

General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

tape ten
tape starts in mid-sentence

S: And as to die I leave my love alone. (laughter) Or you could say that they wanted to try and have greater kalyana mitrata. (laughter)

Ratnaketu: What was that after 'art make tongue-tied by authority'?

S: 'Folly, doctor-like, controlling skill', doctor as I said, is a learned man. Not in the sense of a physician - as when we speak of the doctor of philosophy. Anyway read the whole sonnet. It's a quite instructive and quite inspiring subject. You might even appreciate the last line.

'So leave behind the admonitions when you have not learned to listen! Leave behind these angry brawls unworthy of even wild bears!' Well, that's in a way pretty obvious isn't it.

One certainly you shouldn't have any such thing within the spiritual community. Unfortunately one occasionally has had, but this is quite incompatible with life in the spiritual community.

Aryamitra: I just kept getting these pictures of angry wolves , you know (unclear)

Amoghacitta: The suggestion is that not only is there no matter involved, but also that it's mindless.

S: It's wild, undisciplined, ferocious, animal, bestial. Perhaps wild bears are especially ferocious in Tibet. (pause)

Anyway, that's pretty obvious (unclear) 'Leave behind those religious acts which are mere hypocrisy!' If you don't really believe in what you're doing you might just as well not do it.

I was reading a little incident in a story not so very long ago, I forget when the scene was... it must have been some time during the Victorian period. Anyway, there were some characters in the story who regularly used to go to church, but they went to church just for the sake of setting a good example for other people, they didn't really have any interest in going, they didn't really believe in it, they thought church was a good social institution. They just went to church to set a good example. But in the course of the story, it gradually transpires that everybody going to church, was going to church for the sake of setting a good example to other people. But this reminds me of something that did occur to me a little while ago in connection with another saying, but it's a bit appropriate here too. That is to say, I think I mentioned it before, this saying of Kierkegaard, the famous Danish existentialist philosopher, supposedly the first of the existentialists. He says that people think that god is a fool - he spoke within a theistic Christian context. He said people think that god is a fool, they really do think that, because here they are, they go along to church, they listen to the preacher, the preacher is exhorting them to do things that he knows perfectly well they have no intention of doing, turn the other cheek, love your neighbour as yourself, forgive your enemies. He is trotting out all these fine sayings, and he knows to a degree, that the people to whom he is preaching have no intention of even trying to live up to these exhortations and they all know that he knows that. Now why does he continue to preach and they continue to listen? He continues to preach as though they were taking him seriously, and they continue to listen as though they didn't know that he didn't expect them to listen at all seriously. So in this way they really think God is a fool. (pause)

So what is the point of it? If you don't really want to do it, Don't do it - you're just wasting your time. That is distinct of course from a sort of initial reluctance that you feel or a bit of laziness that you recognise as laziness and generally want to overcome, that is another matter. But if you really don't want to do something, you really don't believe in it, well why on earth should you?

Why act hypocritically? To leave behind those religious acts which are mere hypocrisy! They're just a waste of time. From a religious point of view anyway.

Silaratna: It seems to point very much to those first three fetters about the rites and rituals.

S: It's a matter of being honest with yourself, what you really want to do. Maybe you find the puja dull and boring. Well, if you genuinely are convinced intellectually that you ought not to find it dull and boring and you're willing to make an effort so that you do enjoy the puja more, well, fair enough, continue, as it were, to go through the motions for the time being. But if you not only find the puja dull and boring but you can't even see intellectually what the point of the exercise might be, then probably it is better that you drop it all together rather than just go through the motions. If you are neither emotionally moved nor intellectually convinced, well you're probably better off without it, or it's better off without you.

"In short how plentiful indeed this world's activities which one should leave behind." There are plenty of things to leave behind, no shortage of things to leave behind, no shortage of things to give up. But speaking about leaving behind in general it's not easy to leave behind. People find it quite difficult to leave things behind, to leave the past, to leave the old self, very difficult to make a fresh start. This is why it is quite useful sometimes just to go away, literally. I talked about this last year, and I don't know whether I talked about it this year on any occasion, but perhaps it is worth mentioning that having been here, say, at Il Convento for three months doing things which we don't usually do, at least not so consistently or so regularly, whether you may have noticed it or not you've changed quite a bit, you're probably to some extent different from what you were a few weeks or a few months ago. Maybe you had started changing even before, but people hadn't really recognised that or hadn't accepted that, especially, say, people that you were in contact with before you came into contact with the FWBO, you know, people like your relations and your ordinary friends. So once one has been away, once one has made this sort of break, it's a good opportunity when one goes back to put things on a different footing and, as it were, in a sense compel people to recognise that you are different, you are changing and that they have got to adjust themselves to that. In a sense they've got to change to, they've got to treat you differently, they've got to treat you as you are now, not as you were five or ten years ago. Do you see what I mean? So the fact one has been away and now comes back gives one the opportunity to put things on a different footing as regards those people who knew you before you started changing. Do you see what I mean?

Amoghacitta: You've got an excellent opportunity for that within the communities, because we are going back to people who even expect us to have changed to some degree.

S: Yes, well if you live in a community one shouldn't really have that sort of difficulty. You may have changed even in so far as members of the community. They may not have expected you to have changed in quite the way that you have. Maybe they are accustomed to think of you as a meek little mitra, sort of creeping around. But you come back roaring like a lion, a newly ordained Order member. So they have got to adjust to that - you don't creep around any longer, you actually open your mouth and speak, you actually express your opinion in front of Order Members! You actually dare to disagree with them sometimes. They've got to get used to that, they've got to accept the new self, as it were.

So the fact that you've been away gives you an opportunity when you get back to put things on a new footing. You could even insist on having a new room, or a room to yourself or, if you haven't shared before, insist on sharing, if that's what you always wanted to do. Or even to change your breakfast food if you want to. People really get into a sort of way of expecting you to behave in a certain way. For instance, I remember there was a woman I used to go and visit and (unclear) and years ago. I used to drink much more tea than I drink now, I'd often drink four cups at a sitting. So anyway, at one point I decided to cut this down - I'd never drink more than two cups.

