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

The Buddha's Law Among the Birds Seminar

Held at "Il Convento", Tuscany, Italy

November 1982

Those Present: Ven. Sangharakshita
Dharmacharis Silaratna, Buddhapalita, Ratnaketu, Amoghacitta, Khemananda, Silabhadra, Prasannasiddhi, Amoghavajra, Aryamitra

Sangharakshita: Alright then, I think we won't go through the preface and introduction. I think we can go straight into the text. But if there is anything that you come across in the course of your reading of the preface and introduction, and the article at the end which isn't quite clear, well you can bring it up at the end of one of the sessions. But so far as i know it's all perfectly clear. So we might as well go straight into the text, and devote what time we have primarily to that. Alright, we actually begin on a page without a number, opposite the illustration of the young crow. So would someone like to read that page, and the little preface of the work itself which follows.

Silaratna: "The Lord Buddha has said: IN THE LANGUAGE OF ANGELS, OF SERPENTS, OF FAIRIES, IN THE SPEECH OF THE DEMONS, THE TALK OF THE HUMANS, IN THEM ALL I'VE EXPOUNDED THE DHARMA'S DEEP TEACHINGS, AND IN ANY TONGUE THAT A BEING MAY GRASP THEM."

S: Well, we might as well have a few comments on that to begin with. Ignoring the actual language of Conze's translation, which speaks of angels and fairies - no doubt he's trying to appeal to as wide an audience as possible - presumably the 'angels' are devas and the 'fairies' are (gandharavas). Well, what general principle emerges from these few lines?

Ratnaketu: The Dharma isn't just limited to human beings.

S: The Dharma isn't just limited to human beings. But as a corollary of that?

Khemananda: It's for everybody - all types of beings.

S: It's for everybody, but how does one get it across to everybody?

: In their own language.

S: In their own language. So this is quite an important principle, quite a fundamental principle, in fact, of Buddhism. That one should expound the Dharma to people in their own language, so that they can grasp them. And this is why we have such a rich Buddhist literature, in so many different languages - there isn't just one canonical Buddhist language throughout the Buddhist world. In different parts of the Buddhist world the scriptures have been translated into the local language. This seems to have been the practice, this seems to have been the custom from the very beginning. The Buddha is said to have said to two disciples who wanted to put his teachings into a sort of Vedic Sanskrit. He's said to have told them "let everybody learn my Dharma - (my teaching) - in his own language." At least that's one interpretation, one reading of what he said, and that seems much more in consonance with the spirit of his teaching. The other reading, the other interpretation makes him say "let everybody learn the Dharma in my language", which doesn't seem to be in accordance with the spirit of Buddhism, or the Buddha's own spirit at all.

But when one says 'language', one doesn't of course say 'language' just in the literal sense. One uses the word 'language' to mean also the whole system of ideas with which somebody is familiar, or with which some group of people is familiar. With which some whole people, even, is familiar. So it's important, when expounding the Dharma, to speak people's language. To speak the language that people actually speak, not only literally but also metaphorically. So this is what the Buddha is doing in this instance.

: So suppose that you were giving a talk to a working men's club, you'd have to use their language.

S: Their language, but not necessarily their vocabulary, if you see what I mean. But you wouldn't use an idiom which would seem strange, or unfamiliar, or condescending to them. You wouldn't use illustrations which were remote from their lives. (pause).

For instance if you were trying to give an illustration, telling some little story, you wouldn't say something like, "Well, suppose you were in the Bahamas for the weekend." (laughter) Though nowadays, of course, it sometimes does happen that you find working men going off for weekends in the Bahamas. But you see what I'm getting at? Or if you were talking in India to an audience of ex-untouchable Buddhists, you wouldn't sort of refer, just in passing, to their motor cars, because they just don't have any. These are just very simple examples, but one must speak the language of the people whom one is addressing. Otherwise the Dharma comes across to them as something quite remote and unfamiliar and strange, with no relevance for them. So that suggests that you need to be pretty well aware of the sort of people to whom you are speaking, what sort of ideas they are familiar with, what their cultural range is. No use quoting Shakespeare at them if they've never heard of Shakespeare, or if Shakespeare is some remote, impossible figure. You'll make them feel either that you're over-educated, or that they're under-educated, or both.

So, if you're talking to angels, speak in the language of angels, if you're talking to serpents, so speak in the language of serpents. If you're taking to fairies, use the language of fairies, and the same for the speech of demons and humans.

Ratnaketu: "The Lord Buddha has said" .... is that a quote from the Pali Canon?

S: No, I don't think so. I think this is not so much a direct quote as a sort of expression of the Buddha's whole spirit, the spirit which it is...there may be a passage corresponding to this in one of the scriptures, it's difficult to say, but it, at the same time, may well not be a direct quote. It's certainly true that at the beginning of Mahayana sutras the audience, the congregation is described as consisting of beings of all kinds, not only human beings, not only Arahants and Bodhisattvas, but garudas and kinaras and ghandarvas and all sorts of other beings - nagas and so on - and they are all said to grasp the meaning of the Buddha's teaching in their own language. They hear the Buddha speaking, as it were, in their own language. And this is the way in which the Mahayana puts it. That the Buddha is simultaneously intelligible to beings of all kinds, speaking all kinds of languages. That is one of the sort of special powers of the Buddha, according to the Mahayana tradition, to be so understood.

Anyway, the general principle that emerges is quite clear. It doesn't actually say, the Buddha doesn't actually say that he's expounded the Dharma in the language of animals or in the language of birds - presumably that is to be understood, presumably they are included. (pause) Alright, go on and read what follows.

Silaratna: "ONCE UPON A TIME, in the course of this our auspicious aeon, there was to be found, on the border between India and Tibet, a beautiful wooded mountain. "Pleasant Jewel" was its name, and it was a holy retreat for Saraha, the great magician, an many other saints who dwelt in seclusion among the summits of the Himalayas, which shine in all the splendour of perfect whiteness. Here are found glaciers, like lions with manes of turquoise displaying their majesty. All along the slopes of the mountain, far to the East and South, live countless birds of good omen, birds like the white grouse and others, and also a great many animals, - stages, argalis, antelopes and others, all happily playing and frolicking free from care"

S: Alright, so - "once upon a time" - this is the way Conze translates. Clearly 'once upon a time' is the traditional beginning of a fairy story. It suggests that what follows has a meaning, but it's not to be taken too seriously, in the sense that it's not to be taken too literally, and the phrase sort of transports one into a different kind of world.

So, "In the course of this, our auspicious aeon". The note says at the end, which we can just

quickly look at, this is the Bhadrakalpa. The present aeon is called auspicious - Bhadrakalpa - because in the course of it more Buddhas are said to make their appearance than in most aeons. A thousand of them, to be more accurate, as against the usual three or four. This is according to Mahayana tradition, rather. I think, as far as I remember, that according to Hinayana tradition this kalpa is a Bhadrakalpa because it contains five Buddhas including Maitreya, who is yet to come. But the Mahayana speaks in terms of a thousand Buddhas. Anyway, it's a very auspicious aeon.

So, "In the course of this auspicious aeon, there was to be found, on the border between India and Tibet, a beautiful wooded mountain. "Pleasant Jewel" was its name, and it was a holy retreat for Saraha the great magician and many other saints." So the note says " the original Saraha was a Buddhist sage and magician." Conze translates 'Siddha' as 'magician', so the great magician is the mahasiddha - Saraha is one of the mahasiddhas. Siddha is sometimes translated as 'perfect one'. They were the virtual founders of the Vajrayana. So the original Saraha was a Buddhist sage and "magician" (inverted commas) who lived in India in the sixth century. Many masters of the Kagyupa School have adopted this name, which, as H.Meyer points out, "designates here the type of the perfect man who is both a saint and a worker of miracles". Anyway, no need to go very much into that, it's just mentioned in passing that this beautiful wooded mountain "Pleasant Jewel" "was a holy retreat for Saraha the great magician" (the mahasiddha) "and may other saints who dwelt in seclusion among the summits of the Himalayas which shine in all the splendour of perfect whiteness. Here are found glaciers, like lions with manes of turquoise, displaying their majesty." In Tibetan art you get representations of the so-called 'snow-lion'. The snow-lion is represented as being perfectly white, but he has a greenish-blue, turquoise coloured mane, and greenish-blue, turquoise coloured tufts on his ankles and of course on the tip of his tail, and he's supposed to be a sort of personification of the glaciers, which are perfectly white, inasmuch as the snow has fallen on them, but also sort of greenish-blue, in respect of their waters, so the snow lion represents these. So this is why it says "here are found glaciers like lions with manes of turquoise" - that is to say, pure white lions with manes of turquoise - "displaying their majesty."

"All along the slopes of the mountain, far to the East and South, live countless birds of good omen." You understand what a bird of good omen is? In different traditions, in different cultures, some birds are considered to be birds of good omen, signs of good luck. Others are considered to be birds of bad omen - bad luck. For instance, the owl, in many traditions, is considered a bird of ill omen. So is the raven or the crow. In the West, of course, the bluebird or the swallow is considered a bird of good omen. That's why you get them on greeting cards. You never see a crow on a greetings card do you? (laughter) Well, there are reasons for these things. "Birds like the white grouse, and others, and also a great many animals - stags, argalis, antelopes and others, all happily playing and frolicking free from

care." So this paragraph paints a quite idyllic sort of picture. Alright, let's carry on.

Buddhapalita: "The South, West and North are adorned with many and varied trees, with forest of sandalwood, aloewood, myrobalan, olive, walnut and birch. Magnificent rocks give to the four sides of the mountain an aspect of supreme beauty. All around the foot of the mountain, live royal birds, like King Vultures, eagles and others, giving themselves up to the pleasures of flight. There are lakes, ponds, pools water-meadows, and stretches of water which have flown down from the cliffs, rocks and glaciers. These gurgling, murmuring waters are graced with many kinds of water birds, with geese, swamp birds and black terns. Tree-birds adorn the forest heights - peacocks, parrots skilled in the art of speech, thrushes, crows, and others. this is the precious mountain with its forests."

S: So that's the introduction, that's the scene that is set. This is where the action of the story takes place. No need to linger over that. So lets go on to the first chapter.

Ratnaketu: "HERE, IN ORDER TO TEACH THE DHARMA, unto the feathered folk, the Holy lord Avalokita, who had transformed himself into a Cuckoo, the great king of the birds, sat for many years day and night under a large sandalwood tree, immobile and in perfect trance".

S: So "Here,in this Pleasant Jewel mountain in order to teach the Dharma unto the feathered folk" - that is to say the birds - "the holy Lord Avalokita who had transformed himself into a cuckoo" - if you want an explanation of why into a cuckoo rather than any other bird, you have to read that article or essay at the end - the cuckoo "the great king of birds sat for many years, day and night under a large sandalwood tree, immobile and in perfect trance."

'Trance', of course, is Conze's habitual term for Samadhi. Alright, carry on. Would someone like to read the parrot's speech?

Amoghacitta: "One day Master Parrot came before the Great Bird and addressed him saying:

"Greetings, O great and noble bird!
For one whole year, until today,
You've sat there crouching, motionless,
In the cool shade of a Santal tree.
So silent, dumb and speechless;
Does something anger or disturb your heart?
When, O Great Bird, your trance has ended,

Will you accept these seeds, the fine quintessence of all food"

S: Isn't there a little sort of contradiction in a sense, almost, in what the parrot says, or what he asks?

Ratnaketu: He's saying that if he sits there quiet, is he angry.

S: He says: "You've sat there crouching, motionless, in the cool shade of a Santal tree. So silent, dumb and speechless; does something anger or disturb you heart?" It's as though he thinks that the cuckoo, the great king of the birds has been sitting there, year after year, completely silent, out of anger? But then of course he says "When, O Great Bird, your trance has ended" which suggests that he does, in fact, know that he's meditating. So what do you make of this? (Pause)

Ratnaketu: Maybe he thinks he's just sitting there brooding.

S: We mustn't take the details of the story too literally, of course, but it does suggest there's some doubt in the parrot's mind, whether the cuckoo is just sulking, or whether he's meditating. Whether he's silent out of anger, or whether he's just in a deep trance, deep in meditation. So what does this suggest as a general rule, with regard to us and our relations with or awareness of other people?

Aryamitra: You can't always tell.

S: You can't always tell. sometimes someone is a bit quiet, so somebody else might think, well, maybe they're annoyed, maybe they're angry. But they may be just deeply thinking about something. I've had this experience myself, a number of times. I've been deep in thought, maybe about something I'm writing, and then I don't speak very much, or happen maybe to meet someone in the community, and I don't say anything, just say 'hello' and they think "Bhante's angry with me, he's not talking to me". So you see what I mean? It's sometimes quite difficult to understand what another person's mental state actually is. And I think this is a quite common sort of instance. That someone is just a bit quiet, a bit thoughtful, but others think that perhaps he's annoyed, perhaps he's even angry, and is brooding over something. (pause)

Why do you think people so readily misunderstand other people's mental states, other people's state of mind? Is it just a simple question of unawareness or insensitivity, or is there something else involved?

Aryamitra: Is there a sort of need orientation.

S: Either a need orientation, or sometimes anxiety. Well, perhaps it amounts to the same thing.

_____ : Sorry, I'm (not quite with you?)

S: Well, you may just be quite anxious, you may be the sort of person who expects other people to be angry with him. So if someone falls quiet, or doesn't say much, you're prone, as it were, to think, well, it must be because they're angry; you're always anticipating anger from other people., You're anxious in that respect.

_____ : Slightly paranoid even.

S: Slightly paranoid even, yes.

: So you're relating to people on your terms, and not really seeing them. It's like saying you may be quiet when you're angry, so you see someone else is quiet, so you....

S: Yes, you may know that when you're angry you go all quiet, so you conclude, you infer, that since they've gone all quiet they must be angry - probably with you. So therefore the parrot says, "Greetings, O great and noble bird. For one whole year, until today, you've sat there, crouching, motionless, in the cool shade of a santal tree. So silent, dumb and speechless; does something anger or disturb your heart?" Then maybe he sort of stops and thinks a little bit, maybe he thinks better of that, and he says, "When, O Great Bird, your trance has ended." - perhaps he realises, well, the cuckoo isn't really angry - "will you accept these seeds, the fine quintessence of all food." There's just a sort of little touch of humour here, you know; instead of offering rice and curry or whatever, the parrot offers beautiful seeds, the best of all kinds of food. Alright, carry on. Someone read the cuckoo's reply.

Khemananda: "*Listen then, O parrot skilled in speech!*
I have surveyed this ocean of Samsara,
and I have found nothing substantial in it.
Down to the very last, I saw the generations die,
They killed for food and drink - how pitiful!
I saw the strongholds fall, even the newest,
The work of earth and stones consumed - how pitiful!
Foes will removes the hoarded spoils down to the very last,
Oh to have avidly gathered this wealth and hidden it, - how pitiful!
Closest friends will be parted, down to the very last,
Oh to have formed those loving thoughts of affection, - how pitiful!
Sons will side with the enemy, even to the youngest,
Oh, to have given that care to those who were born of one's body - how pitiful!
Relatives united and intimate friends,
Children reared and riches stored,
All are impermanent, like an illusion,
And nothing substantial is found in them.
My mind has now forsaken all activity.
So that I may keep constant to my vows,
Here in the cool shade of the Santal tree
I dwell in solitude and silence,
In trance I meditate, from all distractions far removed.
Go thou, - repeat this speech of mine
To all large birds, and to all feathered creatures!"

S: So, leaving aside the fact that the cuckoo, the Great Bird, is a transformation of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, leaving that aside, it's as though the cuckoo has had a sort of insight experience. It's as though Perfect Vision has arisen, one might say, or at least he's had a glimpse of Perfect Vision. So thinking along those lines, thinking in those terms, what has he actually seen? Because he has seen something, he says "I have surveyed". The name Avalokita itself means 'the one who surveys', especially 'the one who looks down'. So - "I have surveyed this ocean of samsara and I have found nothing substantial in it". So what has he seen in simple terms, in terms of, say, a standard, a well known doctrinal category?

_____: Impermanence.

S: He's seen impermanence.

_____ : Samsara.

S: Not quite.

Ratnaketu: The marks of Samsara.

S: Well, basically what he's seen is the emptiness of the conditioned. "I have surveyed this ocean of Samsara, and I have found nothing substantial in it" - he's seen the emptiness of the conditioned. "Down to the very last I saw the generations die." He's seen impermanence, he's seen the transitoriness of human beings, or of sentient beings let us say, because he's speaking in the form of a bird. So "Down to the very last, I saw the generations die and the generations come". Generations of living beings, one after another, one after another, but they all die, down to the very last. And while they were alive "They killed for food and drink - how pitiful". For the sake of food and drink they killed one another, they killed other living beings, and how pitiful. Why does he say 'how pitiful'?

Well, he says 'how pitiful' because in the course of killing others for food and drink, they inflict suffering; at the same time they lay up unskillful karma for themselves. They too will have to suffer later on. So he says I not only see that all living beings are impermanent, I see the painful and unskillful nature of the whole struggle for existence, on the part of sentient beings.

Prasannasiddhi: This bit - down to the last generations dying, would you say that he was just, he's just realised that everything dies, or would you say it's a bit more like recollection of past lives?

S: It doesn't seem to be a recollection of past lives. It seems to refer to all the different kinds of living beings, generation after generation - a new generation comes up, but that dies, another generation comes up, that dies, down to the very last, the very latest generation.

Prasannasiddhi: He's just realised it rather than actually seen it.

