter of fact did not happen to know the answers, but that no answer could be found on the level in which they might expect to look for the answers. [Manjuvajra: Mm.] Try to convey something of that sort, that sort of sense: something of the mystery of existence, if you like, with a capital `M' even, if you like. [Pause]

I think the most important thing, in a way, after the initial arguments and discussion, is just getting people to come along. So that means Order members themselves and others circulating as widely as possible, and not, as I said the other day, just waiting for people to come along to our centres in response to our little ads. That can certainly be kept up; that is very good, but perhaps more Order members and mitras and others need to go out and about, and find themselves in situations where they can meet people. Which is not going out with the intent to proselytise sort of thing, but just putting themselves in situations where contact and communication may quite naturally arise.

Siddhiratna: I think what Subhuti used to do and what Dhammadinna does, in taking courses in Buddhism at recognised places, ...[**S:** Yes.] ... that sort of thing ...

S: Yes. That's good. Yes. But it needs a vigorous follow-up, and you need to establish

personal contacts. For instance Jenny Mastin who now goes along regularly to the West London centre, contacted us in that way. She attended Vangisa's City Lit classes, and then, as it were, followed him to West London. And now she's quite a regular, faithful Friend there. Coming to Pundarika too, I think, sometimes.

Lokamitra: On the other hand those situations can be very trying and unproductive. I know Dhammadinna, though she enjoys her course, the people are ... they sit back much more, they expect to receive much more, they don't ....

S: Well this was so at the Centre, this was so at Archway in the early days also, so one shouldn't despair. [Pause]

Lokamitra: One of the things I wonder is: we want to set up situations on our own terms, as it were, so taking more classes in different places, like Vangisa started off in Ealing, you know, just hiring a room somewhere in South London one night a week.

S: Yes. Except that, with one proviso - I wouldn't suggest that any individual Order member does it by himself, or herself, unless they feel very, very confident and full of energy indeed! [Pause] Nagabodhi looks as though he's itching to go and write an article.

Nagabodhi: I'd really love to do that. [**S:** On ?] ... Nagabodhi: (speaks softly - words inaudible).

S: Anyway, time is virtually up, so perhaps we'd better leave it there with, no doubt, Dr. Ling's ears burning - he's probably been wondering what's been going on in the last few days. (sound of chuckling) His ears have been perpetually itching perhaps.

Nagabodhi: Thank you Bhante.

S: Thank you all for your contributions, and you no doubt realise that this is the end, not only of this particular seminar but the whole of the present series, which is the longest that we've had. It's lasted, now, virtually without interruption if you include the women's study retreats, for about three months. I don't like to think how many hours of study we've put in, I think it is well over two hundred - or rather in a way, now I **do** like to think! (laughter)

Lokamitra: Well over two hundred I should think.

S: I think well over. Nearer about two-sixty.

Nagabodhi: I think we probably should congratulate the transcriber, who's just reached the end. (Laughter) We've done it potentially.

S: Right. Proleptically as ? says. (Some words obscured by Nagabodhi's laughter)

Nagabodhi: (laughter in his voice) `Proleptically' speaking.

S: Oh, just by way of a winding up there's going to be a slightly more elaborate meal this evening. There's going to be a contribution from the other kitchen. So we'll see one of your cakes in due course. (Chuckling) And also, I propose to take the Puja, myself, this evening, if the person who was going to take it wouldn't mind.

____: He will stand down.

____: Yeah. I think I'll do that.

S: O.K. You can do the reading if you like. Oh, what about the chanting? What have you been doing lately?

VOICES: (all at once) (Inaudible)

S: I've been hearing pleasant little snatches of chanting from time to time.

Manjuvajra: The Padmasambhava.

S: At the end?

Manjuvajra: At the end before the Seven-fold Puja.

S: And what about the OM MANI PADME HUM?

Manjuvajra: Once or twice.

S: Shall we do that tonight, and have individual offerings in that case, if we've got enough incense.

Siddhiratna: `Padmasambhava' comes at the end of the Transference of Merit.

S: That's right, yeah. And the OM MANI PADME HUM at the end of section one, the Worship, when the individual offerings are made. Would you like to get together a reading? O.K. I'll leave that to you. Anything else to do? And what time have you been starting?

Manjuvajra: Eight-thirty.

S: Eight-thirty. O.K.

Manjuvajra: We've been sitting for a little longer as well. **[S:** Mm.] .... you know, the standard length rather than the shorter version.

S: What do you mean by `standard' length?

Manjuvajra: About an hour. [**S:** Good] ... About fifty minutes.

S: Maybe someone wouldn't mind doing a bit of extra decoration of the shrine? [Manjuvajra: Yeah.] ? few flowers, they could be picked now, instead of later on, and put on the shrine.

All right, that's that for this, well, for today, for this seminar, and the whole series. And now it's up to Nagabodhi to give us all a suitable `write up.'

Nagabodhi: Tim.

S: Tim is it? Good!

Lokamitra: We ought to give Bhante three `sadhus', do you think.

THUNDEROUS VOICES : SADHU! SADHU! SADHU!

S: Great. Thank you.

END OF SEMINAR

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