So anyway, I went to see this woman and had tea with her. So I had my second cup of tea, then she started pouring out my third. 'No thank you, I don't want any more tea.' So she became quite indignant and said, 'Oh, but you always have more tea, you always have more than two cups', as though, you know, since I'd always had more than two cups I wasn't allowed to change, I had to go on having more than two cups. She was quite, what shall I say, well, indignant almost, that I'd ventured to change in that respect.

So if you've been away for a while it does give you the opportunity to introduce these little changes, that we insist on them, and insist that people take notice of the fact that you have changed, you're different from before, that they have therefore got to relate to you in a somewhat different way.

Ratnaketu: It's good having a new name for them.

S: Yes indeed, yes. They are no longer Tom, Dick or Harry.

Ratnaketu: It's interesting, I notice that with some people when I got ordained they were quite happy and they were quite quick to change from calling me by my old name to my new name, yet other people, even years later, were making mistakes, even within the Friends. In one case, it was about two and a half years after I was ordained, and I met this person again who was still in the Friends who came over from New Zealand and he kept on calling me by my old name, and I'm sure it was because, in a way, he didn't want me to be Ratnaketu.

S: I've noticed that some people, some families for instance, some relations, they stop calling you by the new name very quickly and easily. I think I remember this was noticeable when Sona was ordained, his very infant daughter, she was then, she was very, very small, she at once started calling him Sona with no problem at all, but in other cases, Order Member relations - especially wives when they had them - were very reluctant to call them by their Buddhist names (unclear) in some cases - not all, but in some cases. Or sometimes they insisted, well, you may end up calling yourself this or the other, but your real name is such-and-such... your real name is your legal, Christian name.

Aryamitra: You even get this with some type of people who come along to the Centre, they ask you your name and they say, 'Yes, but what's your real name?'

S: They can't sometimes understand that your real name is your Buddhist name.(Pause)

Silaratna: It's so much more so because it's actually something you've had a conscious control over. I mean, the old name was never anything we had any say in.

S: But also the fact that you have a Buddhist name means that, well, you have decided to be a Buddhist; and some people, some of your relations, especially if they are still Christians, they may not want to acknowledge that fact, that you've actually become a Buddhist.

Amoghacitta: It must be difficult for one's parents, because by changing your name, that's really so connected with your parents because they gave you your original name.

S: Yes, you've rejected that to some extent. Why shouldn't you? Why shouldn't you decide what you're going to be called by? Maybe it's a good idea to give a child a number when it's born and let him give himself a name when he's old enough. Some children don't like their names. I remember I didn't like my name at all, I was greatly annoyed with the aunt who gave it to me! I didn't like at all what I was called! I was very glad when I became ordained (laughter) Especially as a small child I didn't like my name at all, I don't know why. Maybe we need not go into that!

(laughter) I just didn't like the name, it didn't sound a nice name, it didn't sound a beautiful name.
(Pause)

Ratnaketu: You had bad associations with a certain comic strip (laughter)

S: Well, maybe... I might have at a later period, but as a boy the comic strip to which perhaps you were referring did not exist (laughter) when I was a little boy (laughter). (Pause) But anyway, it is the new situation that enables or helps you to leave things behind. And to the extent that other people have recognised that you have left certain things behind, that you're not the same person that you were. And it's very sort of, well, annoying almost if people insist on trying to drag you back into the past by treating you as you were, refusing to see what you are now. That's one of the most annoying and unhelpful things that they can do. I'm afraid parents are particularly good at this. They say things like, 'Oh, you needn't think you're so big or so grown up. I know what you're really like. You'll always be my little Johnnie!' (laughter) 'You're not grown up so far as I'm concerned'!

Ratnaketu: No wonder that it inspires people to be really disobedient. They don't want to be nice little Johnnies.

S: Well, if people insist too much on treating you as you were, you've no choice, no alternative in your own interest and sheer self defence except to break off contact with them. The struggle is too much, and often isn't worth it. It's not worth keeping in contact with people who refuse to see you as you are, even if they are your own parents. It's just not worth the effort... not worth the struggle, not worth the strain. (Pause) Anyway, who's going to be the owl, the wise old owl?

Aryamitra: "Thereupon the owl rose, ruffled her feathers, and said: 'u sdug'u sdug, which means, what misery!what misery!
"The hour of death without insight from meditation, - what misery!
The priest without morals, - what misery!
An old lama without judgement, - what misery!
A chieftain without authority, - what misery!
A general without troops, - what misery!
A king without Counsellors, - what misery!
A leader without followers, - what misery!
A teacher without virtues, - what misery!
A disciple without deference, - what misery!
A friend not to be trusted, - what misery!
A household without a common purpose, - what misery!
Knowing the misery that all these things can bring, - avoid them!"

S: So, 'the hour of death without insight from meditation - what misery!' Why do you think that should be misery? To die without having achieved any insight from meditation?

Khemananda: The whole cycle's going to repeat itself...

S: The whole cycle's going to repeat itself. It's as though you've wasted a whole lifetime. That can be a very terrible thought, when you're sort of lying on your bed you realise the end has come, you realise you have not made good use of your life, not made good use of your time. You might just as well not have lived. And this also suggests that the real purpose of life is to develop insight, to develop wisdom, to develop Perfect Vision. If you haven't done that, you haven't really done anything, if you haven't done that your life has in fact been completely wasted, whatever you might have learned, whatever you might have experienced. (Pause) So, "The hour of death without insight from meditation - what misery!" (Pause)

Also the suggestion that not only will the whole cycle will repeat itself but that many sufferings will be repeated. (Pause) I wonder how many people do actually die happy? Thinking, if they do think at all at that time, that life has been worthwhile. That it was worth going through. That their life was well lived.

Silaratna For someone to die like that it sort of means there must be a certain amount of clarity there. I imagine a lot of people die in just total confusion.