S: Yes, he's realised it, yes. Where it says 'surveyed', it's a sort of surveying with his 'inner eye', so to speak. (pause) He's had a sort of vision. As I said, it may be a glimpse of Perfect Vision, or of impermanence.

"I saw the strongholds fall, even the newest. The work of earth and stones consumed - how pitiful!" In Tibet one finds may of these strongholds - presumably he's referring to the (dzongs?) which are sort of forts, great forts or castles, very often transformed at a later period into monasteries. In Bhutan, even now, the castles and the monasteries, the administrative buildings and the monasteries - the government administrative buildings and the monasteries - are one and the same. They're all located in the same premises. A rather extraordinary set-up from our point of view. But anyway, these strongholds, very massively built, are a very familiar feature of the Tibetan landscape. Those of you who know Lama

Govinda's paintings may remember that he's very fond of depicting these sort of things as though emerging out of the solid rock and continuous with it. It's difficult to tell where the rocky mountain ends and the monastery, or the castle, or the fort begins. So these are very strong, very solidly built, but nonetheless the cuckoo says - "I saw the strongholds fall, even the newest. The work of earth and stones consumed - how pitiful!" Even the very strong, very substantial, very solid buildings like these strongholds, these forts, these castles, even the newest of them, made of earth and stones, even they are not permanent. Even the pyramids of Egypt, one might say, are not permanent. So how pitiful. So in what does the pitifulness consist here.

Ratnaketu: It's futile in a way (two or three words unclear)

S: It's futile, because people's labour, people's energy has gone into making that stronghold. The very word 'stronghold' is suggestive. Why do you build a stronghold? It's a sort of permanent shelter. But it can't be permanent. There's no sort of ultimate protection from your enemies. (Pause)

So he "saw the strongholds fall, even the newest. The work of earth and stones consumed - how pitiful! Foes will remove the hoarded spoils down to the very last, oh to have avidly gathered this wealth, and hidden it - how pitiful!" The suggestion seems to be that people live in the castle for a while, maybe they raid the surrounding area, maybe they rob the caravans, they heap up wealth, they hoard their spoils, but sooner or later their enemies will remove it, down to the very last, the last little bit of it. So "Oh to have avidly gathered this wealth and hidden it - how pitiful!" What a waste! Especially as in accumulating, in gathering it, you've had to commit so many unskillful actions.

Silaratna: You get the theme of pity going through the 'Song of Meditation' Haquin says "what a pity".

S: Yes, yes, that's true. Also in that passage translated by Arthur Waley from one of the Chinese Buddhist texts, where there's a refrain "for this he was moved to pity" - speaking of the Buddha. Seeing people engaged in all sorts of useless, futile activities, which don't really do them any ...
[noise on tape, and then a break in the recording]

S: It's difficult to say. In any case, this is translated from Tibetan but [noise on tape] it roughly corresponds. How could one translate this, so to speak, into modern terms? Don't you see people working at their careers, fighting hard to get to the top, really quite ruthlessly, and for the sake of what? A heart attack at sixty-five! (laughter) If not fifty-five!

Ratnaketu: I was thinking, Bhante, that what is being said here is really very direct and I wonder whether - it's also written almost like a children's story - what effect something like

this would have on children, or even on people, if this was written in mundane terms, like saying - you build up your career and you fight for forty years to get to the top, only to die of a heart attack, and you build up your family, and you take out insurance policies, only to see your house get burned down.

S: Yes, but that's the modern equivalent - the insurance policy - that's the modern equivalent of the stronghold. (laughter) "Foes will remove the spoils, down to the very last." Well that, presumably, is the Income Tax Inspector! (laughter)

Ratnaketu : It would have a lot greater effect if it was written like that.

S: Yes. Otherwise it all seems archaic and old fashioned and pertaining to the past, not to the present. Once again, it's a question of speaking people's own language. Nowadays people don't speak the language of 'stronghold' and 'gathering wealth'. They speak the language of fast cars and colour televisions, insurance policies and investments and so on. But perhaps someone could even try re-writing it for grown-up children of the modern age. Fancy opening a book of fairy stories, and having this hit you in the eye!

I don't know what effect it would have upon children. I think perhaps not very much. When I say children, I mean very small children - 5,6,7,8,9,10. On adolescents it might have some effect, although they'd be unlikely, perhaps, to read fairy stories.

Then the cuckoo says "closest friends will be parted, down to the very last." Perhaps he's thinking of those friends in whose company you've hoarded your spoils and gathered your wealth and hidden it. You will be parted from them, down to the very last. "Oh to have formed those loving thoughts of affection, how pitiful!" Presumably he doesn't have spiritual friendships in mind, only worldly friendships based on common worldly interests.

Amoghacitta: The phrase "loving thoughts of affection" sounds more like pema rather than metta.

S: Well, looking at it from a strictly Buddhist point of view, yes. Still, you could, you know, just in a general sort of literary sense, so to speak, you know, speak in terms of having 'loving thoughts of affection' for one's spiritual friends. The language itself, as ordinarily used, isn't differentiated in that sort of way.

Ratnaketu: I was thinking about this because there's said quite a lot in the Songs of Milarepa as well, about friendships - attachments - always being broken up, and I was wondering whether this is always going to be the case. Even as far as spiritual friendships are concerned, are we....

S: (interrupting) Well, so far as this life is concerned, they're bound to be broken up sooner

or later, that is inevitable. But then one can look at things within a broader context, within a wider perspective, so to speak. That is to say that of karma and rebirth. Because if you do believe in karma and rebirth, and if you do believe that people do tend to be drawn together again in future lives, according to the nature of their connection in this life, then it is not impossible that you don't meet up with your old spiritual friends in the future, in future lives.

You might also, of course, meet up with your enemies, if you have any, because enmity can attract and keep you together as well as friendship, in that it's a negative sort of attraction. You're pulled towards the person you hate almost as much, if not more, sometimes, as well towards the person you love. I mean, Devadatta couldn't resist, so to speak, being born again and again in the Buddha's company - or rather in the company of the future Buddha - even though he was always up to mischief and causing him harm.

Ratnaketu: Is there - with other things, like Samsara's said to be impermanent and Nirvana's said to be permanent, and you've got, like, bad aspects of Samsara, the conditioned, and it's sort of like they're transformed, and exalted qualities of the unconditioned. Is there equivalent with this one, because it's said that all these friendships, all this communication, in a sense, will be broken up, and in the unconditioned this is an equivalent.

S: Well, if one speaks of friendship, if one speaks in terms of relations of any kind with other people, even with other living beings, you are assuming a duality. Friendship, even the best friendship, even spiritual friendship, to a great extent, is based upon duality. Duality between yourself and your friend. So if, in the unconditioned, if in the Absolute, duality is transcended, well it means also that friendship as we understand it is also transcended. It cannot but be. But you could say also that it's fulfilled at the same time, because one of the things that you're trying to do in the course of the friendship is to transcend duality. You should treat your friend as yourself, you should feel that your friend is yourself. That he is you and you are he. Not in a sort of sticky sentimental sort of way, but by way of a genuine understanding and insight even. (pause) So it's not so much that in as much as duality is transcended in the Absolute, there is no friendship, well you could say that duality is what gets in the way of real friendship. So that it's only within the Unconditioned, only with the Absolute, that real friendship is possible. A non-dual friendship, I means there's a sort of (ugenadha?) to use the traditional term. But nonetheless, even in the case of spiritual friendship on the ordinary level, well yes, there will be a parting, at least a physical parting. So one has to be prepared for that.

Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps also this translation - we don't know who translated it - perhaps as it's come translated, it might have a slightly different meaning in the Tibetan. It could actually mean the sort of neurotic relationship.

S: Yes, Conze in this translation may not be very clearly distinguishing. But the fact that the reference to the closest friends comes immediately after references to 'hoarded spoils' and

'avidly gathered wealth', it suggests that those friends are friends who've been with you on undertakings of that sort, and therefore friends in the very worldly sense, however close. Because in the case of spiritual friends, even at the time of death, even when you come to part from them, you won't regret having had thoughts of affection of them in a positive, skilful way. You won't think, well, 'how pitiful', you'll be glad, even though it didn't last, even though you have to be parted. It was a skilful thing, it was a positive experience, something that helped you, so you'll be only glad on it's account, you'll rejoice, rather than feeling any regret.

So - "Sons will side with the enemy, even to the youngest." The youngest because usually the youngest is the one of whom you're most fond. So, "Sons will side with the enemy, even to the youngest." All of them, right down to the youngest. Maybe you've had ten or twelve sons, but they all go and side with the enemy. "Oh to have given that care to those who were born of one's body, how pitiful." Again, it's a rather worldly thought, because even if they do turn against you in the end, even your own sons, you need not actually regret having brought them up. It is a pity that they are so ungrateful, but you need not regret that you've done your duty. In modern times it's not so much that one's sons as it were 'turn against' one - they just forget all about one. I remember a few months ago I visited an old friend of my mother's who's about 87. Her son, who's about my age, and whom I knew as a boy, lives just round the corner. He hasn't been to see his mother for years and years. And when anybody asks him why he doesn't go and visit his mother, he says, "Well, what's the point. I know that she's there." He just has no desire to see her whatever. It seems quite strange. I was going to say that nowadays it's not so much a question of sons siding with the enemy so much as of their becoming indifferent. But it's not even just that, sometimes there's actual ill-will for no apparent reason, from one's children towards the parents. That can be quite disconcerting. The parents think, well, they've done all that they could, they did their duty as they saw it, they've done their best, tried to give their children a good start in life, but the children seem to, well, hate them almost. At least to dislike them quite strongly. So "how pitiful.". (pause)

_____: (unclear)?

S: I've said this in the course of a study group. That I think you end up hating that on which you are dependent if that on which you are dependent restricts your freedom. Because everybody's got a sort of urge to be free one might say. And if you're emotionally dependent on someone, and if you're dependent on them to such an extent that you have to sacrifice your freedom, then you'll end up feeling a sort of dislike or even hatred for them because they're frustrating your urge to freedom. I mean, they may not actually be doing that objectively. You may think they're doing it because of your dependence on them. (pause) And this is one of the reasons why you find that people in relationships are very often always fighting and quarrelling. The dependence is there, but the negative feeling is also there. Very often on that very account.

Ratnaketu: But really, we're dependent on the Dharma, but it doesn't limit our freedom, it makes it even more.

S: That's because of the very nature of the Dharma. But some people might think that it limits their freedom, and they can't do what they want to do, because the Dharma intervenes and says 'no, you shouldn't do that, that's unskillful.'Well, the Dharma is not really limiting their freedom. Perhaps it's merely limiting or checking their neurotic restlessness.

: That's why blasphemy is (several words unclear)

S: Yes, yes, because they have this concept of God, a sort of Supreme Being, who is engaged in restricting their freedom. that's how God comes across, that is how God is presented to people. An oppressive figure, a figure that crushes you, and against whom you cannot help rebelling, sooner or later. Unless your rebellion is only a sort of semi-rebellion, you may feel very guilty at the same time.

Right then, he goes on to say, "Relatives united and intimate friends, children reared and riches stored, All are impermanent, like an illusion, and nothing substantial is found in them." Now he's summing up. He's saying that Conditioned things are impermanent. The Conditioned is empty of the Unconditioned. He's referring to the basic things of worldly life - relations, the family, one's friends, children and stored up wealth of various kinds. Do you think it's of any significance that one's wife isn't specifically mentioned? Nowadays we'd surely say 'wife and children and possessions' wouldn't we? But first is mentioned relatives - that is to say the whole body of relatives, the whole family, and then intimate friends, your cronies, so to speak; then the children you've brought up, and then your wealth. Is it just an accident that the wife isn't specifically mentioned?

Ratnaketu: Maybe she has no value. (laughter)

Silaratna: Would it be a bit like a wife, say the wife of a man, would be - she sort of knows her place anyway, so she doesn't become a hindrance.

S: Well, I wouldn't go so far as to say that, even of Tibetan wives.

Aryamitra: Isn't she included in the relatives, the extended sort of family?

S: Perhaps she - well, she's not included in the relatives, because usually that means blood relations. I remember somebody I knew, a European woman, married a Sikkhimese who was a friend of mine, and she was astonished to find that after her marriage with him she was not regarded as a member of the family - she was only his wife, he only married her. His family were his blood relations, especially his nephews (he didn't have any brothers, I think, surviving) - he had cousins and nephews, and they were his family. And they were quite

indignant when she gave signs of, or indicated that she regarded herself as, a member of their family. She certainly wasn't, She belonged to her own family! With which, of course, she hadn't any contact. So I think if there is any significant point here, it is that the wife did not loom so large in one's life - emotionally and otherwise - in Tibet, in traditional Tibet, as she tends to in modern times in the West.

Aryamitra: That might be why people seem to have so much trouble with mother-in-laws (2 or 3 words unclear).

S: So, "All are impermanent, like an illusion, and nothing substantial is found in them. My mind has now forsaken all activity. So that I may keep constant to my vows, here, in the cool shade of a Santal tree I dwell in solitude and silence. In trance I meditate, from all distractions far removed." Again, leaving aside the fact that the cuckoo is supposed to be a transformation of Avalokitesvara, it's as though he's had a great shock. This glimpse of Perfect Vision has, in a way, badly shaken him, has, sort of, in a way, paralysed him. Formerly, perhaps, he was engaged in all kinds of activities, but he can't do that now, because the very basis of those activities, the very motivation for them, has just been 'struck dead', as it were. Petrified by this glimpse of Perfect Vision.

So, "My mind has now forsaken all activity. So that I may keep constant to my vows, here, in the cool shade of a Santal tree I dwell in solitude and silence, in trance I meditate, from all distractions far removed." What do you think 'vows' means in this connection? What is its' significance? First he seems to have a glimpse of Perfect Vision and then come the vows. What do the vows represent?

Aryamitra: Would they be, say, trying to - it's a bit like Perfect Vision and the rest of the Path - trying to integrate, it's trying to...

S: Yes, it's like lines of conduct which have been laid down or lines of conduct which he sees as necessary, as inevitably flowing from his Perfect Vision - "Well, if that's the way things are, well this is how I've got to behave." They may not be vows in the formal sense. He sees the necessity of behaving in such and such a way in view of the fact that things are as they are. This is in the sense in which one say 'a vow cannot be broken', because it's inevitable, the necessary, the logical consequence of something that you actually see. Just as if you really see, you really know, that the fire is hot, that the fire burns, you won't put your hand into it. It's as though, well, you could say, well, you take a vow that you won't put your hand into the fire. In a sense a vow, in the formal sense, is not necessary. That you don't put your hand into the fire is an inevitable consequence of what you've seen about the fire.

Amoghacitta: I was wondering, because he's stressing 'how pitiful' everything he sees is, I was wondering if the vow stems from that. He hasn't actually said that he's taken a vow to help people, but he does stress that he sees the situation people are in as pitiful.

S: Yes, yes. Of course, he does mention 'vows' in the plural.

"In trance I meditate, from all distractions far removed. Go thou - repeat this speech of mine/ To all large birds; and to all feathered creatures!" So, 'go and tell them what I have said, go and tell them my experience'. It's as though, after a year, the time has come for him to speak, to communicate with other living beings, with other birds. (pause) One finds this sort of note struck throughout Tibetan Buddhism. It's a very, sort of powerful note, but at the same time a very simple note, which is repeated again and again, that the basic thing that one must realise is that death is inevitable and life is transitory and all worldly things are impermanent. It's like when you just speak to, when you just address very simple minded people with a certain amount of faith in the Dharma, who are at the same time deeply engrossed in their worldly affairs, very attached to their families and their homes and very busily accumulating wealth, well this is the note that you should strike, this is the sort of note that strikes fear - in a positive sense - into their hearts. That, 'well, what are you doing, what is the value of what you're doing? Do you realise that? Why are you devoting so much time, so much attention, getting so worried about things which are not worth getting worried about? Things which are transitory, things which you're not going to be able to keep, things which are not going to last.' (pause)

This is why I've sometimes said, from a certain point of view at least, the whole of the Dharma can be summed up in the word impermanence. If you've realised that things are impermanent, that worldly things are impermanent, well that is the basic thing. Of course, in a traditional civilisation, in a traditional culture - like that of Tibet, as like that of India - there was a positive corollary to all this, that if you really did see, if you really did agree that all worldly things were impermanent - and it therefore wasn't really worth one's while to devote one's time and energy to them - well it followed, it was clear as day, so to speak, that you had to lead a spiritual life. That above and beyond the Conditioned there was the Unconditioned. But it isn't like that, of course, in modern times. At the background of our civilisation and our culture there isn't this sort of faith in an Unconditioned, which you might have ignored for a while, but which, for one reason or another, you now remember, or turn you attention to. In modern times, if you are sort of made to see that all Conditioned things are impermanent, and worldly things aren't really worth pursuing, well you're just left with nothing. It isn't in the background of your culture, in the background of your civilisation, that spiritual element or that spiritual dimension which you automatically fall back onto. Perhaps that's the difference.

Ratnaketu: I've noticed this quite a lot with Western writers. They might see this, they might see that it's all impermanent and that the whole of life is futile, but none of them, or very few, have seen that there is anything you can do about it.

S: Yes, well, you'd better just amuse yourself, have a good time, have fun, forget that you've seen everything is impermanent. Well, the best thing to do is to forget what you've seen. That is very much the modern attitude. Or else, the attitude is one of cynicism, even despair. People have been know to commit suicide because of their feelings of the meaninglessness of existence. Not to give up the world and lead a spiritual life - just commit suicide.

Silaratna: These are what, these three things are, impermanence, death are they part of what's called the preliminary, in Tibetan things preliminary practices? Like a Mahayana monk would go through.

S: Ah, yes, that's true, yes. The inevitability of the results of karma, and so on. Yes, that's true.

Silaratna: So how long would someone - a young monk or whatever - spend concentrating on those three things?

S: Well most of them, I'm afraid, spend about five minutes! There are some verses that they'd repeat at the beginning of their practice. But one could, maybe one ought, to spend years over these things, spend as long as is needed, as long as is required, to develop some real understanding of those things.

Silabhadra: Our equivalent here would be the six-element practices.

S: The six-element practices are more concrete in a way, a more vivid form of the same thing. Maybe even more effective because of the powerful element of imagery, the concreteness of it. (long pause)

So it does seem from this speech of his that the Great Bird, the cuckoo - again leaving aside the fact that he's supposed to be a transformation of Avalokita - has had a sort of arising of Perfect Vision experience, as I've described in the first lecture in the eightfold path series on Perfect Vision. But maybe he has 'entered the stream', so to speak, and of course if he has entered the stream there is an other-regarding element to that. An other-regarding element represented by the arising of the Bodhicitta. So he becomes concerned for other living beings, especially for the 'large birds and all feathered creatures'. And therefore sends the parrot to report his speech to them. (long pause)

Well, would someone like to read that next paragraph?

Silabhadra: "The Parrot, skilled in speech, then gave a signal to all the birds, both large and small who thereupon arrived from all sides, - the Indian birds led by the Peacock, the Tibetan birds by the Vulture, the water birds led by the Goose, the tree-birds by the Parrot, the birds of good omen by the White Grouse and

> the domestic birds by the red-breasted Cock. And so it was until all the birds had assembled. They then came before the Great Bird with a request to be taught the Dharma. And the peacock, as leader of all the birds from India, arranged his followers in rows on the right, while the vulture, as head of the Tibetan birds, arranged his in rows on the left"

S: The right seems to be the more honourable side because India, after all, takes precedence over Tibet, because the Dharma came from India to Tibet.

Ratnaketu: Would that be on the Buddha's right?

S: That's what I was wondering. I assume it is on, in this case, the Great Birds right. You're thinking about arrangements of seats in the shrine.

Silabhadra: I was just thinking about that. Normally, as in the Pali Canon when saluting the Buddha, when you leave you've got your right side facing the Buddha, so that would be in fact on the Great Bird's left. If the Buddha's say in front you have your right side facing him. Presumably it could be the other way round.

S: If you circumambulated, keeping him on your right, you could sit down on either side depending on how far round you went.

Silabhadra: I was thinking in terms of sitting in the shrineroom. If you had the Buddha at the front and sat down at his right, you would have your left side facing him.

S: Yes, you'd have your left side [facing him] when you sat down, but going round you would have had your right side towards him. It seems to be, perhaps, that the peacock is regarded as the leader of the Indian birds.

Aryamitra: You see peacocks in the very colourful Indian (?) paintings.

S: Yes. There is a lot of symbolism attached to the figure of the peacock. The peacock feeds upon snakes, or at least snakes form an important part of its diet, so the peacock represents the capacity to turn something that is poisonous into nourishment. It represents, in a way, the principle of radical transformation, the capacity to turn even negative things into positive things.
So in that case the peacock is especially associated with the Vajrayana. And, of course, the peacock is associated with Amitabha, the Buddha of the West.

Prasannasiddhi: Is the peacock generally in India quite a highly regarded bird?

S: Yes and no. He's not very highly regarded in the Pali Canon. The lay person is compared with the peacock and the monk to the wild goose! Because the peacock cannot fly very far, you see the peacock is essentially a tree bird, it sort of roosts in the lower branches of the trees, it doesn't go very far from the ground, it only flies a short distance at a time, rather like a pheasant and its flight is quite clumsy, it doesn't seem quite at home in the air. So the layman in the Pali Canon is compared with the Peacock, he's very colourful, he's, as it were, rich, gaudy, there's a lot of display, but he hasn't got much power of flight. You see what I mean? Whereas the wild goose is a comparatively ordinary looking bird, it's white or grey, but it can fly very far, right up into the mountains, into the Himalayas. So in the Pali Canon the peacock is regarded as the representative of the lay life. But that apart, yes, in other respects, the peacock has quite an important place in symbolism. The peacock is quite highly regarded. Peacock feathers are used in religious ceremonies. The 'eye' in the feathers of the peacock represent consciousness.

Prasannasiddhi: and the vulture?

S: The vulture, of course, is highly regarded in Buddhism, especially Tibetan Buddhism, as it's supposed to fly higher than any other bird. Therefore it represents the yogi who soars, as it were, in his meditation, higher than anybody else. So that's why Padmasambhava has a vulture's feather at the top of his lotus cap. I suppose the water birds are led by the goose because presumably that's the biggest water bird - we might say swan. I'm not quite sure why the birds of good omen are led by the white grouse - presumably because he is a bird of particularly good omen for some reason or another. It is pretty obvious why the domestic birds are led by the red-breasted cock, because he's a very domesticated bird with a large family of wives. (pause)

"And so it was until all the birds were assembled. They came before the Great Bird with a request to be taught the Dharma." It's as though, well presumably the parrot had carried out the cuckoo's wishes and had, in fact, repeated his speech to them and presumably that had impressed them and they all wanted to know more about the Dharma and therefore came to the cuckoo with a request to be taught. Alright, let's carry on and see what the parrot then says.

Prasannasiddhi: "The parrot, skilled in speech, then rose from the middle of the ranks, and, swaying like a bamboo hurdle, saluted three times and spoke as follows:

"Greetings you great and noble bird!
Though you are weary and disgusted with Samsara,
We beg you, give a little thought to us!
Ignorant and deluded creatures that we are;

The effects of many misdeed in our past
Have bound us to this suffering, bound us, chained us.
We beg of you the good Dharma freeing us from suffering,
We beg the light dispelling all our ignorance,
We beg from you the Dharma,
- the cure of all defilements,
Birds of every kind assembled here,
We beg of you the good Dharma,
that we may ponder on it"

S: You may remember the three kinds of wisdom, the three kinds of prajna. That which comes by hearing, that which comes by thinking or reflection or pondering, and that which comes by meditation. So the parrot says, "Birds of every kind assembled here, we beg of you the good Dharma", we beg of you to teach us, to explain the Dharma, so that will give us the wisdom that comes by hearing, that we may ponder on it, and in that way develop the wisdom that comes by reflection, by thinking, by pondering. The Great Bird himself, the cuckoo, presumably has the wisdom that comes from meditation.

So, "Greetings, you great and noble bird". First of all he greets the cuckoo - ah yes, I've missed something - "Then rose from the middle of the ranks, and, swaying like a bamboo hurdle." You know the way the parrot sort of ducks and bends. I'M not quite sure what a bamboo hurdle is or how it sways, but anyway, that's a comparison. And he salutes three times, and then he greets the cuckoo. He behaves in proper Buddhist fashion. "Though you are weary and disgruntled with Samsara, we beg you give a little thought to us!" He asks the cuckoo to have compassion on them, "Ignorant and deluded creatures that we are; The effects of many misdeeds in our past have tied us to this suffering, and bound us, chained us. We beg of you the good Dharma freeing us from suffering, we beg the light dispelling all our ignorance, we beg from you the Dharma, - the cure of all defilements, Birds of every kind assembled here, we beg of you the good Dharma, that we may ponder on it."

'Good Dharma' is presumably the Dharma, Saddharma - the good, the right or the true or real Dharma, which frees from suffering, which dispels ignorance and which cures all defilements. (pause)

So, "Birds of every kind assembled here, we beg of you the good Dharma, that we may ponder on it." In other words the cuckoo is invited to address them all on the Dharma. What does this little speech represent, broadly speaking?

Aryamitra: Entreaty.

S: Entreaty, yes. It represents the proper attitude for receiving the Dharma. The birds' interest in the Dharma is not just intellectual. They're concerned with freedom from

suffering, dispelling their ignorance, curing their defilements. They're concerned with it in a highly practical way. That's why they want to hear it, that's why they want to ponder on it.

Buddhapalita: Is it almost like going for refuge?

S: It is almost, in a way, going for effective refuge. I mean, they're inviting the cuckoo to be their Kalyana Mitra, you could say. (pause) 'Defilements' represents the Sanskrit term 'Klesa', which also means 'afflictions' - because your defilements, your unskillful mental states, your unskillful emotions, are a source of troubles to you. A source of suffering to you. So klesa can be translated either as 'defilements' or 'passions' even, or as 'afflictions'.

Silaratna: It seems to be (3 or 4 words unclear) what we were saying before about the parrot perhaps having entered the stream. It says 'weariness and disgust has arisen'.

S: That weariness and disgust is represented in the sequence of positive niddanas by 'nibbida', 'nirvid', the serene withdrawal or disentanglement, as I've also called it, which is consequent upon seeing things as they really are, the arising of the knowledge and vision of things as they really are. The natural result of that is that you withdraw. You disentangle yourself from mundane things. At the same time there is disinterested compassion for others, and that's what the parrot is now invoking, "We beg you, give a little thought to us."

Birds tape 2.

S: Would someone like to shake his wings and read the next section.

Amoghavajra: "Thrice the Great Bird shook his wings and then he said *"Cuckoo!"*
"You birds assembled here, without distraction listen, - Koo!
To these three exhortations I deliver here, - Koo!
Reflect in earnest on impermanence and on death -Koo!
Commit in no way any evil deed, - Koo!
Release within yourselves the good and wholesome thoughts, - Koo!
In this and the after life the Three Treasures are a safe refuge, - Koo!
Venerating them brings treasures from on high, -Koo!
Keep regular in your petitions to them! - Koo!
These are my wishes for your happiness in this life: - Koo!
Abandon all attachments, wherever they may be, -Koo!
Be diligent in your performance of your tasks, - Koo!
Then you will gain a lasting happiness, - Koo!
The objects of activities are altogether vain, - Koo!
Put your inmost minds into a state of non-action, - Koo!
For this is the thought of the Jina himself, - Koo!
For seven days meditate on these precepts, - Koo!

And then return to me, - Koo!'""

S: So having been requested to give them the good dharma the Great Bird shakes his wings and he says "Cuckoo" which is his characteristic note and then he says, " You birds assembled here without distraction listen, - Koo!" Listening without distraction is important - "listen to these three exhortation I deliver here". So there are three points that he makes. "Reflect in earnest on impermanence and on death, commit in no way any evil deed, release within yourself the good and wholesome thoughts." It's a bit like the Buddha's little summary in the Dhammapada. Ceasing to do all evil, learning to do good, purifying the heart - it's a bit like that although there is some difference. So first of all reflect in earnest on impermanence and on death. In other words develop that basic insight experience and as a result of that don't commit any unskillful action. If you have Perfect Vision, especially if it's of sufficient depth, that will hold you back so to speak from committing any unskillful action, you simply will not be able to commit such actions because you'll see so clearly their utter futility, in fact their harmfulness.
And then he says "Release within yourself the good and wholesome thoughts". I don't know how literally this word release is to be taken, whether he's suggesting that the good and wholesome thoughts are there, that they're sort of blocked. I have sometimes made the point that it's not just our negativity that is blocked, it's our positivity that's blocked. So release it so to speak - release within yourselves the good and wholesome thoughts. This can also of course refer to practicing meditation because the practice of meditation, the experience of meditation, the experience of they dhyanas is essentially the experience of an uninterrupted flow of positive, of skillful, mental states. It could also refer to the development of the Bodhicitta which is of course the best and most wholesome, most skillful thought of all.

Ratnaketu: Reflecting on impermanence and on death is becoming aware of what your situation actually is, like the nature of the world.

S: Yes, impermanence is much broader in scope. A tree is impermanent, a rock is impermanent, a building is impermanent, the world is impermanent, the universe is impermanent but death is a term that refers more to living things, to sentient beings, and in this case especially to the birds themselves, or in our case the human beings. He also says commit in no way any evil deed, he's very emphatic. Release within yourselves the good and wholesome thoughts. It's as though he's referring here briefly both to the path of Vision and to the path of Transformation. The path of Vision is represented by "Reflect in earnest on impermanence and on death". The path of Transformation is represented by "Commit in no way any evil deed", the negative side, and "Release within yourselves the good and wholesome thoughts, the positive side.

"In this and in the after life the Three Treasures are a safe refuge" or Three Jewels as we usually say. Why does he say in this and in the after life the Three Treasures are a safe

refuge?

Silabhadra: Because they're birds at present and they'll be reborn as human beings.

S: But there's also the suggestion that worldly treasure doesn't last, you can't take it into the next life but in the case of your Going for Refuge to the Three Treasures, the Three Jewels, you can. That commitment of yours, that spiritual commitment will continue. You will so to speak take it with you because it's part of your continuing, so to speak, mental attitude.

And what about this next line? "Venerating them brings blessing from on high". Venerating them, worshiping them, brings blessings from on high. What exactly are these blessings that come from on high if you venerate the Three Jewels? What's he referring to?

Amoghavajra: It's a bit like the Grace Waves.

S; It's a bit like the Grace Waves, yes. The word may in fact even be the same one. If you venerate the Three Treasures, the Three Jewels, if you worship them, if you revere them you are opening yourself to something spiritual, something transcendental and from that a blessing, so to speak, will come, "down", inverted commas. And what about this " Keep regular in your petitions to them". There's a lot of this in Tibetan Buddhism. What are these petitions? They're more like prayers. A petition is a request. So it's a prayer of request but not for only mundane things but for spiritual things. What do you think of this, do you think there is any point in, say, asking or petitioning or, as it were, praying to the three jewels or to the Buddha or Bodhisattva for this or for that, even for knowledge, even for compassion?

Aryamitra: I think it can open up the attitude of being open to them.

S: It may actually help you to develop those qualities. It's not that you ask them to give you those qualities and they give, but if you develop that attitude of asking for them, that asking expresses your willingness to develop them, your wish to develop them. You don't really think that they are going to come to you from some other source, but the Buddha or Bodhisattva to whom you, as it were, pray, whom you petition, represents a goal or the ideal of what you want to be, what you want to become, and you want to reduce the gap between yourself, as you now are and them. You want to become more like them, you want to share their qualities, you want them, so to speak, to give you their qualities. I mean, they're giving you their qualities as an aspect of you developing their qualities - it's another way of putting it.

Silaratna: The sadhana's a bit like that really.

S: In the ultimate sense, its just as correct to speak of those qualities coming from them to

you as being developed by you because the subject is no more real than the object, nor the object less real than the subject. One can speak in both terms provided the gap is closed. You can speak in either way, in either terms, you move towards it or it moves towards you, they are two aspects of one and the same process.

Khemananda: I think I was reading in the Manjughosa seminar extract, where you were saying that in terms of our experience it's almost as if Manjugosha is external to us and, as Subhuti was saying, he found it quite important to see it as almost being child-like in relationship to Manjugosha, and praise him which is developing a relationship.

S: Developing a relationship with the ideal, almost a sort of dialectical relationship in the emotional sense. In the sense that something goes back and forth between you, something from you to the ideal, something from the ideal to you. It's a living sort of relationship, well a dialogue almost, one could say. Well, in Christianity, there is prayer, people pray to God, pray to Jesus, pray to the Virgin Mary, but then they've got the fixed idea which, within the framework of Christianity, cannot actually be reduced. The fixed idea that there is a personal god out there, there is a Jesus, there is a Virgin Mary. Those figures are never dissolved into anything higher as is the case of the Buddha's and Bodhisattvas, who are dissolved, so to speak, into Sunyata. The Buddhist, certainly the instructed Buddhist, understands that those figures of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are in the ultimate sense as much subjective as they are objective. They are himself, in a very much deeper sense which he has not even begun to realise, but at least he knows it intellectually. Where in the case of a Christian, he does not even know it intellectually, he is not supposed to know it, he is not supposed to think it. What he is supposed to think is that they really are out there, they really do exist, they really do help, they really do save, that he himself can do nothing. The Buddhist is not encouraged to think in that sort of way.

Aryamitra: Is that why sometimes... Well, what comes to mind is when you were saying, that why the Puja doesn't work sometimes is because your heart is not in it, that you are not actually ...

S: (interrupting) Doing it to anybody. You are not conscious of anybody there to receive the worship as it were. You are just reciting the words into the air.

Khemananda: You are not in a relationship with anything, you are not aware of that relationship that we were talking about.

S: You are just sitting on your own and just reciting the words which may be quite good but which is not exactly 'Puja'. Puja does mean worship, it does mean veneration, it does mean reverence. So venerating then brings blessing from on high. "Keep regular in your petitions to them, these are my wishes for your happiness in this life." If you want to be happy in this life, well, this is what you must do. "Abandon all attachments wherever they may be." That's

pretty straightforward, isn't it? Abandon all attachments wherever they may be. Don't reserve something, don't sort of keep something aside and say - well, I am not going to give up my attachment to that. This is very often what people do. They are prepared to give up everything except that. To give up their attachment to everything except that. There is always that mental reservation. I am committing myself wholeheartedly, one hundred percent, but I am not prepared to do and so.