S: Yes, yes. It would seem so. (Pause) In some (unclear) people do die with a clear, a definite idea that their whole life, or their whole life's work has been a failure, and that can be quite sad, that can be a misery. Maybe they've spent their whole life building up a big business, the business has gone broke, they've become bankrupt, they have a heart attack and they die. So it's as though the thing they devoted their whole life to has failed. Or they might have devoted their whole life to bringing up their family, hoping to keep their family together, a big happy family, and it just disintegrates. One or two people touched upon this sort of thing telling their life stories, that their own parents had seen that sort of thing happening, had seen the family, that they had so hopefully built up, just dwindling away before their eyes, and people going off in their own direction and doing all sorts of unexpected things that their parents didn't approve of, instead of settling down nearby with their wife or with their husband, grandchildren coming round for tea every Saturday afternoon or every Sunday afternoon and visiting their old folks, but it didn't all happen. they either went off to Canada or they ran away with some loose woman, something like that, and got unsuitable jobs, or maybe didn't get jobs at all. So things didn't turn out at all as their parents expected. So they felt that their whole effort had been wasted. Their attempt to build up this big happy family and keep it going had been futile, that their life was a failure.

Amoghacitta: Or one's children run off and join the Buddhist movement.

S: Yes, surely, yes.

Ratnaketu: There's some Order members whose fathers are preachers

S: Well, there are at least two order Members around who have brothers who are Catholic priests, at least two.

Aryamitra: Maybe it's worth imagining being on one's deathbed and just what one might regret or wish to develop?

S: Yes, well, what would you wish that you did have?

Aryamitra: I think it would be (unclear) (laughter)

S: Well, it is said that there are some people on their deathbeds regret all the sins they committed and others who regret all the sins they didn't commit. (laughter)

Amoghacitta: It's said of Vangisa that he had a smile on his face when he died, and that is apparently a very rare phenomena.

Silaratna: Padmasiddhi looked very happy too, in a picture I saw of him all laid-out.

S: Well they both had a sense of humour. It might have something to do with that. (laughter) Vangisa had always wanted to give up family life but had never been able to.

Ratnaketu: He actually wanted to do that, did he?

S: Yes, he had been planning to move into a mens' community before he died. That was going to be the next step for him. (2 or 3 sentences unclear)..in that way, perhaps he's moving into a men's community in the sky! (laughter)

Amoghacitta: Perhaps he's living in Sukhavati proper.

S: But anyway, the owl is clear enough about it; 'the hour of death without insight from meditation - what misery.' One has to, to be happy on one's death bed, one really has to look back to some kind of spiritual achievement, some kind of spiritual progress made in the course of one's life. Otherwise one cannot really die happily. (Pause)

Prasannasiddhi: Not only to look back to some spiritual achievement, but you would still be living that spiritual achievement.

S: Yes. If it was actual Insight, with a capital 'I' as it were, it wouldn't just be something that had occurred in the past, it would still be with you. (Pause)

Anyway, 'A priest without morals - what misery!' Why should it be misery, a priest without morals? What does one mean by a priest in this connection? Conze seems to be avoiding the term 'monks', so it presumably doesn't refer to a Bhikkhu - a person with some kind of religious position. Maybe a position in society, someone who performs the ceremonies. So why should it be a misery for a priest to be without morals?

Khemananda: Well, someone who sets himself up as a teacher...

S: I don't think it's a question of teacher, because teacher is mentioned later on. 'Lama' comes in the next verse and teacher is mentioned later on. That's why I say it presumably means someone who has a sort of social function performing rituals and ceremonies; probably something more of that sort. What does one mean by 'being without morals'?

Ratnaketu: Unethical?

S: Presumably just that. But why should it be a misery for a priest in particular to be without morals?

Ratnaketu: Because a priest being a social thing, his whole practice is morals.

S: He has a sort of social position. It's important for him to be respected as a man of character, otherwise people won't like to have him performing their rituals, performing their ceremonies. Presumably something like this. In other words, the fact that he's without morals will be a disability to him in the exercise of his profession, so to speak. It's almost like a lawyer who has the reputation of being dishonest and cheating people; or a doctor who has the reputation of bumping people off! (laughter) It's almost like that.

Ratnaketu: You're ineffective.

S: You're ineffective, yes. (Pause)

What about, 'An old lama without judgement - what misery!' Why an old lama? Lama literally is a spiritual superior, so he's a sort of guru-like figure. So, 'an old lama without judgement'...

Aryamitra: He's looked on as being experienced.

S: So what is judgement? Judgement is something you develop as a result of experience. You can't really expect judgement from a young lad who hasn't seen much of the world, but you can certainly expect it of an older person, and certainly you can expect it of a lama. So if people are expecting you to have developed a certain power of judgement as a result of your long experience of life and if you haven't got that, and yet they're looking up to you, expecting that from you, well, that clearly is a misery. They are expecting something from you which you're just not in a position to give. They come to you for advice. You're not able to give it. That is a misery, both for you and perhaps for the people that come to you. (Pause)

Prasannasiddhi: They don't have any faith in you and as well as that, the things that your judgement would have been useful for.

S: Even if they do have faith in you, that is a misery because you don't have the judgement which is necessary to give them proper advice or proper guidance. Perhaps you know that. You find yourself in the uncomfortable position of being looked up to for guidance and you're just not in the position to give it. You do not have that power of judgement. People expect you to have it because you're old, because you're a lama. I've know many such old monks, I'm not so sure about old lamas, but there are certainly old monks who've been looked up to by people who just weren't able to help them in any way and they certainly found themselves in a difficult position. Sometimes there are old monks that people knew were just stupid and foolish and had no respect for them whatever. That was quite a sad state of affairs.

Amoghacitta: Perhaps it's a bit like knowing the Dharma but not being really able to apply it practically.

S: Yes.

Amoghacitta:... or help people.

Ratnaketu: I see a sort of connection between all these things. It's like a life without insight is not a life because it's a meaningless, (unclear). A priest without morals is not a priest because to be a priest you need morals, to be a lama you need judgement.

S: So in a way it's an extension of 'leave behind your urge for greatness when you cannot bear its burdens.' You're in an unsuitable position. You're in a position without the very thing that is necessary for you to hold that position, for you to fulfil that position. (Pause) And certainly that's clear in the case of authority: 'A chieftain without authority - what misery!' Supposing you're a chieftain, some kind of ruler, the head of a group and you have no authority. There you are, you're as it were the chief, you're the boss, but nobody takes any notice of what you say, no one carries out your orders, people disregard your orders, flout your orders. What misery that is. Then you're in the position with the responsibility but no power. Well, sometimes rulers do find themselves

in that situation, both small ones and great ones. (Pause) In much the same way 'A general without troops - what misery!' What use is a general, however skilled, however brave, however experienced, if he just doesn't have troops to command. He's completely frustrated, he's completely ineffective. No troops - no general. It's the troops that make the general in a sense, as it's authority really that makes the chieftain. If he hasn't got authority he isn't really a chieftain. He's a chieftain only in name, and if he's something only in name, and not in reality, it's just a misery. It's better not to be like that - to have the name at all.

Aryamitra: You find this in war and peace. When there's no war going on.

S: Yes. 'A king without counsellors - what misery!' Why should it be a misery to be a king without counsellors, without people to advise you?

Amoghacitta: Kings usually are people who don't have any natural aptitude and they usually just inherit the throne, as it were. They're usually just ordinary people in a sense. They need people who actually are skilled in politics and so on to tell them what to do. So they're put in a position of authority they can't actually handle.

S: I think it's a bit more than that, or a bit different than that because counsellors just give advice. Even if you're a really efficient king, even if you really know your job, if you're really capable, you can't know everything yourself. You need people who will inform you, who will explain the situation to you, so that you can then take the decision. You may be quite capable of taking the decision, but all the facts have to be put in front of you. So for that you may well need advisors, you may need to ask different people what they think before making up your mind, even though the decision is yours. You can't find out everything yourself, study everything yourself. You need some people who have your confidence and can help you - your counsellors.

Ratnaketu: Even sometimes counsellors convey the decisions from the king to the people, so if you didn't have them you need to make all the decisions in the world (unclear).

S: Counsellors does mean primarily advisors like in the Elizabethan times in England, the king had his Privy Council, well the Privy Council still exists but it doesn't any longer perform the same function. The Privy Council or private council was all the king's closest friend and most important ministers to whom he could turn to advice for, he could just discuss things and clarify things, from whom he could gain information and knowledge of current situations, so that he did give an order and did make a decision it was on the basis of knowledge and understanding and not just out of ignorance or impulse. And the good kings very often were those who were intelligent enough to choose for themselves good counsellors. Queen Elizabeth the first was especially skilled in the particular area. She chose very good people, she had very good judgement where people were concerned so she surrounded herself with very capable, very trustworthy, very loyal men. In this way she ruled quite successfully.

Ratnaketu: Is the Privy Council now associated with the Prime Minister.

S: No it's associated with the sovereign. There's about 120/130 Privy Counsellors. But there are certain important committees which are formed from privy councillors to deal with more confidential matters. For instance, you may remember that during the Falklands War, I forget who made the offer, but either Mrs Thatcher offered Michael Foot, the Leader of the Opposition, or he offered her, to discuss the matter, not as Prime Minister and leader of the Opposition, but as fellow members of the Privy Council. Meaning it would be a fully confidential discussion, but it wouldn't have any sort of political significance because it wouldn't be the Prime Minister talking to the leader of the Opposition, just two Privy Councillors having a confidential discussion, since they were both Privy Councillors. But whoever the offer was made to rejected it. There are certain judicial committees of the Privy Council which has its own have legal rights

and so on but we don't go into that.

A king without counsellors, - what misery! A leader without followers, - what misery! It's a pure contradiction in terms, isn't it, to be 'a leader without followers' - what a ridiculous position. You sometimes find this with leaders or politicians who are chased out of their own country, who lose their power, who try to keep up some kind of semblance of leadership or authority in the country of which they've fled. So the king may try to keep up a little court and so on.

S: A teacher without virtues, - what misery! Why should it be a misery to be a teacher without virtues? Presumably it means spiritual teacher. Virtue presumably is the subject-matter of your teaching. If you very obviously have no virtues yourself, well, what an awkward position you've put yourself into. Well, here you are, perhaps giving discourses on the five precepts and all that, and it's known that you're not observing those five precepts, you don't have any virtues. Maybe you're talking about generosity, and you're known to be mean and stingy. Maybe you're talking about forgiveness and having a good temper, but you're known to be bad tempered. Well, what a miserable position for you to be in, when what you teach is at variance with the way that you live. (pause)

Well presumably this means that, in this case, the teacher or the so-called teacher is without those virtues which he actually teaches. You can't blame him for not possessing those virtues which he doesn't in any case profess to teach, or that he doesn't think of as virtues, that is quite another matter. (pause)

In all these cases one occupies a position without the qualities appropriate to that position, or that function, without the qualities that enable one to discharge that function, to fulfil that function. So you are in a very false position, you could summarise that to be in a false position is a misery. (long pause)

Then, 'A disciple without deference, - what misery!' What is deference?

Aryamitra: He defers to you. Acknowledges that the guru knows more and is more developed than himself.

S: He sort of gives way, yields as it were...

Becomes receptive, yes. So, 'A disciple without deference, - what misery' Why is it misery, if you're a disciple to be without deference?

Khemananda: You can't be a disciple because you're not being receptive.

S: And you can't learn, supposedly you're a disciple in order to learn. If your mental attitude is such that it prevents you from learning, it's just a misery to keep up the appearance of being a disciple. I've mentioned, I think before, the case, the example, of the famous French nun in Kalimpong. A very difficult woman, an academic who became a Buddhist nun and she used to go along to her various teachers, and she was quite pontilious even with them, pay them proper respect, bow down, make them the three prostrations. But as she got up on her knees, in the very act of getting up, she started telling them what to do (laughter) before she was even up off her knees. She wasn't only telling them what they should do but almost telling them off. She wasn't very deferential except in a very external sort of way. (pause) So if you are a disciple but you don't have deference then you really are in a very miserable position. (pause)

Then, 'A friend not to be trusted, - what misery!' Why is it a misery to be a friend and not to be trusted? Well, if you're not trusted, you're not a friend - you can't be one, you can't be a friend. If you're not worthy of trust, you can't be a friend. Trustworthiness is an essential part, an integral part of friendship itself. If someone is your friend, it means that you can trust him. If you can't

trust him he's just not your friend. Trust is so important in friendship. There is no friendship without it. So just to be a nominal friend, to keep up the appearance of friendship without there being really any trust, well, that's a misery, (long pause)

And then finally, 'A household without a common purpose, - what misery!' (pause) Well, going into this, understanding this, interpreting this along the lines of the previous statement, one might say that a household is essentially something with a common purpose, if it doesn't have a common purpose, then it's not a household. Whether it's a household in the mundane sense, or whether it's even a spiritual community, there must be a common purpose to hold it together, otherwise it is not a household, it is not a spiritual community. This is really vitally important. (pause) Well even in the case of an ordinary household what is the common purpose that holds everything together?