Aryamitra: I remember the time when Sukhavati was being built and people were going through all sorts of hardships, people were living on two pounds a week etc. But when it came to earning money for Sukhavati and doing film extra work - people quite excited about that. But the fact that they had to have their hair cut - no! (laughter) quite a few of them would not have their haircut, which was really ... I was quite knocked out! You're slaving, you're living in this community, you're doing this, you're giving up this, but you won't cut your hair for the Dharma! (Laughter)

S: Things have changed, fashions have changed! (laughter)

Ratnaketu: It's almost like one thing, one thing sort of sums up all your ideas of freedom or something like this.

S: It reminds me of the Zen saying. The Zen master is supposed to have said the body of the cow goes through the door, but the tail won't go through. (laughter) So it's just the same as what Aryamitra's saying - people had given up ... Well, they were living in such difficult conditions, they had given up so much, they would not give up their hair, that was like the tail of the cow, that stuck, it wouldn't go through the door! Any other thing that people just would not give up in that sort of way? I mean a seemingly little thing, I don't mean a big thing like relationships and all that.

Silaratna: Your... sort of attachment to where you come from in some respects can be a bit like that.

S: But that is again quite a big thing, not an apparently little thing, its an obvious attachment. Whereas to be attached to ones hair, to that extent is not such an obvious attachment, one would not have expected that, would one?

Prasannasiddhi: I don't see why people should cut their hair. I mean, perhaps you could say the other way - why cut your hair! Wanting to cut your hair is an attachment.

Aryamitra: No, this is for a specific reason, to earn money for Sukhavati, doing commercial work. It was not just for the sake of cutting hair.

S: To do film extra work, to earn money as film extras and to play that part, as it were,

people have to cut their hair. Well, some of them would not do that.

Aryamitra: It was a war film!

S: They didn't so much object to the war bit as cutting their hair! (laughter)

Aryamitra: I was thinking that the last thing that I would let go of when looking around my room was old letters and maybe photographs.

S: I am quite clear, looking back over my biography, the thing that I found most difficult to give up and which took me years and years to give up was my books. I really felt that the first time that I gave away one of my books it was quite a turning point in my life, almost like entering the stream, (Laughter) one might say. I never for years thought that I would have given up a book! To have given away a book that I had known, the books were so important and so precious. But I quite consciously one day - I knew what I was doing - I actually gave away one of my precious books. I felt it was a real sort of turning point. I didn't mind giving away anything else, they could have it but not my books. Now I can give away books, it doesn't cause me any pain or suffering, but I think everybody's got something like that. In the case of those people it was their hair. I could rationalise about my books - they were useful books, they were Buddhist books - I don't know what is so useful about hair!

Ratnaketu: Sometimes its things like going to the movies or having a cup of tea at a certain time every morning before you meditate and if that program is changed, say there is an extra meditation or something, sometimes people get really upset about not being able to have their cup of tea or whatever people do sometimes.

S: In India, Indians are often really thrown if they can't have their early morning bath because they are so accustomed to that. It can quite upset and Indian and put him out for the rest of the day if he is not in a position to take his bath, say if he is not well or if he is travelling.

Prasannasiddhi: That's a little different because it's a sort of habit in a way, it may even be a positive habit, your habit is thrown out of gear and it might take a little time to adjust to that.

S: In the case of most Indians who can't take their early morning bath, it doesn't take them a little time to adjust, they just don't adjust the whole day. So if one is trying to lead a spiritual life, at least, one has to be on one's guard against that. So that one is not thrown too much by changes of routine which sometimes can't be avoided.

Silabhadra: It's like not having something for breakfast that you're used to having.

S: You had to have maybe Kelloggs instead of Shredded Wheat or something like that, and you get really annoyed. I think that the last thing that you are ready to give up or give away does vary quite a bit from one person to another, whether it's hair or a book or what else do you think it might be with some people?

Prasannasiddhi: I remember that Kulananda was saying in Sukhavati that the day he gave his stereo away that would be the day that he really entered.

S: I remember one of our friends in the early days. It was an order member who resigned after a while, who was very ascetic. One of the reasons why he resigned was that he thought that the FWBO was not ascetic enough. He founded his own order, actually, called the Order of Perfect Enlightenment. It never had more than one member which was himself, but anyway at one point he gave me his entire record collection, feeling that he had become too attached to them. So for some people that's the last thing, their records, their record collection.

Amoghacitta: It's not just giving things away, it's actually lending them out, perhaps a book or record when it wouldn't cause you any problem to lend someone a record.

S: Very often lending means giving, because very often, unfortunately, you don't get it back. I very, very rarely lend books because I know that people are very careless about returning them. I just give the book usually. I won't lend it or supervise someone reading it - make them sit down and read it at Padmaloka, and not take it away, or else I just give it away to them because I might as well give it. If you just lend it you very likely don't get it back and may be you feel a bit annoyed about that. So it's best just to give. If it's a book that can be replaced. Just buy another copy for yourself. (pause)

So "Abandon all attachments wherever they may be, Be diligent in performing your tasks." Well, how literally is one to take that? "Be diligent in performing your tasks." Does it mean that you shouldn't ever change your job? What about the principle of Right Livelihood? What are these tasks anyway? Be diligent in performing your tasks, I mean, presumably the birds represent a sort of audience or congregation of lay people. But be diligent in performing your tasks? What does that mean?

Aryamitra: I think duty has something to do with it.

S: Or then you will gain lasting happiness.

Ratnaketu: Well, in a way, if you are going to be a lay person and say you are going to have a job, you should be diligent about it anyway.

S: But presumably the tasks represent duties which you do actually have which represent

genuine responsibilities, perhaps that you have taken upon yourself quite voluntarily. If you have, for instance, a wife and children, well, it is your duty to support them.

Amoghacitta: What does 'diligent' actually mean?

S: Diligent means conscientious, hardworking, sort of painstaking, persistent, mindful. So be diligent in performance of your tasks. Clearly tasks cannot cover anything unskillful here.

Aryamitra: Would 'duties' be a better word?

S: I am not so sure. For many people duties has a not very positive connotation, but then for others tasks doesn't have a very positive connotation either. So be diligent in the discharge of your responsibilities.

Amoghacitta: Could you not read tasks as just meaning all that which you have to do, in other words everything which you are called upon or have to do?

S: What does one mean by have to do? What makes it obligatory for you to do? Clearly there is the possibility of your not doing your tasks because you are being exhorted to be diligent in the performance of them? So in what sense does one have to do? I think this is a quite important point. I've raised this several times in previous study groups. That people say that they had to do this and that they had to do that and that is not the case at all, they have chosen to do that instead of something else. For instance, the example I often give - someone say who makes an appointment to see you at 2 o'clock and they don't turn up and they don't let you know that they are not going to turn up. You meet them sometime later and you say, well why didn't you turn up at 2 o'clock? And they say, Oh I couldn't, I had to see my girlfriend, to give an extreme example. It wasn't that they had to, there wasn't a policeman dragging them along to the girlfriend in handcuffs. They chose to go and see her rather than keep their appointment with you. So we have to be very careful how we use this expression that we have to do this or we have to do that. We must not use it in such a way that we disguise the element of choice. Because sometimes we try and disguise the element of choice when you don't want to admit, at least to other people, that you have chosen. You want to represent yourself as being under some sort of compulsion. so that you can't be held responsible. If some one says, I couldn't keep my appointment with you at 2 o'clock because I had to do something else, it suggests that you have been compelled. Therefore you were not to blame for not keeping the appointment. But you have really abdicated responsibility, you have disguised your free choice, if it was a free choice, and not just the result of attachment, you have disguised it as external, objective necessity in order to escape blame.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, there are different degrees of this. Perhaps you are in a position of some responsibility, and something happens and you just have to deal with that at the time

that you were supposed to be meeting someone else and then when you finally have dealt with something that only you can deal with ....

S: (interrupting) Even so, it is a choice. You should not say that you had to, you didn't have to. It was your free decision, in this particular case if it is a positive thing, you say, well I didn't come because such and such a thing happened and clearly it was more important that I should attend to that. It was not that you had to, it was still a free choice because you could not have done that and kept the appointment instead. The choice you make reflects the scale of values, you see what I mean? A scale of values which you, yourself have set up. If someone, for instance, said I didn't, not that I couldn't - I didn't come to see you because my mother was very ill at the time, well, clearly that's a valid excuse. But you don't need then to - if it's really valid - to put in a form of I couldn't come because you really shouldn't have come, because you had a duty that was even greater is obvious to anybody. You only put in that way that is "I couldn't come" when you are trying to disguise the fact that you have chosen to do something else that you consider in fact more important but you don't like to admit that you consider it more important.

Prasannasiddhi: Do you think that there is any case where it would be actually possible to say that you had to do something?

S: Well there are two things to distinguish. One is physical compulsion. I you said that I had to go to court to be a witness, well yes, then you could say that you had to , there is an element of compulsion, you are legally required to attend. You could be sent for by the magistrate or judge or taken along by a policeman, so there is that element of compulsion. Or there is the element of, so to speak, moral compulsion. For instance, to continue the same example, on your way to the appointment you might have seen someone knocked down by a bus. So you felt morally obliged to help, so that is a sort of compulsion but that is of a different kind from the physical compulsion and you could say there is a psychological compulsion as when you are psychologically unable to do anything else due to your weakness. So one should be very careful how one uses this expression 'had to.' I had to do this or I had to do that, especially when you use it in the sense to disguise the fact that you have exercised a choice - have chosen to do something and not something else and therefore you can be held accountable by saying that you had to do this or were not able to do that. You try to evade moral responsibility, you try and avoid being held accountable for your actions.

Ratnaketu: Presumably there are two sides to that, there is one side which you avoid responsibility for doing something and think, well I have to go and do this. But there is also the case in the morning when you get up to meditate. you think that I have to get up and meditate, in a way, you are missing out one of the good consequences of making the decision here because you're avoiding deciding to get up and meditate. You think, well it's one of the

rules of this place, I've just got to do it. But if you decide, well this is what I wanted to do, I decided to do that ...

S: (interrupting) Yes, I am quite free not to, sometimes you should think that you are quite free not to. Who is obliging you to get up? If you feel it's better for you to lie in bed, well, who is stopping you? No one is going to come with a whip and get you out of bed. If you genuinely think that that is better for you then do that. Or if you think it is better for you to get up and meditate then do that. It's your free choice, you don't have to get up, there is no one standing over you with a stick - not literally, anyway! (laughter)

Prasannasiddhi: But in that circumstance can't you say that I have to get up and meditate or else the consequences will be such that my mental state will deteriorate?

S: Well, then you need not use the expression 'have to' with all its sort of associations, your reflection can take the form, If I do not get up and meditate, well then such and such will not happen. I will not be in a positive frame of mind today. I want to be in a positive frame of mind therefore I want to get up and meditate.

Prasannasiddhi: you couldn't say therefore, 'I have to' get up and meditate....

S: It's a 'have to' only in the logical sense. It's only in the sense of logical necessity. If you want to be in a positive state during the day and if meditation gets you into that positive state, it is logically necessary that you get up and meditate. But it's not a necessity in the sense of a psychological compulsion which someone else is exercising over you. So you are simply recognising a logical necessity, a cause and effect relationship.

Prasannasiddhi: So you are distinguishing in a way between being motivated from your self and being motivated by external things.

S: Through, perhaps, fear. If you yourself see a logical connection between two things well, then you will want to do the one which is in fact the cause of the other thing which in any case you do want.

Prasannasiddhi: You couldn't speak in terms of having to.

S: Only if you use the expression 'have to' in the sense of logical necessity. In as much as my being in a positive state depends on my meditating and I want to be in a positive state, therefore I have logically to get up and meditate. But not 'have to' in the sense that there is someone other than myself obliging or compelling me to do that. So one can say that there are these different kinds of necessity, so to speak. There is the psychological necessity, the logical necessity and the moral necessity - in the sense of moral obligation.

Prasannasiddhi: What about the Buddha when he gained Enlightenment and he looked out on the world and saw the suffering. Could you say that he just felt he had to?

S: You could say it was a sort of moral necessity, a moral obligation on a higher level, because it sort of, in a manner of speaking, logically followed from the fact that he was the Buddha. It logically followed from the fact that there was wisdom and compassion in his enlightenment experience, that he couldn't do anything else except help people overcome the sufferings in which he saw them involved. You could call that a sort of spiritual necessity in a way. I mean he couldn't behave in any other way because he couldn't be untrue to his own nature and his nature, at least in part so to speak, was compassion. So he could not but behave in accordance with that compassion.

P: So you could almost say that, that was coming from himself and that it was something that he had to do so you can use the term have to.

S: Yes, you can use it legitimately there, in some cases it's used legitimately. For instance, supposing someone comes and says, I saw that beautiful suit in a shop window, I just had to go and buy it, or, I saw that beautiful piece of cake, it was so lovely, so mouthwatering that I just had to eat it. That 'had to' does not indicate logical necessity, it doesn't indicate moral obligation, it doesn't even indicate psychological necessity because you could have resisted. You could have not bought it, or not eaten it, so it doesn't even represent psychological necessity. So you can't really in those circumstances use the expression I had to do this or I had to do that. Because you do in fact have a choice, but you are disguising from yourself, or from others the fact that you had a choice. That you could have resisted, you could have not have bought the suit, or you could not have eaten the piece of cake, but you disguise that fact, you disguise your weakness, you say that you were compelled or obliged as though by some external force. You had to do it. So I think that one must be very careful using this language. In as much as we use it to disguise in a sense our own weakness.

Khemananda: I find it very easy to forget that I am responsible for myself and I can remember when I've been in the basement of "Friends Foods" for a day and then spending the whole week feeling quite resentful that I had to be there, then just having the realisation that no one was compelling me, that I was free to say to somebody I'll be leaving in a week's time, but I actually wanted to be there and take responsibility for that.

S: Well, in the strict sense, you are free to walk out on the spot. What can stop you? No one!

Ratnaketu: It's really surprising when you realise that you can work all the harder. I remember when I was first getting involved with the Friends. I went to help Akshobya build his house and I was working really hard and not getting any money for it and he said that you always work harder when you are not getting paid and that quite struck me. And I was thinking when we do the shrines and we spend quite a lot of time drawing lotuses and things

for special days, and in a way because it's only going to last one day because, you know....there is a freedom there.

S: I am not so sure that I agree with your analysis, but we will let it pass. (laughter) Yes it is true, the basic point is true. If one realises, if one recognises one is free not to do something, you feel more free to do it. Obviously, if you are free not to do it, you are also free to do it. You can not be free to do it unless you are also free not to do it. There must be a free choice at every instant in a sense.

Silabhadra: Otherwise there's nothing that you can do about it. There's an inevitability about....

S: Anyway, "be diligent in the performance of your tasks and then you will gain a lasting happiness. The objects of activities are altogether vain. Put your inmost minds into a state of non action. For this is the thought of the Jina himself". The Jina is of course the Buddha. So what does one mean by this? "The objects of activities are altogether vain." What does vain mean here? Vain means just useless, futile. So the objects of activities, presumably worldly activities, are altogether vain, altogether futile. "Put your inmost minds into a state of non action." What sort of activities do you think that the cuckoo has in mind?

Silaratna: It seems to hark back to the first utterance that he made. Hoarding jewels and things.

Ratnaketu: Why does he not just say the activities are altogether in vain instead of the objects? He doesn't just say the activities, he says the objects are vain.

S: They are vain in the sense that they can't be achieved. If your object, say, in heaping up wealth is security, well then this can't be achieved through wealth, therefore that particular activity is vain, is useless, is futile. (long pause)

To put your inmost minds into a state of non action. What do you think that this means? First of all, what is meant by a state of non-action and why is one to put ones inmost minds into it? Does it suggest that one need not be engaged in action externally?
On the negative side it means not indulging in reactivity.
One could think of it in terms of appranihita, one of the four entrances to liberation, the appranihita-samadhi, the directionless or unbiased or unmotivated thing. It could refer to something like that? Put your inmost mind into a state where there is realisation of the emptiness of the Unconditioned. You don't remember the appranihita-samadhi? Remember the three vimoksas corresponding to the three laksanas.

Ratnaketu: That's the one where you feel no inclination.

S: No inclination in this direction or that, no preference because there is no discrimination, no sense of duality. You are perfectly content, so this, at a very deep level, at the transcendental level is the appranihita-samadhi. So it's as though the cuckoo is suggesting that in your inmost minds you must put yourself, he says to the birds, in this sort of state, a state of complete inner tranquility and content. He is not necessarily saying that you must not engage in activities externally. You certainly must not engage in futile activities but you can certainly engage in, so to speak, Bodhisattva-like activities. "This is the thought of the Jina himself." This can either mean this is the idea of the Buddha himself or this is the mental state of the Jina or Buddha himself. I mean, externally he performs all sorts of activities, but his inner state, is one of complete tranquility. Not just in the psychological sense but in the transcendental sense. Or you could say that his inner state is one of complete wisdom and externally he is performing deeds of compassion.

Prasannasiddhi: : "Put your inmost minds into a state of non-action", in a way, you could say that's almost like saying, just get in touch with your inmost minds, with the depths of....

S: Well this certainly involves that. It means that we get in touch with the Unconditioned even though you remain active, in a positive skillful manner, within Conditioned existence.

Prasannasiddhi: : This almost implies getting beneath the surface of things, actually contacting a more sort of...

S: (interrupting) This is not external non-action that is important. That may be good, or it may not be good, according to circumstances. But certainly he says put your inmost minds into a state of non-action for this is the thought of the Jina himself. Don't have any selfish or egoistic motivation. Suspend the operation of the ego entirely. In that respect be in a state of non-action. Because the ego goes very deep then the non-action will have to go very deep.