Ratnaketu: The bringing up of a family.

S: It's the bringing up of a family. So when you've just got husband and wife living together, he's got his job and she's got hers, and they go their separate ways to a great extent, can you really speak of a household? If there's no common purpose for what they're living; if maybe, other than, you know, maybe a certain amount of pleasure they get from each others company, can you really speak of a household in that sense, do they really have a common purpose, a serious objective, towards which they're bending their united efforts... you don't really have one. It does seem as though people can get on well together, whether on the worldly level or on the spiritual level, only if they do have a common purpose, only if they can work together in, or for, something. In the case of the ordinary household, this is bringing up the children, and that does unite husband and wife and maybe other members of the family. Raising the next generation, that is a definite function, a definite common purpose. Of course, when you've achieved that, well it's as though things aren't quite the same you feel almost as though, especially if the children have left home and set up their own household, you feel almost as though the purpose of your existence no longer exists, unless, of course, you belong to an extended family where everybody is around you and you still play an important part in the household. I think you can't expect a marriage to sort of hold up if there's no question of a household, if the husband and wife are not working together in a common purpose, it's not surprising that they drift apart or that they quarrel or are not happy together. And the same with the spiritual community, there has to be a common purpose, a common ideal.

Ratnaketu: If there isn't the people inside the community, if they're going a different way, that causes friction.

S: Yes.(long pause)

Ratnaketu: It's quite important in the communities to find out, to make clear the common ideal, because I remember at times in Sukhavati, there have been people who had been living there who, it hasn't been their ideal to meditate every morning, I don't think that meditation for them, meditation...

S: Well, it's not enough, one might even say, to have a common ideal in the abstract so to speak. There must be agreement upon the method and the way of life necessary to realise that ideal. Because you're living together, you've got to have a common way of life, not just a common ideal in the abstract, but a common ideal, a common way of life leading to the realisation of that ideal. You may have a common spiritual ideal but another person thinks that the way to realise that ideal is full-time meditation and another believes that the way for him to realise that ideal is by getting deeply involved in painting. If you have people of that sort living together they can't really form a very satisfactory spiritual community, even though they have got the same ultimate spiritual ideals, and are trying to move towards them in different ways. There must be a common

way of life to a great extent. In the same way, it is difficult for vegetarians and non-vegetarians to live together. We don't fortunately have that problem in the FWBO but it would be a problem.(pause) The common purpose is to enough, there must also be a common way of life, in a sense that's your spiritual community. (pause)

So, 'Knowing the misery that all these things can bring, - avoid them!' Avoid putting yourself in a false position; this is what it basically means. Well, avoid putting yourself in that position; your practice does not correspond to your profession; your qualities do not correspond to your position. (very long pause)

Anyway, we seem to have come to the end of our time. Any final points? (long pause) Alright then, lets leave it there.

Tape 11

Silaratna: "Thereupon the cock, the domestic bird, rose, flapped his wings three times, and said e go e go, which means, do you understand that? Do you understand that? Whilst you live in this samsaric world, no lasting happiness can be yours, - do you understand that? To the performance of worldly actions there is no end, - do you understand that? In flesh and blood there is no permanence, - do you understand that? The presence, at all times, of Mara, the Lord of Death, - do you understand that? Even the rich man, when he is laid low, departs alone, - do you understand that? He has no strength to take the wealth he gathered, - do you understand that? Our bodies, so dear to us, will feed the birds and dogs, - do you understand that? Wherever the mind may go, it cannot control its fate, - do you understand that? We are bound to lose those we love and trust, - do you understand that? Punishment follows the evil we do, - do you understand that? Wherever one looks, nothing is there substantial, - do you understand that?"

S: This piece deals mainly with impermanence. The cock is really asking does one understand the meaning of impermanence? In a way this covers ground that we've already gone over, so maybe we don't need to go through it line by line; we'll just pick up anything that does require a little discussion.

Amoghacitta: Why do you think it says, 'He has no strength to take the wealth he gathered'? It's an interesting way of putting it.

S: He has no capacity, no ability, to take the wealth that he gathered with him. He's just not able

to. Maybe we shouldn't attach too much significance to the word 'strength' because after all it is a translation and we don't know the original. You're just not able to take your wealth with you. He has, so to speak, the strength to gather it in this life, but he doesn't have the strength to take it with him into any other life. (pause)

Do you understand this reference to 'Our bodies so dear to us will feed the birds and dogs'? What is this a reference to?

Ratnaketu: Is it the way that Tibetans deal with dead bodies?

S: Yes. It is a reference to the dismemberment of the corpse and the feeding of it to birds, especially vultures, and dogs. The reason for that being that, the main reason being that in Tibet there is very little fuel in many places; very little wood. So there is no question of their being able to cremate. Also the soil, the ground is very rocky; it is difficult to dig a grave, so they normally used to just cut the body up into little pieces and feed the pieces to the birds and dogs.

Ratnaketu: I've heard somebody say as well that it was, sort of, like they're putting into practise the Bodhisattva Ideal.

S: There is also that aspect.

Aryamitra: (unclear) practise?

S: Well you're of some use to people even when you're dead, Maybe you're of more use after your death than walking around, in some cases. (laughter)

Buddhapalita: Don't the relations actually come and watch the body being chopped up?

S: It may in some cases happen. I think it all depends on their degree of sensitivity. There is a special sort of, almost caste of people who do the actual work of chopping.

Silaratna: So there is actually a caste thing in Tibetan society?

S: : Well there isn't, that is why I say a sort of caste. They are a sort of hereditary group - the occupation is handed on from father to son and they are considered to be a little apart from the rest of society, on account of their work.

Aryamitra: In what way are they er...?

S: I think perhaps, I'm not quite sure about this (unclear), people might hesitate to mix with them, to even be with them, even to marry them, perhaps. I wouldn't be too sure about that. because if people are going to be associating with dead bodies, the disposal of dead bodies, perhaps there does come to be something a little odd about them.

Prasannasiddhi: What about burning? I thought - perhaps I saw on those - there was that Tibetan Trilogy that used to be on, they had a burning, they burned a body.

S: Well, they certainly would burn it if it was possible, they'd certainly burn it in the case of someone in a very well off position, and if it was in an area where there was plenty of timber. But in many parts of Tibet there's just no forest, you just can't get timber, you can't get the wood. So you need that for the cremation.

Prasannasiddhi: So burning would actually be considered a sort of better form of...

S: I think burning would be considered better, in as much as it's more in accordance with Buddhist tradition, in as much as the Buddha was cremated, and his great disciples were cremated, so there is a sort of Buddhist tradition of cremation, even though there's no rule in Buddhism that you ought to be cremated rather than otherwise disposed of. There's no hard and fast rule about it but cremation in Buddhism has a certain prestige, on account of its association with the Buddha himself. It's regarded as a desirable mode of disposing of the dead, even though not obligatory. If you don't have someone cremated it is not un-Buddhistic, you're not going against Buddhism, you're not going against the teaching. I think that's quite clearly understood. In a sense there's nothing Buddhistic about it in principle, but it's Buddhistic by virtue of sort of cultural associations.

Amoghacitta: Wouldn't it be more Buddhistic, in the more literal sense, to actually offer your, one's dead body to the birds and beasts?

S: One could argue like that, yes.

Amoghacitta: Rather than just burning it, which seems a waste.

S: Well, you'd then need of course birds that were going to feed upon corpses, you'd need vultures especially (unclear) you may not get those everywhere.

Amoghacitta: I was thinking in terms of Tibet.

S: Some people in this country would not like that. I know feeding their pet dogs on corpses, it wouldn't be considered nearly good enough for the dogs! (laughter)

Silaratna: China has a sort of different tradition, doesn't it?

S: China has a different tradition, they very definitely have a tradition of burial. When Buddhism was first introduced into China - there was, I believe, some resistance to the idea of cremation, but eventually it did become customary for Buddhists - especially monks - to be cremated.

Aryamitra: Maybe in a way (you) would be less likely to linger around the body if it's going up in flames.

S: It's definitely not there any longer to linger around.

Aryamitra: If you bury it you can actually linger around.

S: It's also said that cremation is a more hygienic way of disposing of the dead, because if they have died from disease, especially an infectious disease, it is better that they should be cremated. There is also that if you bury it, of course it takes up valuable ground which could perhaps be used for agriculture.

Aryamitra: So in a cremation ground why do you get bits of corpses there ... well not because they'd failed to get burned but because some people couldn't afford to burn them?

S: Yes, you find that even in India with very poor people, the corpse is not, in some cases, not much more than badly charred. They just can't afford a sufficient supply of wood to burn them properly. In modern times they pour kerosine on a funeral pyre. In ancient times they used clean, clarified butter, but that only the rich can afford.

Prasannasiddhi: One back a bit, 'the presence at all times of Mara, the Lord of Death'. How does that fit in with the Mara who is supposed to be the Buddhist equivalent of evil?

S: Well, there are four kinds of Mara. There is what is called, let me think.... there is Klesa Mara. Klesa means defilement, or passion, or affliction. So Klesa Mara is Mara as the personification of the defilements. Do you see what I mean? Supposing you are meditating and suddenly you are distracted by a thought of what you might be going to have for lunch, you say, "Ah! that's Mara." Well, that would be Klesa Mara. So Mara as the personification of the defilements, that's Klesa Mara.

Then there is - this is the Pali form - Devaputta Mara or in Sanskrit Devaputra Mara. 'Mara who is the son of a god'. In other words, Mara as a mythological entity. That is to say not Mara merely as the personification of some mental state of yours, but Mara as an actually existent being in the universe. So you see what I mean?

Prasannasiddhi: Would that be, in the sort of form of a physical body

S: Well a body yes, but not a physical body because he doesn't belong to the physical world. (unclear) had a physical body according to tradition. He's sort of like a god or, if you like, an asura. He's got a subtle body and he is a definite personality, as a deva is a personality, or Brahma is a personality. He is not merely - the point I am making is that he is not merely the personification of a psychological state - as Klesa Mara is.

And then there is Skandha Mara. The skandhas, you know, the five skandhas - rupa, vedana and so on. So this is Mara as the personification of the skandhas, Mara as the personification of conditioned existence itself. Mara as the world if you like.

And then there is, fourthly and lastly, though they are not necessarily always given in this order, Mrityu Mara, which is Mara as death, Mara as the personification of death. And this is, of course, the Mara who is referred to here.

Silabhadra: How do you spell that?

S: M-A-R-A, mrityu, M-R-I-T-Y-U, Mrityu Mara.

Aryamitra: Could we just go through them again, just the names?

S: So there is Klesa Mara, there is Devaputra Mara, there is Skandha Mara - these are all the Sanskrit forms - and there is Mrityu Mara. This is quite a well known list. (unclear)

Amoghacitta: These are in the Mitrata Omnibus - the four Maras.

S: Ah. So here, clearly, 'Mara Lord of Death' is the fourth. Mara here is the personification of death. I mean there is a sort of, in a way, mythological being called the Yamaraja, who is sort of, what shall I say, underworld figure, a sort of king of the dead, or a king of those in hell. The Tibetans call him (Shin Je). And of course, according to the Mahayana, he is supposed to be an incarnation of Avalokitesvara. So these different traditions have a somewhat ambiguous attitude towards Mara. When Mara is a sort of personification of death, here of course death is regarded as an evil. So when one says, 'the presence at all times of Mara the Lord of Death, do you understand that?', meaning, do you understand that you are liable to die at any minute? That Mara, the Lord of Death, or Death himself is, so to speak, standing over you all the time.

Prasannasiddhi: How would death be a personification of, or be regarded as, evil?

S: Well in the sense that people don't want to die, that they see death as an evil. This is just from the ordinary, worldly point of view.

Prasannasiddhi: Ah, but from a non-worldly point of view...