(very long pause)

Prasannasiddhi: : "This is the thought of the Jina himself"? Could you perhaps say that if you got in touch with the depths of your being, then you would be able to be in touch with the Jina in a way.

S: Yes, you could say that too. If you are in touch with the Buddha himself, who is the embodiment of the Unconditioned, you are therefore in touch with the thought of the Buddha, the mental state, or the attitude, or idea of the Buddha.

Amoghacitta: Is this synonymous with Nirvana?

S: One could say so broadly speaking, yes. (long pause) then he says, "for seven days meditate on these precepts and then return to me." When I took a study group on the "Door

of Liberation", there was quite a discussion on this conception of precepts. the word precept (in the singular) is used in two senses, one to translate when we speak of the five or ten precepts, meaning ethical rules or, rather, ethical principles. But also precept is used in Buddhism, especially in Tibet, to mean a teaching which is orientated specifically to the needs of certain individuals or a certain individual. The Tibetan term, I think, is 'Ti'. For instance, in connection with the Tantric initiation, there are said to be three stages, Wong, Lung and Ti. Wong meaning the actual initiation. The Lung, the reading through and explaining the text relating to the actual practice one does after receiving the initiation and the Li, the precept, the individual instruction that you get, the instruction which perhaps meets or takes into account personal difficulties or personal problems, personal mental confusions. So precept in the more general sense means any teaching which is directed to someone's specific needs and usually the precept has to come through the guru. Someone can give a teaching in such a way that it meets your personal needs , your very specific personal needs, only if he knows you. So a precept is almost inevitably a personal communication between the teacher and disciple. So the Great Bird, the cuckoo seems to be using precepts in this sense, "for seven days meditate on these precepts", not on these moral rules, or not even these moral principles. But this teaching that I have given, which is specifically oriented to your needs, and therefore, I think I said in connection with that particular study group, that it is very important in teaching the Dharma generally to be able to give precepts. It's not enough just to be able to lay down very general principles. You have to be able to give precepts to people, to explain to them in accordance with their individual needs and their individual approach, exactly how they are going to put these principles into operation. For instance, it's no use saying something like "Oh if you want to be a Buddhist you have got to purify the mind". Well that's true, but someone might ask, what do you mean by purifying the mind and how am I to purify my mind? He wants to know that, not just about the mind and purification in general, he wants to know how he shall actually purify his mind and that means that you have to give him precepts based on that general principle of purifying the mind. So if you are actually in contact or are dealing with individuals within the context of the Dharma, you need to be able to give them precepts. So, "for seven days meditate on these precepts." You notice that he has given a comparatively short discourse and then they have to go away and meditate on it for seven days! There is no discussion even allowed, or perhaps no discussion was needed. Perhaps the birds understood what the great bird said without any difficulty, "and then return to me."

Ratnaketu: It's interesting as well that they asked for something to ponder on and he gave them something to meditate on!

S: Yes, yes - right! Some of the Hindu scriptures in the Upanishads have stories of disciples going to gurus and receiving instruction in just a few words, and going away and meditating on it for ten years, or even forty years and then coming back for further instruction. There's a quite different attitude, a quite different approach. (long pause) Would someone like to read what follows?

Aryamitra: "All the birds thereupon meditated on this discourse which had so pleased their ears for seven days without allowing themselves to be distracted in any way. On the morning after these seven days had elapsed the Great Birds spoke again as follows:

"Smoke a sign of fire is,
The Southern cloud a sign of rain.
Thee little child will be a man,
The foal a stallion one day.

Deep thinking about death will lead to the unique and worthy Dharma. The rejection of attachment to the wheel of Samsara, the belief in the retribution of all deeds, mindfulness of the impermanence and mortality of this life,
- these are signs that we approach the unique, worthy Dharma, O Birds assembled here, is there anything of this nature in your minds? Tell me then your thoughts!""

S: So then, all the birds thereupon meditated on this discourse which had so pleased their ears for seven days without allowing themselves to be distracted in anyway. On the morning after these seven days had elapsed, the great bird spoke again as follows: "Smoke a sign of fire is, the Southern cloud a sign of rain, the little child will be a man, the foal a stallion one day." So why does he recite this verse? Perhaps he is quoting from somewhere? He's giving examples of inference, smoke a sign of fire is, - smoke is a sign of fire. This is the usual example given in Indian books on logic as an example of inference, that if you see smoke coming from a hill, you know that there must be fire behind the hill because smoke and fire are always connected. There is no smoke without fire. So if you see smoke you can infer the existence of fire, even though you don't see the fire. So "smoke a sign of fire is." This is the example of inference from the perception of one thing, the existence of another thing can be inferred. So "The Southern cloud a sign of rain", in the same way; if you see the Southern cloud, if you see a cloud in the South or coming from the South, you can be sure that rain will follow because there is always that connection between the two. In the same way, if you see a little child you can be sure that later on, if the child lives, you will see a man and in the same way if you see a foal, later on you will see a stallion. So in the same way, deep thinking about death will lead to the unique and worthy Dharma. In the same way, if you think about death you can be just as sure that sooner or later that will lead you to the unique and worthy Dharma. Just as smoke is a sign of fire, in the same way, thinking about death is a sign that the Dharma is, in fact, there, or very soon will be there. So, "rejection of attachment to the wheel of Samsara, the belief in the retribution of all deeds, mindfulness of the impermanence and mortality of this life, these are signs that we approach the unique, worthy Dharma." In other words, if we do these things, if we think about death, reject attachments to the wheel of Samsara etc., then we can be sure that we approach the Dharma. Just in the same way if we see smoke we can be sure that fire is there. If we see the Southern cloud, we can be sure that it's going to rain. If we see a little child, we can be sure that it's going to be a man. If we

see a foal we can be sure that it's going to be a stallion. In the same way, thinking about death and so on is a sure sign that we are approaching the Dharma. In other words, he is congratulating the birds on what they have been doing. He is saying that they have produced the cause, so to speak, the effect will necessarily follow. (pause)

Then he says "O birds assembled here, is there anything of this nature in your minds? Tell me then your thoughts?" He wants to find out whether they have been really meditating on his discourse and, if so, what sort of experiences, what realizations they have had. (long pause) So will someone read the King Vulture's speech?

Silaratna: "Thereupon, the King Vulture rose from the ranks on the left, shook his wings three times and said:

"One must open one's ears to such beneficial discourse.
One must know the folly of this ceaseless busyness.
One must know the True Dharma to be the basis of freedom.
One must know that born, one cannot stay,
that one must die.
One must know that hoarded wealth must be dissipated.
One must know that gifts now given are provisions for the future.
One must know that a state of woe is the fruit of evil deeds.
One must know that all happiness is the fruit of good deeds.
Through lasting merit alone can happiness be achieved.""

S: So these lines begin with 'one must'. What is the force of this must here? It's rather like this 'have to' that we discussed earlier. Is it a logical must, a psychological must, or a moral must, or a spiritual must? "One must open ones ears to such beneficial discourse."

Aryamitra: It's logic

S: It's logical that if you want to develop spiritually this is what you must do. The one is the cause, the other the effect. If you want the effect, you produce the cause - there is no other way. So it represents a logical necessity. "One must open ones ears to such beneficial discourse. One must know the folly of ceaseless busyness." Anything to comment on there, anything not clear? The first line is probably quite clear, but what about the second line. What is this ceaseless busyness? Why do you think that Conze uses busyness instead of activity. Is there any difference of connotation as between busyness, say, and activity?

Khemananda: Activity, you could actually be doing something but with busyness you might not be actually doing anything or anything substantial, but you are behaving in such a manner that you are rushing around, constantly seeming to be doing something, but your actual impact might be quite negligible.

S: And perhaps the king vulture is suggesting is that what people usually think of as activity is really just busyness, because it is basically, essentially futile.

Aryamitra: It would be the same as hurry and worry.

S: Yes. So, "One must know the folly of this ceaseless busyness. One must know the true Dharma to be the basis of freedom." Conze's note says that he is not sure what this line means or if the text itself is correct here. But anyway, he has made out a sort of acceptable meaning, "One must know the true Dharma to be the basis of freedom." What do you think it means, in what sense is the true Dharma the basis of freedom?

Ratnaketu: The Dharma, or the practice of the Dharma sets us free from the Conditioned.

S: Yes, there is no real freedom without the Dharma, without the practice of the Dharma. The only real freedom is spiritual freedom, or the freedom of the Unconditioned. You are not free if you remain a victim of your own unskillful mental states. (long pause)

"One must know that born, one cannot stay, that one must die" It might seem a very easy thing to know, a very simple thing - that death is the inevitable result of birth. Do you think that people do know that and in what sense do they know it?

Silabhadra: They know it but they don't usually accept it.

Amoghacitta: They certainly don't act as if they know it.

S: They don't really envisage it or They don't really have a very clear or very vivid idea of it actually happening. I think that when you are very young, you can't. It's almost impossible. You feel so alive, you can't really imagine that you are going to die, or that you will be dead one day. The very idea so contradicts your whole present experience.

Prasannasiddhi: It's almost as well that you can kind of go through a stage or at a certain time in your life this fact might sink in a little deeper and you realize that, yes, you are going to die and from that you work out the implications of what that means in terms of your life. So then you can proceed through your life on the basis of that, and in a way when you think about it afterwards, you may not feel quite so deeply unless you ponder on it as you'd done previously - that you're going to die. But you may not concern yourself with it in the same sort of fashion. Rather, than always trying to ponder on the fact of death - maybe just to have a deeper experience of it once in your life. It sort of just carries you through the rest of your life acting in a skillful way.

Aryamitra: It does seem interesting that the Manjushri Institute, the first practice that I think they get was recollection of death and maybe because it's very Tibetan based, that it's part

of the Tibetan tradition. I did at that time wonder why we didn't do it except that I knew we did the six element practice.

S: It certainly is the Tibetan tradition to start off in this way. But it comes back to something I said a while ago, is that having been convinced of the inevitability of death etc, we need something positive, so to speak, on to which to fall back, and in the case of many people in the West today, they just don't have that and their Buddhism, perhaps even, doesn't go very deep. So you must be very careful that they have got a sort of positive basis first within them, of some kind or other, to fall back onto before you get them reflecting and meditating on impermanence and death.

Aryamitra: And obviously, the Tibetans had a very long tradition.

S: They clearly did have that and even do have that. So it's a question of Tibetan Lamas needing to be real lamas and give precepts, not just carry on the existing Indo-Tibetan tradition in a way unthinkingly without realising the sort of effect it has or may have on people in the West. I remember when I was in New Zealand on my first visit, some of the people who came to see me and are now in the FWBO, in fact, in the Order in some cases, had just been on a retreat conducted by two visiting Tibetan lamas and they left in a sort of state of shock because it had been about death and impermanence and the hells and lots about the hells and detailed descriptions of the hot-hells and the cold-hells and they literally left in a state of shock. They felt maybe in the long run it had been a quite positive experience, but I personally am not so sure of that. I mean, the Tibetan lamas were throwing the whole book at them, so to speak, in the traditional way, but these three people were in contact with the Friends, they were meditating, they had a definite positive connection with Buddhism, though perhaps not a very strong one at that time, but what about other people who might have gone along completely fresh, completely new? They could have been seriously thrown by all that.

Aryamitra: There's the example of the Buddha's disciples who committed suicide.

S: Yes indeed.

Ratnaketu; I think some evangelical Christian groups use this a lot. They really emphasise the Armageddon, the end of the world is coming and golly, you'd better watch it!

S: The Catholics also make use of this approach. If you read for instance James Joyce's "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man", he describes his childhood and his experiences at a Catholic school run, I think, by Jesuits and the sorts of sermons that they had to listen to during the holy week, or something like that on the four last things. I mean, death, judgement, hell and what's the other one? - not having been brought up as a Catholic? - I don't remember. What were the four last things? Death, hell, judgement....?

Ratnaketu: Why are they called the last things?

S: Well like the last judgement, I suppose they do happen last, they happen after death, well, they include death. Perhaps death gets lost sight of, it's not dwelt upon much but James Joyce gives a very good sort of example of the sermons delivered on these occasions - really terrifying.

Prasannasiddhi: You can end up living in quite a bleak world, no positivity. There is in, I think it's Australia, they are doing this Burmese Vipassana.

S: Yes, that sometimes has the same sort of effects. Yes, one must certainly know that born, one can't stay, that one must die. One must know this. But it's not enough to know this in a purely mundane sort of way, in the sort of way which gives rise to pessimism or cynicism or despair. One needs to be able to fall back onto something positive.

One must know that hoarded wealth must be dissipated, this seems pretty obvious. One must know that gifts now given are provisions for the future. How do you like the sound of that - is it literally true? It sounds like - that gifts and Dana represent a sort of sound investment!

Silabhadra: It does seem to work. The idea of like the more you give the more you seem to get.

S: Yes via, presumably, the psychological and spiritual effect upon you of the act of giving. Not that you literally get back what you actually gave, sort of double or treble or ten-fold or a hundred-fold! (laughter)

Ratnaketu: I actually read an article in a 'new age' magazine about the laws of money and one of them, it said, was that they had come across this precept of giving and they put it into practice and they found that it worked and so now, as part of their business, they deliberately give away a certain amount of money each year, and they found that it really works - and that get it back, say they give away 15% and get back 30%!

S: There are logical fallacies here. How did they know that there was that particular connection? I mean, did they give it away to advertising or did they give it away to charities which they were known to be giving it away to? Did they give anonymously? Because even giving to charity can be a form of investment, because it helps your image with the public.

Amoghacitta: This is a bit like accumulating merit.

S: Yes. (pause) "One must know that the state of woe is the fruit of evil deeds." The simple cause-effect relationship. One must know that all happiness is the fruit of good deeds.

"Through lasting merit alone can lasting happiness be achieved." What do you make of this - "through lasting merit alone can lasting happiness be achieved." Is there such a thing as lasting merit and if so what is lasting merit? Is merit mundane or is it transcendental? Taking it in the sense of punya.

Aryamitra: Could you say that Insight was merit?

S: No! Insight would be jnana. If one has these two terms-jnana and punya insight belongs to jnana, it's transcendental and merit is mundane. So there can be lasting merit. Can anything mundane be lasting? One would have thought not, so what is this lasting merit? How can merit be made lasting?

Prasannasiddhi :Perhaps on the basis of Insight all ones activity would be such that one would always be creating or doing merit towards others.

S: Yes. Merit can only be lasting in conjunction with wisdom, with jnana. So through lasting merit alone can happiness be achieved. I mean true happiness, real happiness. One might say eternal happiness can only be achieved by merit which lasts, by merit which is also eternal, that is to say, merit united with wisdom, with jnana. I mean the happiness which is received by ordinary mundane merit doesn't last anymore than the merit does. So this is what the king vulture has understood, these are his thoughts, this is what is in his mind.(pause)

Silaratna: Could merit be thought of in terms of setting up the conditions, thinking from the point of view, say, Insight is transcendental - you can't cause it to arise. you can sort of seek conditions on which that sort of thing could take place.

S: Yes, merit can be thought of in that way. Though, of course, one doesn't necessarily take advantage of those conditions having set them up.

Silaratna: I didn't quite understand that.

S: Well, you might perform certain skillful actions and you might thereby set up conditions which are quite favourable for practising the Dharma. You may be born or reborn with a healthy human body. You may be born in a well to do family with leisure and means of education. But that doesn't mean that you will necessarily take advantage of those opportunities.

Silaratna: This is where wisdom comes in.

S: Yes. All right, lets hear what the great crane has to say.

Buddhapalita: "Then the Great Crane rose, stretched his neck three times and said: *srun dgos*, which means, *one must observe.*
"*One must observe unsullied moral purity*
as the root of all dharmic action.
One must observe the need to abandon
whatever belongs to this world, and that includes
the bonds of life in the various heavens.
One must observe that indolence and sloth hinder
the doing of good.
One must observe that the demon of meanness
hinders generosity.
Let these things also enter well into your minds"

S: Alright then, "The great crane rose and stretched his neck three times and said srun dgos which means one must observe". So, here again, what is the force of this must? - and clearly again it's a logical force. This is what one must do i.e. logically needs to do if one wants to develop spiritually, if one wants to realise the Dharma. "One must observe unsullied moral purity as the root of all Dharmic action." What is this unsullied moral purity?

Aryamitra: Sila.

S: Sila. In other words, all ones actions need to be based on, need to proceed from skilful mental states. This is the root of all Dharmic action.

Aryamitra: (I suppose you couldn't really believe purity was empty)?

S: I think that would be a little premature. It does say moral purity so that does seem to refer to a mental state or action based on a mental state of freedom from anything unskillful, freedom from lobha, that is to say craving, dvesa or aversion and moha or confusion or bewilderment or ignorance. So this really means if one wants to practice the Dharma one must do so on a basis of sila. So moral purity in this sense depends upon one's mental state. That means one must be aware of one's mental state, one must know when one's mental state is either skillful or unskillful, whether greed aversion or delusion are present, or not. So this means that one must examine one's mental state, look at one's mental state, go over it, analyse it even, certainly be aware of it.

Ratnaketu: It's also firmly making the connection that the Dharma is not something just to be studied sort of abstractly.

S: Yes, it speaks of Dharmic action.

Ratnaketu: It's within a moral life, not just (appended?)