S: From a non-worldly point of view, well death is an opportunity, so, from that point of view, in the Mahayana (Shin Je), the Yamaraja, or Lord of Death is said to be the embodiment, or if you like, the incarnation of Avalokitesvara. So you see what I mean? In other words, death here is not, in this context, in this perspective, is not seen as an unmitigated evil. It is seen as a spiritual opportunity. So that is expressed in these sort of quasi-mythological terms by saying that the Lord of Death is, in fact - though he looks very fearful and terrible - is in fact, none other than Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

Silabhadra: Is it Yamaraja that is holding the Wheel of Life?

S: No, that is usually considered to be the embodiment of impermanence - if you like, the demon of impermanence. Again, people see impermanence as a demon.

Ratnaketu: Bhante, I remember in the Vimalakirti series, you mentioned something about, Mara being actually a Bodhisattva. Do you remember that? I think it was because he actually sort of provides...

S: I'm not really... yes, it is that one can regard, perhaps, Mara as a Bodhisattva, or that Bodhisattvas can take Mara-like forms even. So in other words, what you consider as an evil may not be an evil at all. Just as you consider death an evil, it may not be an evil at all. In the same way, something that you consider an annoyance or a distraction may not be such at all. It may be an opportunity. There is, in connection with the Vimalakirti sutra, there is something that I remember... I can't quite remember at the moment - maybe it will come to me shortly - about Bodhisattvas appearing as Mara and Mara as being in fact a Bodhisattva.

Prasannasiddhi: If Mara could be - as the Lord of Death - if you could represent Mara as the Lord of Death then you could also say that Mara, or that the Lord of Death was, from a certain point of view, was actually a spiritual thing, or had spiritual significance. Well then, from that, well you could work back up through the other Maras and say that they all had a spiritual content.

S: That might be difficult, for instance, because the Devaputta Mara is considered to be a definite sort of mythological figure who is definitely bent on mischief. He annoys the Buddha's disciples. Not with the idea of helping them, but definitely with the idea of hindering them. And it is Mara, of course, who challenges the Buddha under the Bodhi tree. So there is, in Buddhism, this conception not simply of Mara as a sort of personification of subjective mental states, unskillful states but more as a definite being.

Amoghacitta: Doesn't Shantideva suggest, I think in the Bodhicharyavatara that if such a person, or if living people should annoy us in any way, even mischievously, that we should regard them as helping us because we can use our own mental states...

S: (interrupting) That is another point of view. What I am saying is that we mustn't confuse the Klesa Mara, or the other forms of personified Mara, Mara as the personification of a subjective mental state, with Mara as a definite mythological entity. So Mara as a definite mythological entity is definitely opposed to the Dharma. He does not want the Dharma to be spread, he did not want the Buddha to gain Enlightenment, he does not want the disciples to practise meditation. In a way, he is the sort of counterpart of Brahma. Brahma is the more helpful, the more sympathetic sort of mythological entity or mythological figure. Mara is unsympathetic and unhelpful. But his power, his capacity for mischief is very, very limited. He doesn't occupy in Buddhist mythology anything like the position that Satan or the Devil occupies in Christian mythology. He isn't, in a way, very important. So one can't really regard that Mara as being, as it were, basically good, because he is not a personification. He is a being. But no doubt the

Buddhist teaching is that even Mara will one day, you know, gain Enlightenment. For him that possibility is not excluded, any more than it is for any other being. But he is a being, not a personification.

Prasannasiddhi: with the Christian tradition, you can say there's God, the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ and the Devil, and they're all archetypes, although the Christians have a certain thing that the Devil's, er, you try to get rid of him, in a way. But actually they're all aspects of reality, and it seems from a certain point of view that you've got to admit to all these sort of different aspects of your being in a way, or...

S: As an aspect of your being, it would be Klesa Mara - Mara as the personification of the defilements, that is you 'shadow' side, as it were.

Prasannasiddhi: The passions. So could you actually say that on a certain level those are an actual aspect of your being which you have to admit to?

S: Well, Buddhism - certainly early Buddhism - wouldn't put it like that. It would definitely say that unskilful mental states are simply to be got rid of. It doesn't say, it doesn't speak the language of integration or sublimation. But the Vajrayana definitely does. The Vajrayana, even the Mahayana to a certain extent does that. For instance, there's a well known equation of klesa and bodhi. The Vajrayana says, well if the Mahayana says that Klesa is eventually bodhi. In other words, klesa, defilement, can be transformed into Enlightenment. That is your raw material. So if klesa is Bodhi, Mara is Buddha. Do you see what I mean? Some texts do actually say this. not as he is, but Mara is capable of becoming a Buddha which, you know, actually no form of Buddhism would deny, but they might put it in a different sort of way. So the Mara within you is capable of becoming the Buddha within you. So in that sense the klesas are not rejected.

Prasannasiddhi: Could this perhaps also relate to how actions aren't actually skilful or unskilful in themselves, as just the way you use the action. Such as what you could consider was an unskilful action in some cases may not?....

S: Well, a great deal does depend upon intention. Buddhist ethics is usually described as ethics of intention, that an action is skilful or unskilful according to whether it is accompanied or not accompanied by lobha, dvesa, and moha - craving, aversion and delusion. But it is obviously the objective results, the objective effect of the action are also important. It's not that if you feel good doing something and you do it with a good intention, well that's O.K., that's enough. No, because it must be without delusion. There must be a certain element of intelligence in what you do, and that includes awareness of the consequences of your action.(Long Pause)

What about this line; 'Wherever the mind may go, we cannot control its fate, do you understand that?' Does this mean that the mind is subject to fate, or to destiny, which would not seem to be very Buddhistic? 'Wherever the mind may go, we cannot control its fate.' Well, what it really means is that wherever the mind may go or wherever you may go, you cannot escape the consequences of your own actions. Once you've performed the action, you can't escape the consequences. It is the consequences that constitute your fate, that is, the fate that you've brought upon yourself by your own actions - whether skilful or unskilful. This is emphasised in the next line; 'Punishment follows the evil we do, do you understand that?' (pause)

There is a verse in the Dhammapada, 'Not in the mountain caves, not in the depths of the sea, is there any place, going to which, a man will escape the consequences of his own actions'. So, in the same way, 'Wherever the mind may go, it cannot control its fate, do you understand that?'. You have the freedom to perform or not to perform a certain action, but you have no control over the consequences of that action once you have performed it. This is sometimes compared to tossing a ball down a flight of stairs. You have the freedom to throw or not to throw the ball, but

once you've thrown it, inevitably it will go bouncing from stair to stair, from step to step until it reaches the bottom. (Long Pause)

Anything more in that speech of the cock that requires discussion?