S: "One must observe the need to abandon whatever belongs to this world and that includes the bonds of life in various heavens." This represents giving up or disentanglement. Abandoning the bonds of life in the various heavens perhaps is not a very real option to most people, even most Buddhists in the West. One must feel that it is a real option before there can be any question one giving it up. You can't give up the career, for instance, for which you have no hope of ever having. I mean the Buddha really did give up something when he left home and went into the forest. He gave up,according at least to the later accounts, a whole kingdom. At least, according to the earlier accounts, he gave up a high social position and all sorts of worldly prospects, but not everybody can say that. All some people have to give up is their dole money and they don't even give up that! (Laughter)

Prasannasiddhi: It does require moving on to greater happinesses, rather than just sort of giving up things. It implies that there is actually something happier or more positive.

S: Yes, even than the life in the various heavens.

Aryamitra: it does say the *bonds* of life in various heavens?

S: Well, life in the various heavens is spoken of in terms of bonds because according to Buddhist tradition you can settle down in the heavens, you can become content there, not think of going higher, not think in terms of making any further progress and, in a way, that is the greatest obstacle. Here the good is the enemy of the best. It's like people who are very happy and comfortable in the world, at least for the time being. They don't feel the need of making any effort in a spiritual sense. They are quite satisfied with what they've got, quite satisfied with where they are.

Ratnaketu: But how can we possibly gain enlightenment if beings, who live in a realm where they are continually dwelling in the fourth dhyana have so much trouble?

S: Well, we are lucky that we aren't dwelling in the fourth dhyana all that time, that we are not allowed to, you could say.

Prasannasiddhi: We are not allowed to?

S: We are not allowed to, so to speak, by external circumstances.

Prasannasiddhi: External circumstances?

S: Noise, our own bodies, you know... need to feed them... and things like that. The gods don't even have any material bodies that need material food, they don't have to work.

Prasannasiddhi: How did they achieve that?

S: Well, according to tradition this is the result of performing skillful actions.

Ratnaketu: But I would have thought that it would be easier to develop that in a god realm, to get enlightenment, because it seems for the most of us that what were are trying to do is, in our meditation, to get into a god realm for the length of the meditation, and then try and....

S: (interrupts) Well, in the case of the gods, taking tradition literally, they are in that sort of fourth dhyana state naturally. They are sort of born into it and they stay in it. It lasts a long time, everything in these worlds lasts a long time. So it's very difficult to perceive the truth of impermanence. Whereas in our own world, our material world, things don't last a very long time, so it's comparatively easy to perceive the law of impermanence, to perceive the truth of impermanence, and to use your dhyana experience to meditate upon that. But again, according to tradition, in the worlds of the gods it is not quite like that. They are caught up in a dhyana experience that lasts a very long time. Things in the world in which they live all last a very long time, they change very slowly. So they are not so favourably placed, in a way, for developing Insight however favourably they may be placed for the experience of dhyana.

Ratnaketu: It's harder for them to see the nature of their conditions.

S: You could say that, yes. Again one is discussing tradition on its own terms.

Silaratna: So in most respects, if insight is the main goal that you are aiming for, You don't really have any need, as it were, to dwell in states higher than the first dhyana?

S: Well, yes and no. Because even though you, so to speak, come down to the first dhyana to develop Insight via reflection and discursive thought, if you have some experience of the dhyanas which are even higher, then your energies are much more behind that discursive thought when you come down to it, because they are much more unified.

end of tape two.....Birds, tape three

Prasannasiddhi: It takes a long time to build... you get into the god-realms in terms of, like fourth dhyana, as a result of merit and, if it the experience lasts a long while, well, how does one equate that with one's attempts in meditation to get into these higher states?

S: Well, one isn't trying to get into those higher states for their own sake, but so as to achieve a basis for the development of Insight. In order to develop Insight one needs a very steady, a very concentrated, a very sustained, as it were, thinking, and that sort of thinking most people are not capable of. Their minds are not sufficiently concentrated, there's not enough energy, not enough power behind the thinking. But if one has some experience of the dhyanas, if one's energies are much more collected, much more together, if one is much

more concentrated, then it is possible to develop Insight by reflection, by discursive mental activity. So dhyana's not an end in itself, though, yes, it may be very satisfying, and so on. But it's essentially a means to the development of Insight.

Amoghavajra: (unclear)

S: One could think in that way. One could think of the gods as those (unclear) representing or embodying those particular mental states. One thinks of the Bodhisattvas in that way, as embodying, so to speak, different stages of the path.

Amoghavajra: In a sense you wouldn't really call them gods because (unclear) the mundane.

S: Well, Tibetans do distinguish themselves between what they call 'gods of the round' and what they call 'deities of the path', though they use the word (unclear) - Devas of the round and devas of the path. Maybe you should make that distinction in English. Maybe gods with a small 'g' and gods with a big 'G' - Keeping Gods with a big 'G' in the plural, to guard against theism.

Prasannasiddhi: Speaking of the higher dhyanas in terms of god-realms and lasting a long while, that would imply that if you really wanted to get into deep, or higher states of consciousness in meditation, you would have to develop, go away and devote quite some time to it, to develop those states. Rather than - you couldn't expect to, when you do your sit every morning, probably, to zoom up into....

S: No, but one point which is also made very strongly is that rebirth in these sort of higher realms, in these sort of heavens, where dhyanic experience is, as it were, natural, is, or can be, the result purely of ethical activity. Do you see what I mean? Not even necessarily of meditation itself, though clearly yes, it will be the result of meditation, but it can also be brought about just by ethical activity, ethical life, or by sila, inasmuch as in order to act ethically there must be a skillful mental state, and that skillful mental state is of the essence of dhyana. Do you see what I mean? You mustn't think of meditation in a narrow sense, or even dhyana in a narrow sense. Dhyana is essentially a skillful mental state. We call it a skillful mental state, a dhyana when it is sufficiently prolonged and sufficiently uninterrupted and sufficiently intense.

In the case of meditation it's as though we only gather together or re-collect all those skillful mental thoughts, which are normally present anyway, as the basis of our activity - that activity then being, of course, ethical activity, or sila.

So it's as though for sila to be possible there must be, in a sense, a meditative state present, in the sense of a state virtually concentrated and prolonged or sustained skillful mental states, skillful thoughts. So the point I'm making is that traditionally rebirth in these

Brahmalokas, for instance, is not regarded simply as the result of meditation, though of course it can be that, but also the result of an ethical life.

Prasannasiddhi: So you could, perhaps, say that a poet who was engaged in quite a long work, he'd been writing for quite a while, he'd kind of built up a momentum in terms of his mental states and he might be really deeply engrossed in some quite, sort of major work, and you could, in a way, say that he was living from day to day as he was writing his work, in a quite dhyanic state.

S: Well, depending on the subject-matter of the poem, or the subject-matter of what he's writing. Suppose he was writing about battles and bloodshed, well then, that would be concentrated but not in a skillful way, because concentration can be either skillful or it can be unskillful. Do you see what I mean? I mean, the example of unskillful concentration is often given of a cat watching a mousehole. Do you see what I mean? You're concentrated, but you're concentrated through greed, you can be concentrated through anger,so that would not be a meditative or dhyanic state. There's got to be concentration in conjunction with positive mental states.

So whether the poet, or any other kind of writer, was in a dhyanic state while writing - as distinct from a merely concentrated state - would depend to some extent on the subject-matter of the poem. He might be working on a patriotic poem, sort of glorifying his own country, expressing hatred or contempt for other countries- well, he would then not be in a very positive and, therefore, not in a very dhyanic state. On the other hand he might be writing a long poem in praise of beauty or in praise of joy, in which case he might well be in a dhyanic state. (sentence unclear)

Prasannasiddhi: I suppose I'm thinking of the arts and poetry and painting, etc., in terms of a basis for the higher meditative states.

S: Well, concentration is certainly there, concentration is certainly involved in the production of these works, but concentration is not enough. In the case of the dhyana states, it's not that they are states of concentration simply. They are also states of concentrated skillful thoughts and emotions. You can have concentration due to unskillful thoughts. But certainly, in a way, in the case of the artist, it's not only concentration, but an abundance of skillful thoughts and emotions. Well there is, to that extent, an approximation at least to a dhyanic state. (pause) Well, let's just finish off this speech and discuss what the Great Crane (unclear).

"One must observe that indolence and sloth hinder the doing of good." Well, this is pretty obvious, isn't it? Indolence and sloth, or sloth and torpor hinder the doing of good, hinder the doing of what is skillful or meritorious. So one must observe this , one must see this and act upon that sight, that understanding. No doubt there's a lot of really good things we could

do, but we're hindered from doing them simply by laziness. What is indolence exactly? Well, is it necessarily a negative state - indolence? What do you understand by 'indolence'?

Amoghavajra: Idle.

S: Idle, 'at leisure'. There is, it can be used in a positive sense, there is a poem by Thompson called 'The Castle of Indolence', which he eventually tears down in the course of the poem, but you can see from this.... (words covered by laughter)

Silaratna: It's sort of like self-orientated?

S: It's a bit self-oriented, yes.

Amoghavajra: I suppose it can be quite good if you're used to being quite busy.

Ratnaketu: Yes, some people could see you as being indulgent if you're just quite happy, just quietly sitting, looking at the countryside.

S: You might have had a very hard week. When they just see you sitting down for five minutes, just looking at a tree, they think you're just being lazy. But actually you're being indolent.

Silabhadra: So is indolence just, sort of, non-activity? What would be a good definition?

S: Well, it's more sort of, well, taking it a little positively - and it is sometimes used a bit positively in literature - it means not having any definite occupation, just taking things easily, not being in a hurry, being concerned to enjoy things and experience them. I'm beginning to sound quite fond of it! (laughter) It's quite interesting that in Thompson's poem, in part two this Castle of Indolence is destroyed by the Knight (K-N-I-G-H-T) of Arts and Industry. Not arts in the sense of fine arts, but arts in the sense of more manufacturing arts, practical arts, and industry.

S: His indolence means something more like 'gentlemanly leisure'. But here indolence means laziness, apparently. I don't think Conze has used the word very exactly. Indolence, laziness. Though sometimes people use the word 'lazy' (to mean?) other people being lazy, but sometimes I've raised the question What is laziness and why are people lazy? I haven't yet found a satisfactory answer to this. What makes people lazy, what is laziness?

Ratnaketu: Is it an unwillingness to do something which you're quite capable of doing?

S: But why should you be unwilling to do it if you're quite capable of doing it? What is at work? What prevents you?

Khemananda: You don't want to do it. You might be capable of doing it, but you don't particularly want to do it.

S: You're not motivated to do it. But why should you do it if you don't want to do it? In other words, in that case, what's wrong with being lazy?

Ratnaketu: Well, it might be part of your responsibility to do it.

Khemananda: If you put yourself in a position which assumes certain responsibilities which other people have just taken for granted as going with that - you have decided to become manager of a business, for example - and that entails that you write off orders and you don't do that, well,then, you're being lazy, because part of being manager...

S: Yes, but wouldn't that just be irresponsibility? just being irresponsible.

Khemananda: Yes, that's true.

S: I wouldn't exactly call it being lazy. So what is laziness?
It is unwillingness to make an effort, laziness. When you find that effort is unpleasant, you don't enjoy making an effort. But then of course why don't you enjoy making an effort? It seems to be, or it would seem to be natural to enjoy making an effort. Is there such a thing as laziness, true laziness? I mean, sometimes people may seem to be lazy but they might just be tired. Laziness seems to be a term of moral condemnation.

Silabhadra: It seems like somebody can only be lazy if you're doing more than they are, so it's quite a subjective sort of thing.

S: Yes, I'd say laziness wasn't unwillingness to make an effort, but then that is not necessarily an unskillful thing, depending on circumstances. When it is unskillful, then, well, laziness is just laziness. But why should you be lazy, even in that sense. What makes you lazy? I mean, is laziness something that one is or is it more something that other people think you are?

Ratnaketu: Sometimes I feel lazy.

S: What do you mean by that?

Ratnaketu: I mean, I can't be bothered. I just feel I should do something, I should be acting in such a manner, or doing something I can't be bothered doing.

S: The laziness seems to be, then, an unwillingness to do something. An unwillingness to make an effort where an effort is needed, or is either considered by you yourself to be

needed, or by other people to be needed. So laziness, then, is an unwillingness to make an effort when making an effort is necessary or appropriate.

Silaratna: Does it have any connection with the term 'lassitude' or ...

S: I'm not sure about that. Lassitude is usually sort of a lack of energy, almost a weakness.

Prasannasiddhi: So you think that laziness can only be defined in a negative way, as an unwillingness to make an effort when effort seems appropriate?

S: That would seem to be the case. I mean 'indolence' is sometimes used in the positive sense, as I've suggested. But the word 'laziness' never seems to be used in a positive sense, not, at least, of human beings. You can talk about 'the waves', you know, 'rolling lazily up the beach.' Well that's allowed - waves are allowed to be lazy because that's just really descriptive, but not human beings - laziness is never held to be a virtue, except by some more extreme hippies. (pause) Well, what's sloth?

Silabhadra: Sluggishness.

S: Sluggishness. Because if you define laziness as unwillingness to make any effort where that effort is considered appropriate then, of course, that does not hinder the doing of good, because you'll see something to be done which is good, something, the doing of which, is good. But you'll be unwilling to make the effort to do it, and that will be laziness. Laziness is like a sort of resistance.

Aryamitra: It can be positive, can't it?

S: Do you think so?

Aryamitra: Yes, resisting doing something bad.

Ratnaketu: But that's active.

Aryamitra: Well, looking at it in one way, but supposing you're going against the group.

S: Supposing one says I was thinking of going and robbing a bank, but I was too lazy to do it! (laughter) Could you sort of not go and rob banks out of sheer laziness. So laziness usually exists in relation to something that is recognised as a good thing, that is worth doing, that one should, in a sense, do. But one is too lazy to do it. The term 'Laziness' is usually used in a pejorative sense.

Khemananda: I think what could happen sometimes though is that one person might recognise, think, that it's obvious that this is a good course of action and then assume that the other person thinks that and perhaps they don't, and they haven't actually seen that as a good course of action to motivate them.

S: So genuine laziness is a sort of unwillingness to exert oneself in a situation in which you yourself recognise exertion is really needed. But again, why should that be? Why should you be unable to make that effort? Well maybe it's a simple case of the gravitational pull, or that you might be tired or something of that sort, in which case it would not be genuine laziness. It would just be tiredness.

Prasannasiddhi: I don't know whether you can actually be lazy if you know something's actually good to do.

S: Yes, if you really know that, if you really see that, acknowledge that.

Prasannasiddhi: Laziness seems more where you aren't aware of the consequences of your...

S: You see one doesn't speak of animals being lazy, does one? One speaks of them, say, being inactive, or resting, or sleeping, or lying down, but you don't say "well that dog is very lazy" because to be lazy...

Silaratna:(unclear)

S: Ah, but then that introduces a human element, it introduces the idea of a job to be done, work, responsibility, 'the good' in a way.

Prasannasiddhi: You can have a 'lazy old horse' out in the field.

S: Well is he really lazy? He's just been turned out in his old age.

Ratnaketu: Animals don't have a conflict do they? They just...

S: No they don't.

Ratnaketu: Whereas human beings have a conflict with their...

S: They have self-consciousness. Laziness seems to imply self-consciousness, reflexive consciousness.

Silabhadra: People call animals lazy because they want to be like animals. They're jealous.

S: Maybe they're just projecting. All right, so much for indolence and sloth.

"One must observe that the demon of meanness hinders generosity." The note says that the word for demon means something like 'preta'. "The demon of meanness hinders generosity." What is this demon of meanness? Is it just a metaphorical way of describing meanness itself? do you feel when you're - sort of - you know, not able to be very generous; do you feel as though you're sort of hindered by a kind of demon, some sort of preta-like figure, somewhere in your heart, you know, lurking and just getting in the way. you just feel mean, nasty, or part of yourself feels mean and nasty, not wanting to give others. But it's interesting that the demon of meanness is a sort of preta-like figure, because a preta is someone who can't take in. Who is sort of starved. So if you feel that you're not getting, you won't feel very willing to give, will you? Do you see what I mean? So the demon of meanness that hinders generosity can be that sort of element in yourself which feels 'I'm not getting, no one's giving me, so why should I give to others?' Sometimes people do talk in that way don't they? Anyway.

"Let these things also enter well into your minds." Lets ponder these things. Anyway that was the speech of the Great Crane. Anything further about that?

Silaratna: "Thereupon the Golden Goose rose, shook his wings three times and said: *nan stud nan stud*, which means, *that prolongs the bondage, that prolongs the bondage.*

"To remain from birth to death, without the Good Law, - that prolongs the bondage.
To desire emancipation, and still deserve a state of woe, - that prolongs the bondage.
To hope for miraculous blessings and still have wrong opinions, - that prolongs the bondage.
To neglect those things which turn the mind towards salvation, - that prolongs the bondage.
To strive for purity of vision and yet be blinded by a faulty judgement, - that prolongs the bondage.
To give and yet be checked by meanness,
- that prolongs the bondage.
To aim at lasting achievements while still exposed to this world's distractions, - that prolongs the bondage.
To try to understand one's inner mind while still chained to hopes and fears, - that prolongs the bondage.
All you who thus prolong your bondage within this ocean of suffering,
Try to grasp the meaning of my words,
For they will shorten your bondage.""

S: So what does this bondage, about which the Golden Goose is speaking, mean?

Aryamitra: I've got a picture of when you told the story about the stupa - the man who's found out...(unclear)

S: Ah yes, except one's also bound up in more subtle ways with Buddha (unclear) as well, even (unclear). This bondage of the Samsara. So "To remain from birth to death without the Good Law." That's to say, the Saddharma "that prolongs the bondage." So what is the Golden Goose really getting at, what is the point that he's making?

Buddhapalita: Without practising the Dharma...

S: Yes, without practising the Dharma in one way or another things will just remain as they are. The present state of bondage, the present state of suffering will just continue indefinitely. In other words, the state of bondage to the Samsara won't come to an end of it's own accord. you have to make an actual conscious effort. It's no use simply desiring, no use simply hoping. He says, "To desire emancipation and still deserve a state of woe - that prolongs the bondage." So the fact that you still deserve a state of woe - what does that imply? What does 'deserve' mean? Why do you 'deserve'?

Khemananda: Because of your unskillful acts.

S: Yes, because of your unskillful acts. So you are desiring emancipation, you are desiring to be liberated from bondage, but you are still performing those actions which deserve, by way of recompense, a state of woe, a state of suffering, and that prolongs the bondage. That is to say, when one's actions are at variance with one's aspirations. You desire emancipation, but you perform those actions which, far from giving you emancipation, far from bringing you to a state of emancipation, will bring you to a state of suffering instead. So why do you think people behave in this sort of way? It's a very common sort of situation, a sort of situation of inner conflict. You desire emancipation and still deserve a state of woe.

Amoghacitta: Not integrated...

S: Yes, not integrated. (pause) "To hope for miraculous blessings, and still have wrong opinions - that prolongs the bondage." What are these miraculous blessings for which you hope? What do you think they might be?

Amoghacitta: Salvation from a personal god, or something like that.

S: It could be salvation from a personal god, or just even blessings from Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. But how can those sort of blessings come if you still have wrong opinions,

wrong views? It would suggest that right views are very important, not to speak of Perfect Vision.

Prasannasiddhi: It's sort of - perhaps it reflects a sort of one-sided kind of approach, where you just think that you can leave it all up to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and you don't have to do anything.

S: Yes. Not only do you think you don't have to do anything, you still have wrong opinions - there's wrong views, which is even worse.

Silaratna: It's almost like the 'spiritual supermarket' thing that you talked about, say someone's shopping around - they want all these things but they don't want to make a commitment.

S: They don't want to change their ideas. (pause) And you do find in India, and in Tibet to some extent, that for many people the spiritual life consists in going in search of lamas and gurus who can confer on them miraculous blessings without them having to change at all. One finds this even in the West among some people - sort of, along the fringes of the various New Age groups and cults. Maybe right in the midst of them. If they hear of some great lama or great guru, they want to go along to get a kind of blessing. They don't think in terms of sorting out their views, don't think in terms of straightening out their thinking, seeing things clearly or actually practising. They have to go rushing along for some kind of blessing, some kind of initiation, in the vague sort of hope that they'll get something out of it, without them doing anything specific or making any real effort. It's some cases it may show a sort of faith, but it's quite weak, it's quite feeble, it doesn't get them very far. So they're hoping for miraculous blessings, but still having wrong opinions. Sometimes the lamas and gurus seem, at least, to encourage that sort of attitude, because they 'lay on' these performances. They charge for them.

Aryamitra: Does this happen in India at all?

S: It does to some extent. There are people like this who, as I've said, think of the spiritual life, think of the religious life in these sort of terms. They hear there's some famous guru, some famous teacher visiting their town so they just go to see, and they hope that they'll get some blessing. They have a sort of belief that if he wants he can give that kind of blessing. They've only got to humble themselves enough and they'll get it. But they don't think in terms of changing their lives, or turning over a new leaf, usually. Do you see what I mean? Just to get that miraculous blessing is enough, and this presents itself to them as a sort of faith - 'Oh what great faith I have, I believe that he could confer this miraculous blessing on me if he wanted to. See what great faith I've got. See what a great devotee I am." They think that this in itself represents a sort of high spiritual state.

Silabhadra: It's like both of these two verses - to desire emancipation, to hope for blessings, they're both a very passive thing, sort of sitting back and waiting....

S: Yes indeed.

Silabhadra: As opposed to what is really going to...

S: Yes, desiring and hoping is a sort of pseudo-spiritual daydreaming, more or less. A sort of pseudo-spiritual pipe-dream.

Khemananda: It becomes a substitute for action, doesn't it?

S: Yes indeed, yes.

Khemananda: Just desire and hope but you don't act.

Aryamitra: Couldn't there be a case where somebody goes along to, say, Ramana Maharshi and actually does experience his darshan? And through that changes their (unclear).

S: Well this is true. I'm not saying that that might not happen, but the sort of people about whom I'm talking aren't receptive in that sort of way, they're just passive. They're just there to 'get' something.

Aryamitra: And they're not actually paying attention to ...

S: Well, not that they consciously say to themselves 'well, I'm not going to change'. If they were asked they would probably say they had been changed by this miraculous blessing. They consider themselves as changed, if you were to ask them. Because they've got this sort of faith, this belief in that miraculous blessing, and this guru is able to give it, which you haven't, perhaps, and they think therefore that they are, as it were, superior to you, they have reached a more advanced state of spiritual development, because they've got this wonderful faith. They think that that is all involved.

Ratnaketu: What about the evangelical Christians, they have those meetings, and people 'speak in tongues' and people get healed and great changes come about.

S: Well maybe more miraculous blessings and more wrong opinions! I don't know that it's the miraculous blessings in the sense of this particular text. Though certainly there are strange that happen, sort of psychological disturbances take place when, as you say, people 'let off steam'. It doesn't seem to be very much more than that.

Silaratna: Sort of group hysteria.

S: Group hysteria, yes. Very often at these sort of pentecostal meetings you get people who are leading quite sort of deprived lives, maybe quite frustrated, very poor people usually.

Prasannasiddhi: It's probably a bit like a football match or something. Big crowds of people get carried away.

S: There was a hall - not exactly a pentecostal hall - but a hall where there used to be sort of pentecostal meetings, opposite the community in West London. I remember I visited them once one evening, it must have been a Saturday night, and there was a terrific din, a tremendous racket coming from this hall. I thought it was some kind of - I don't know - orgy! (laughter) I was informed that it was a pentecostal meeting and that a lot of people in that locality, especially black people went along to it and it was very, very noisy and very, very - well - excited.

Aryamitra: There was even I remember, when I was a mitra a long time ago pills that had been blessed by a Tibetan lama.

Ratnaketu: There was this lama actually came to Sukhavati when I was there, a Tibetan lama, an he was an old friend of Devaraja's, who was from some Tibetan monastery, and he gave Devaraja and Prakasha these little pills which had been blessed, and they didn't know what to do with them!

S: they were supposed to swallow them?

Ratnaketu: Yes, but they didn't know whether to do it! Or what to do after he'd swallowed it. But he did and he said he didn't notice any difference.

S: Well this is the way in which, sometimes, miraculous blessings come, according to popular Tibetan tradition. But what's the use of swallowing any number of such pills that have been blessed, and still having wrong opinions? The pills, however many times they've been blessed, however miraculous they are, just won't help. That prolongs the bondage. The text doesn't even say getting miraculous blessings, it says just hoping for them, and still entertaining wrong opinions.

Aryamitra: So is it suggesting that there are such things as miraculous blessings?

S: I don't think the text is questioning that. I think the point that it is making is that simply to hope for those without doing anything yourself, without even trying to straighten out your own thinking, or still having wrong views, that only prolongs the bondage. I don't think that the text intends to question the fact that there are such things as miraculous blessings. Perhaps we shouldn't take the word 'miraculous' in the translation too literally. Supernormal blessings, blessings coming from outside, higher spiritual powers, from a higher spiritual

source. But "To neglect those things which turn the mind towards salvation, just desiring and hoping - that prolongs the bondage." So to desire the effect while neglecting the cause, that prolongs the bondage. That is what we do so much of the time - again it comes back to the day-dream, the pipe dream, building a spiritual castle in the air, building your spiritual community in the air, so to speak. (long pause) There's a line of poetry by Matthew Arnold. "We want all pleasant ends, but will use no harsh means" - you get the sense of that? "We want all pleasant ends" , effects, "but will use no harsh means." If the means are unpleasant, we won't make use of them. We just want the pleasant ends - all pleasant ends, but will use no harsh means."

Ratnaketu: (sentence inaudible)

S: Well that is one of the great paradoxes of Christianity. (Long Pause) It reminds me of an incident I wrote about in connection with the funeral of an uncle of mine about three years ago, I wrote about it in ' *Shabda*' - but you would not have read it of course, any of you I expect - well you might have done. He'd belonged to some kind of pentecostal church for about 12 years of his life, and the woman minister took the service, and she gave an address about him, about this uncle of mine, and apparently, according to her, he was a thoroughly religious, not to say, deeply spiritual man - and we'd seen nothing of this! (laughter) In fact, she said he'd lived only for God, so she was certain he'd gone straight to heaven and that they would meet there one day, all those who were on the right path. She was quite, sort of, (unclear). Anyway, having said her piece, she came back with us to the house for tea, and then she took off her hat and had her cup of tea. She said "Ah well, poor old Jack, we won't see him again." (laughter) You see? So there's this sort of duality, as it were. On the one hand, the confident way in which she'd expressed her belief that she'd meet him in heaven and then, when she was out of the pulpit and relaxing, well, she's sort of, in a sense, said what she really felt - that she won't see him again and nobody would! It's rather like that, one's actions don't square with one's profession. Of course, it isn't only the Christians who are guilty of that sort of thing.

So, "to neglect those things which turn the mind towards salvation - that prolongs the bondage. To strive for purity of vision and get blinded by faulty judgement" - what is the 'purity of vision?

Silabhadra: Insight.

S: One could say that it was Insight. Or if one didn't want to go so far as that, one could say, well, it was at least seeing things very clearly, seeing things very objectively. So, "To strive for purity of vision and yet be blinded by faulty judgement". So what is a faulty judgement: What is 'judgement' anyway?

Aryamitra: Could it just be a wrong view?

S: Ah, it's more than a wrong view in the literal sense. What do we mean by 'judgement' here? What is judgement?

Amoghacitta: It's like an interpretation.

S: It's like an interpretation. It's drawing conclusions, coming to a conclusion, to the summing up. Coming to a decision on the basis of certain evidence, certain facts. So clearly a judgement can be faulty. Your judgement, your assessment of a situation, of a person, of an idea, of a book, it can be faulty. So why is our 'judgement' faulty? What makes a judgement faulty? How is it we don't draw the correct conclusions?

Amoghavajra: Is it that they're not completely objective things?

S:: They're not completely objective.

: (several words unclear)

S: Right, sometimes we don't take all the facts into consideration. Sometimes we want to arrive at a conclusion too hastily, we don't give ourselves enough time to think, to think the matter over. Sometimes we're swayed by prejudice, by wishful thinking, so our judgement is faulty. So, "To strive for purity of vision, and yet be blinded by a faulty judgement - that prolongs the bondage". I mean, these two things - striving for purity of vision, and being blinded by a faulty judgement - they're incompatible. So it's no use striving for purity of vision without trying to get rid of those things, those subjective emotional factors, which cause you to arrive at faulty judgements.

Ratnaketu: What did you (2 or 3 words unclear) subjective ...

S: Emotional factors. The prejudices, the assumptions, it's not necessarily emotional, it's one's assumptions. Sometimes one's assumptions get in the way of correct judgement, and therefore of purity of vision.

Aryamitra: Doesn't 'prejudice' mean 'pre-judging'?

S: Yes indeed. Judging before you've examined the evidence.

Aryamitra: Especially with people.

S: This brings to my mind something - a point I've made before, but it's worth making again in case anyone hasn't heard it - that sometimes the word 'prejudice' is used wrongly. For instance, if you disagree with somebody, they may say, 'Oh, you're just prejudiced'. Now you may well have thought that matter over quite thoroughly. You may, in fact, not be prejudiced

at all, you may have come to your conclusion on the basis of evidence; you may perhaps be wrong in your view, but at least you haven't just jumped to a conclusion, you have tried to think it over. But nonetheless, people say, 'Oh, you're prejudiced', that is if you disagree with them on some matter about which they perhaps feel quite strongly. So they think it's a sufficient rebuttal if they just accuse you of being prejudiced. To take one sort of very conspicuous example., if you for instance say, you don't think men and women are really equal, well people very often say, "well you're just prejudiced.' They can't accept, or can't recognise, well, you may have given thought to this matter, and you may have come to a definite conclusion because of the thought that you've given to the matter. But they want to invalidate what you say by accusing you of prejudice. So one should be on the watch for this sort of thing, whether in connection with that particular topic or any other, not allow other people to invalidate or try to invalidate what you say merely by accusing you of prejudice when, in fact, you have thought the matter over, perhaps more than they have, in some cases.

Or if somebody says, or if you say, for instance, well, Buddhism is not a puritanical religion, it's not an ascetic religion in that sense, then people say, ah well, you're just prejudiced because you're a Buddhist. Do you see what I mean? Whereas, in fact, you have perhaps thought the matter over quite seriously and have come to a definite conclusion on the basis of the evidence. You're not prejudiced, you have not 'pre-judged'. Perhaps they're the ones who have pre-judged. So this word prejudice is really misused quite badly in this sort of way. And yet sometimes people paradoxically accuse you of being prejudiced because you know something very well. For instance, if you speak well of Buddhism, well you're being prejudiced because you're a Buddhist and they're not prejudiced, apparently, even though they know very little about it. It's really quite a ridiculous sort of situation.

Silaratna: You get that universalist type of tendency where you're accused of prejudice.

S: So 'prejudice' strictly means coming to a conclusion, arriving at a judgement or making a judgement, passing a judgement, without even attempting beforehand to examine the evidence. If you have at least made an honest attempt to examine the evidence, you can't be fairly accused of having prejudice.

Prasannasiddhi: In a way, if someone accuses you of having prejudice over an issue where you've thought something out, in a way they have that prejudice themselves.

S: Well, yes, that's clear, because they've been sort of emotionally upset, they're re-acting. They don't want to go into the matter, discuss it, they just want to 'smear you' and 'prejudiced' is a very useful smear-word. This is how it is used. And by accusing you of being prejudiced they are sort of indirectly proclaiming how free from prejudice they are themselves, how fair-minded, how open-minded, etc, etc, etc, etc. It's just a nasty little - sort of, well - debating trick, actually. It's no more than that. (pause) But nonetheless, there is such a thing

as faulty judgement, and we have to be careful that we don't fall into it, because it does obscure purity of vision.

But going a bit further into this question of purity of vision, well, in what does it consist? It's alright to say, well, it's a sort of Insight, etc, etc, but in what does purity of vision consist? Just taking the phrase in an ordinary sort of way, in a sort of 'non-technical' kind of way. If you speak of someone as having purity of vision, what do you mean by that?

Silabhadra: It's not obscured by anything.

S: He's not obscured by anything; but even more than that perhaps.

Aryamitra: Free from subjective biases.

S: Yes, free from subjective biases, but that amounts to much the same thing.

Silaratna: There's an element of concentration.

S: There's an element of concentration, yes. That's why we often speak of 'single-mindedness'. Because I know Blake speaks of 'single vision' in a negative sense - it means a very narrow, restricted sort of point of view - I'm not thinking in these sort of terms. But purity of vision implies singleness of vision in the sense that you are concentrated, you are giving your whole mind, your whole attention. You are integrated. Sometimes I think that, or sometimes I say, we shouldn't think of purity in sort of moral terms. We should think of purity in chemical terms. Do you know what I mean by that? When we say something is chemically pure, what do we mean?

Khemananda: It's not contaminated by anything.

S: It's not contaminated, it's not mixed. So purity of vision, in this sense, is vision which is not mixed with anything. There's nothing extraneous, you're not in the least distracted. There's no ambivalence. There's no inner conflict. You're just concerned with the thing that you're looking at, the thing that you're trying to understand. Your vision is so pure in that sense. It's uncontaminated. Completely concentrated.

Prasannasiddhi: So was it singleness of vision or singleness of purpose?

S: I said singleness of vision, or single mindedness although that does also imply singleness of purpose, too. In terms of purpose you can be divided, there can be a conflict between your desire to do this and your desire to do that. So purity of vision represents on the sort of cognitive level that sort of absence of conflict or the absence of that sort of conflict. Your vision is pure when you're just attending to one thing. This is - your purpose is single - when

you're just directing all your energies to one thing, trying to achieve one thing. There's something in the Bible, one of the gospels, about "if your eye be single". That is to say, if you're looking just at one thing, you're keeping your eye on that. You're not attending to anything else. Well that is singleness of vision, that's purity of vision. So there are these several aspects: there's the fact that there's no prejudice, there's no subjective emotionality getting in the way; and also that you're fully concentrated; that all the energies of your psyche are just bent on one object. So that is purity of vision. So, "To strive for purity of vision and yet be blinded by a faulty judgement - that prolongs the bondage." (pause)

And, "To give and yet be checked by meanness - that prolongs the bondage." To give sort of half-heartedly. When you have a sort of instinct, a sort of feeling to give, but then you think, 'Oh well, I'd better not, maybe I'll need it myself". So you check yourself in the act of giving, you're checked by meanness. All these sayings, all these different lines, all these things that prolong the bondage suggest a sort of state of mind which is divided. You want something, but you don't want it enough to really sort of go after it. To take the steps which are necessary to achieve or to gain that particular thing. You just like to do it, you want it, you desire it, you hope, but you don't actually really do anything about it. So that prolongs the bondage. It only makes things worse and worse.

Ratnaketu: It's also a mixture of when you do have this urge, this feeling to give, and then you think, 'well, I might need it', it's like something has just sort of blossomed a bit inside you, and then you sort of stomp on it a bit, or hold it down.

S: It's been frosted over. But sometimes it's difficult to know whether you're being generous or whether you're just being reckless and foolish. Sometimes you don't genuinely know. You might be just being a bit of a fool. Maybe you're walking along the streets of Glasgow, and some old beggar stops you - I think there are still old beggars in places like Glasgow, well lets suppose that there is, and he says, "Oh, could you spare me a few bob?". And you feel a sort of impulse of generosity, you've got 2 or 3 pounds in your pocket, you feel like giving, and then you think, well, maybe he'll just go and spend it in the pub. You know, maybe I'm just being a fool, maybe I'm just giving way to sentimentality. So you don't genuinely know what's the best thing to do. Should you give him all the money, sort of acting out your generous impulse? Or should you try to persuade him to go along to the centre and give him a cup of tea and talk to him about Buddhism. Or should you just compromise and give him one pound, maybe 50 pence, and just send him away. Very often you don't genuinely know the best thing to do, so it isn't quite such a simple matter. You don't know what is your truly skillful impulse - there's this sort of conflict of impulses, none of them unambiguously skillful, none of them unambiguously unskillful, you don't really know which is which, and which one to follow, do you see what I mean? Someone asks you maybe to lend him a book, well your impulse is yes, to lend them, but then you think, well they don't usually return books. Then you think it would be good if they read this book, then you think, on the other hand that book would still be useful to me, I don't really want to lose it at this stage. Again,

another little conflict. So very often it isn't a question of a conflict between unambiguously skillful impulse and the unambiguously unskillful impulse. Sometimes you just don't know; or it takes some thought before you can come to a decision on the matter. But very often the situation calls for immediate action. You're not allowed time to think things over.

Amoghavajra: Sometimes it's best just to give because your impulse is based on what (unclear).

S: Yes, yes, that is a point of view also; that if one's impulses to give are comparatively rare, well clearly it's that side of you that needs strengthening, even if perhaps, in the present instance, generosity isn't particularly justified by the objective circumstances of the case. It's as though you need practice in just giving without bothering too much whether you're giving to the right person, at the right place, or the right time.

Ratnaketu: So in the "Diamond Sutra" when it says that you give without seeing a gift or a giver, or somebody who gets, you're still making a decision who to give, and what, how much to give to them, even then?

S: Well, in the Diamond Sutra one doesn't make any decisions! (laughter) But, well, people in the other group have racked their poor little brains quite enough about that! (laughter) I don't think we want to do it in this group. (laughter) I think we'll just keep our feet firmly planted to the earth and just flap our little wings (laughter) and consider it in quite ordinary everyday terms.

So, "To give and yet be checked by meanness". It's not that you even just want to give, you actually do give, something, to some extent. But then you're checked by meanness, you start giving but you don't complete the action. You sort of think better of it - if it is better - very often you don't even know that. You don't know whether it's your meanness checking you or a greater degree of objectivity. But probably, I would say, in these sort of cases, it probably is better to give, just for the sake of practise, so to speak, and sort things out, work things out, afterwards. If you come to the conclusion that you were just a fool to give, well never mind. One might as well be a fool in that way as in some other way.

: (one or two sentences unclear)

S: Then "To aim at lasting achievements while still exposed to this world's distractions - that prolongs the bondage". I think there's quite a lesson here, perhaps, for those going back into the world's distractions, so perhaps we'd better look at this rather closely. What are those lasting achievements?

Mmm - anything that cannot be undone. And that must mean an achievement - the other side of the point of no return. The other side of stream entry. It can only refer to Insight with a

capital 'I'. It can only refer to Perfect Vision, the path of vision. So "To aim at lasting achievements" - to aim at things like stream entry or the arising of the Bodhicitta, whatever one might like to call it - "while still exposed to this world's distractions - that prolongs the bondage."

You notice the golden goose says not "while still yielding to this world's distractions". He says "while still exposed to this world's distractions." So why do you think the word 'exposed' is used here? What is the significance, what is the force of this word 'exposed'?

Amoghacitta: It's like there's no protection.

S: There's no protection, you're just open to them. It's just like Saint Sebastian, you know, tied to the tree, and people are just shooting arrows at him. (pause) So to aim at lasting achievements while you're still in a situation where you're exposed to the world's distractions, you've no protection against them, no way of avoiding them, "that prolongs the bondage."

Ratnaketu: It's also saying don't underestimate the power of the world.

S: Yes, yes.

Prasannasiddhi: Or the power of any circumstances that you're in, they do effect you - the company you keep.

S: Because even if you don't succumb to those distractions to which you are exposed, the fact that you don't succumb to them means that you are having to keep a very strict control over yourself, you're having to put up a lot of resistance to those distractions, and that may be taking up a great deal of your energies, perhaps the greater part of your energy. Having to be always on your guard, always watchful, which in a way is a good thing, but if it's a question of being on your guard against distractions, watching for distractions, well this can distract one's mind from the more positive, more creative side of the spiritual life.

Silabhadra: So it's saying that you need to engage in say full-time meditation or be in a monastery or something like that.

S: Well, that is the question, what is the sort of situation in which one is actually exposed to the world's distractions? As distinct from a situation in which you are sheltered from them, and don't have to bother so much about not succumbing to them? Do you see what I mean? After all, you can't get away from the world completely, you can't get away from distractions completely.

Silabhadra: So that's more like saying guarding the doors of the senses.

S: Yes, but what is, or what would be, the sort of situation in which you would still be exposed to the world's distraction, and what would be a situation in which you were sheltered from them?

Aryamitra: Well presumably the spiritual community would be the best, but even better still would be a solitary retreat.

S: Yes.

Aryamitra: And, say, working out in the world would probably be one of the most difficult for yourself.

S: I'm not so sure that a solitary retreat would be a more sheltered situation in all cases than living in a spiritual community, because in the case of the spiritual community, if you're living in a spiritual community, or as a member of a spiritual community, you do get positive emotional and spiritual support from the other members of the community which you don't get, certainly not in that way when you're on a solitary retreat. Not to say that a solitary retreat isn't a sheltered situation. It certainly is, especially if you are a bit more experienced, or a bit more advanced on the spiritual path, a bit more sure of yourself. (pause)

But one might say that the worst situation, say for someone going back from a course like this, say, to England, the worse situation would be if you were to go back home, live with your wife and children, or your parents and brothers and sisters, and carry on an ordinary full-time job which gave you very little time to meditate, to study or to go along to the centre, or see your spiritual friends. That would really be a situation in which you were "exposed to this world's distractions". The most sheltered situation, in the positive sense, would be if you were to go back to a spiritual community, situated in the country and half way between perhaps, is to go back to a spiritual community and/or centre situated in the midst of the city. That would seem to come half-way in between, do you see what I mean?

But you can't afford, too early on, to expose yourself too much to the world's distractions. You have to recognise that you're still comparatively weak. You can easily succumb - and even if you don't, so much of your energy has to be expended in fighting off these distractions, warding them off, and that is, in a sense, almost a waste of energy. You could, in another situation, put that energy to much better use.

Silaratna: Sometimes, though, circumstances arise where you do have to engage in that sort of area, where the distractions are likely to take place, because that's where you're living.

S: Well, one should estimate one's own strength and act accordingly.

Silabhadra: So what it's saying is, in fact, ideally you need to be a stream entrant - or beyond - to be functioning well within the world. (Thinking more in terms of the Bodhisattva Ideal).

S: Yes, in the long term you can't function in the world, in the sense of in the midst of worldly distractions, exposed to worldly distractions, without any danger of succumbing to them, unless you are a stream entrant. So only a stream entrant can expose himself to the world's distractions without fear. In his case it probably couldn't be considered exposure. There'd be something about him which just turns back all those arrows. He wouldn't have to bother about actually warding them off. I mean, there are some people who are not distracted by advertisements, are not distracted by placards outside cinemas, they're not distracted by pretty girls, etc, etc. They just don't bother.

Ratnaketu: (unclear)
S: Yes well, I don't want to suggest you shouldn't think like that, but yes, one can make up one's own mind. One can make, as it were, a sort of vow, though even then, I think, one is having to put quite a lot of effort into it, to maintaining that vow, one's having to put up a resistance to distractions.

Khemananda: And then, perhaps, there's the danger that there'll be more of you concentrated on the negative side of keeping out (unclear) creative, inspirational...

S: Yes that's true. You may survive simply by building up a sort of wall around yourself, by enclosing yourself in a sort of shell; and this may become habitual, and you may find you have difficulty in coming out from behind your wall, or from inside you shell when the situation permits.

Ratnaketu: It sort of brings out this point of some people saying that by living in a spiritual community you're sort of running away from the world, like that. But in a way you're not, you're just producing an alternative world. But since it is so big and all inclusive there's lots of other people involved. There aren't many people who shut themselves off completely.

S: Including a lot of people who live in the world, who consider that they're not running away - actually they are. They run away by shutting themselves off, by not allowing themselves to feel very much anymore.

Aryamitra: back to the question of centres, you mentioned that there could be a centre in the country.

S: I'm thinking of the best for the individual concerned, I'm leaving out of account this whole question of public activity.

Aryamitra: But they could be combined by having a public centre inside a city, where the people are, and the community that runs the centre to actually live outside, maybe about ten miles, twenty miles, outside?

S: I don't know. I think - well in the case of London you'd have to go much further away than ten miles to get into the country. You'd almost have to run the LBC from Padmaloka! (laughter)

Aryamitra: You wouldn't have to go that far really - ten miles in a car...

S: (interrupting) Well some people found it difficult even, well not just running, but attending the LBC from - what was it called Vajrasamaya - which is in Wanstead. Wanstead, yes. All that travelling, all that to-ing and fro-ing, sometimes in heavy traffic, in vehicles that kept breaking down. It wasn't very uplifting, so I gathered!

S: I think if you're running a centre you need to be pretty well on the spot for the sake of the centre.

Aryamitra: So it wouldn't be, say, people in Padmaloka running Norwich, for example?

S: I think that wouldn't be impossible, in the case of a small centre in a small city, with the country retreat, with the community only a few miles away. I think that wouldn't be impossible. But on the other hand, if you were, say, running the Norwich Centre from Padmaloka, it would interfere with the life of Padmaloka, as a community, quite a lot; because you might have people 'phoning up, you might have people calling, do you see what I mean? It might not survive as a country retreat centre in the full sense.

But I sometimes feel it's a great pity when you young order members are exposed to a situation such as that of London, or even situations like those of the LBC mixed retreats, where they are exposed to distractions and, sometimes, even though they're there in the line of duty, they do succumb to these distractions and all sorts of complications arise. That seems to be a pity. It is a pity. (pause) We don't have any very old, mature Order members yet, I'm thinking of really mature people, say between 50 and 60. But perhaps in the long run our centres should be manned by people who are quite mature, who've been in the Order and with the FWBO 25, 30 years, and who are not going to succumb to the distractions of the city. Though of course, sometimes even older people do and, as you know, they say 'there's no fool like an old fool'! (laughter) (unclear) people who perhaps have spent 10 or 15 years in a spiritual community in the country, done a bit of meditation, quite a bit of study, they are the people really, ideally, to run city centres. Not very young Order members in the first bloom of their youth, so to speak. Their kesas are still white and clean. Do yo see what I'm getting at?

At present, in a way fortunately, the Order is a very young Order, but that does have certain drawbacks when it comes to maturity and depth of experience. It is people with maturity, by which I mean spiritual maturity, as well as worldly maturity, and depth of spiritual experience, who should ideally be running city centres, at least. And retreats for members of the public, mixed retreats for members of the public. Not impressionable youngsters, however sincere and dedicated and truly committed they may be.

Ratnaketu: That brings up a thought about even Mitras living, say, living in a community, that come to the centre, and are living in a community. Maybe working in a co-op, not really going to the centre just for the sake of going but only going to mixed classes as part of a team. They're not just sort of floating round the centre. Having mitra classes, men's mitra classes at the community maybe.

S: Well, one has to think of all these things.

Amoghavajra: (long question inaudible)

S: Well, I don't think it's fair to expect a newly ordained Order member at once to start leading classes. At the most they should just support an older, more experienced Order member, and just be there with him for a while.

Aryamitra: But they should be - well not necessarily - but it would be good if they were involved. I think what Amoghavajra is pointing out that people just coming back from Tuscany just sort of somehow drifting off into the background somehow, not quite being involved in things, in one way or another.

S: They should be involved. They should certainly be involved with the community of which they are a part - assuming them to be part of a community. But I think they need not be in a hurry, or perhaps should not be in a hurry to get involved with public centre activities, and especially not in a hurry to lead anything. Lead within the context of the Order, yes, but that's a different kind of thing. But not lead classes at the Centre for quite a while. Maybe just make a start by supporting an older Order member, a more experienced Order member.

I know there will sometimes be a bit of pressure brought on younger Order members just because there's a shortage of people, but on the other hand, the younger Order member might turn round and say, 'Well look, there's so-and-so, and so-and-so, they've been Order members for 4, 5, 6 years - they're not helping with classes at the moment, it would be better if you were to tackle them, and give me a bit of a chance to settle down.

Khemananda: I was talking to one person who came back from Tuscany last year, who was saying that he was amazed at the number of requests he'd had to lead this, and this, and this. people seemed to be (unclear) that other Order members were expecting a terrific amount

from him because he'd been to Tuscany for three months and he'd been on course and things. In a way, they thought he should be doing, be really involved in classes - things like that.

S: Well, however good Tuscany may be, however bright you may be, three months in that sort of way isn't really a sufficient foundation. You need to think things over, you need to reflect, you need to consolidate your own practise. you need, at least, to adjust to being back. So you shouldn't let yourself be rushed.

On the other hand, it doesn't mean you should just sort of drift away from things, or just get involved in your little personal interests, I mean, that's the other extreme.

Khemananda: I feel, in a way, that there's two sides in me. There's a side that's afraid that I would kind of drift back, as it were, but then I could react against that by going back to London and getting immediately involved, and over-committing myself instead of trying to find, as you point out, a middle way.

S: Mmm. Well, first of all you should beware of distractions outside the movement, outside the centre. That is to say distractions which are clearly distractions - and of which London offers a plentiful supply! First of all be clear about those. You're not going to just automatically go out on Friday evening and Saturday evening, just because you're in London. You don't have to go to the cinema just because you're in London, and just because there are a hundred films showing on that particular night. You don't have to go and see one of them - there's no compulsion at all, etc, etc. So get that sort of clear in your mind. And then consider distractions within the movement itself, and you might have to consider very seriously whether you do go along to mixed events, mixed classes. You have to think that over. And then even distractions within the community itself, because even within the men's community distractions may arise,even if it's only in the form of food or the wrong sort of reading. You just sit around in the common room, and it's a bit dull, and you don't know quite what to do, so you just pick up whatever's lying there. I was really surprised, formerly, walking into Sukhavati - it's not quite as bad now - the number of people I'd see reading Superman comics! (laughter) They were quite a favourite at one stage. Or just thumbing through an old 'Time Out'. (laughter) An old one! It might even be three months old, and there they are, thumbing through it, maybe not even realising it was three months old! Or the day before yesterday's newspaper, or a three week old colour supplement, and they just sort of pick it up and thumb through it with glazed eyes. Well this is succumbing to distraction within the context of the community itself which seems ridiculous.

Ratnaketu: it's interesting. I've noticed that words are a real danger trap. Anything, even the jam jars can become - especially on retreat - you just, you see writing and you must read it. And you likely read the same label at breakfast every morning, you read where it was made, what it was made with. That's why I really like being here because everything's in Italian!

S: You should have learned Italian by this time! (laughter)

Prasannasiddhi: Do your practising on jam-jars!

Silabhadra: One has to beware of conversation in communities as well.

S: Yes one has to make sure that conversation doesn't degenerate into just trivial chatter. (pause)

Anyway, that's pretty clear, I think now, at least in a provisional sort of way. "To aim at lasting achievements while still exposed to this world's distractions - that prolongs the bondage." Then, "To try to understand one's inner mind while still chained to hopes and fears - that prolongs the bondage." What is this 'understanding one's inner mind'? - "while still chained to hopes and fears". I've a suspicion Conze is translating quite non-technically, but maybe the language of the original even is quite non-technical. "One's inner mind" - what does this suggest? One's inner mind. Well, what is one's outer mind, to begin with? If there's an inner mind there must be an outer mind, so what is this outer mind?

Aryamitra: Well, concerned with others, and the world - things.

S: Yes, external objects, things, activities.

Silaratna: The mind of the senses.

S: The mind of the senses, yes.

Amoghacitta: Just your everyday consciousness.

S: Yes. And then what is this inner mind?

Silabhadra: It's like - the concentrated mind, or the more purified mind.

S: Yes,as it were, the mind that isn't disturbed by all these external things - it's as though there's a mind within the mind. If you go deep enough you reach a level where the mind is completely undisturbed, where it's completely tranquil. Like the depths of the water, underneath the surface where the waves are. So, "to try to understand one's inner mind" To try to establish contact with this mind, in a way to realise this mind, "while still chained to hopes and fears". What does hope and fear suggest?

Aryamitra: A sort of reactivity between two...

S: Yes, it suggests also desire, it suggests craving. That you hope for something, and at the same time you're afraid, you have the fear that you may not get it, or that you may loose it. So hope and fear probably stand for all the conflicting egocentric emotions, or ego-centred emotions. So while you're still chained to these things - that's a pretty strong expression [end of tape three]

(Please note that there is no page 70!)