Aryamitra: It's so repetitive, it's almost like he is confirming what has already been said, saying, 'do you understand that?'

S: One gets the impression throughout the whole of the work so far that it is a very popular work, popular in the sense that it is addressed to the people or intended for the people, for ordinary people, maybe in small villages or little settlements for even nomads, and addressed perhaps to people who - though basically good, quite good - were perhaps very, very strongly attached to their families, their homes, their work, their belongings, and who perhaps weren't remarkably bright, and one had therefore, presumably, the author this little book sort of hammering away the same lesson in a very powerful, unambiguous sort of way, constantly sort of (unclear) that everything was impermanent, that you couldn't take it with you. Death was inevitable - even sons could turn against you etc, etc. Do you see what I mean? Very basic lessons constantly repeated, constantly hammered home.

One certainly used to get that impression with the Tibetans. It wasn't easy to get anything into a Tibetan's head, but once you'd got it there nothing would move it, and they'd certainly act upon it. I used to find it very difficult to convince Tibetans, they are very difficult people to deal with in that respect. They're quite obstinate, quite resistant, quite hard to convince. It was very difficult to get them to agree to do something, but once they'd agreed you could be quite sure they'd definitely do it. I used to find this in connection with just organising the Buddhajyanta celebrations, and things like that. In India especially Hindus would readily agree to anything you said and make any promise that you asked them to make, but you couldn't rely upon them. Tibetans were just the opposite. They weren't easy to convince and they didn't agree very easily. They always wanted to make sure that they understood exactly what you were saying, exactly what they were expected to do, and only then - maybe - would they agree. But once they'd agreed you could absolutely rely upon them without any question whatever. So maybe one should bear in mind these sort of characteristics of the Tibetans in reading this text. It's addressed to people of this sort, people who are not very quick, who are slow to be convinced and, maybe also like all people. they are just very attached to their homes and their families and their worldly belongings. Difficult to shift, but once you have shifted them, well, you really have shifted them. They'll take what you say seriously and act upon it.

They're not intellectually brilliant in the way that Indians often are. They don't have very active minds in the way that Indians often have, but they are much more solid and dependable. Or at least they used to be - I hope they haven't changed under the influence, on the one hand, of communism and, on the other hand, of capitalism. The influence of communism in the case of those who stayed in Tibet and the influence of capitalism in the case of those who fled to India as refugees and dispersed themselves, you know, over the world.

Silaratna: The actual text seems to be sort of like, throughout, sort of caged in quite a negative sort of way, but I was just wondering is would a Tibetan, we sort of like look at it as being caged in a negative term, but would a Tibetan look at it in that fashion, or just take it very much as being, applying the positive attributes of all these things as well?

S: Well, what does one mean by 'negative'? I mean, is it really negative to point out the impermanence of things? Presumably it's only negative - and thus unskillful - if you point out the impermanence of things without also pointing out that behind the impermanent worldly things there is a permanent, unconditioned or transcendental reality. Presumably that was no more easy for the Tibetans to understand than it is for us to understand. But at least they had it in their

tradition, certainly after Tibet became Buddhist, it was there for them, so to speak, to fall back onto. When, in the middle-ages in Europe, if a man started thinking along these sort of lines, well it was obvious that he had to go and become a monk. It was very easy for him to become a monk and enter a monastery. There were hundreds of monasteries all around. You saw monks every day. But it isn't like that nowadays. I mean, nowadays, if a man gets fed up with worldly things, I mean to become a monk is not the first thought that occurs to him. He is more likely to be thinking about committing suicide. Or maybe changing his job, changing his wife.(Long Pause)

Alright, let's see what the lark has to say.

Buddhapalita: "The lark, weary at heart from her countless rebirths, then wept and said, "skyid skyur skyid skyur, which means, the pleasures turn sour, the pleasures turn sour.

"When they dwell in a state of woe, the pleasures of beings turn sour.

After the births and deaths of the past, the pleasures expected from future rebirth turn sour.

Seeing others enjoy one's gains, the pleasures of storing up wealth turn sour.

Seeing the crops destroyed by weeds and hail, the pleasures of tilling the earth turn sour.

Seeing aged parents turned from house and home, the pleasures of raising children turn sour.

Since, when the time has come, one must part without it, the pleasures of love for the body turn sour.

Since when the time comes, one must depart alone, the pleasures of love of friends turn sour.

Seeing the corpses laid in the burial ground, the pleasures of pride in this bodily citadel turn sour.

And she continued:

Since these pleasures all turn sour, what use are all these things?

What use this homely existence, - a source of suffering?

What use these families rent by strife, yet even in unhappiness not parting?

What use are sons, when their upbringing is so profitless?

What use are friends when they are not sincere in our defence?

What use possessions when one knows not how to use them?

What use these fortresses without defence against the Lord of Death?

What use these chieftains who spread misery and death?

What use in this unrighteous world to eat and thus maintain the body?

What use is religious talk to those who have learnt little and can understand still less?

What use concern for others' good when one is full of selfish interest?

What use these moral rules with no attempt to follow them?

What use, therefore these many things - useless indeed are they.""

S: So that's quite a sort of diatribe. What does one mean by 'turning sour'. What does one understand by that?

Amoghacitta: It's like a fruit, when it expect it to turn ripe and it turn sour instead.

S: Does 'turn sour' mean quite the same thing in all these instances?

Silabhadra: It's like the pleasures become unpleasant, they're not really pleasures at all.

S: Yes, there seem to be two distinctions here. First of all, first of all that pleasure in any case is

impermanent, so you are bound to realise this after a while and therefore you become less eager after pleasures than you used to be. Because maybe it would be a different sort of delusion if you thought it was going to last. So you pursued the pleasure, or enjoyed the pleasure quite eagerly, but repeated experience shows you, or convinces you that pleasure isn't going to last, so it sort of turns sour. Because even while you are enjoying it, you know it's not going to last, so you can't enjoy it as much as before, certainly not in the old, as it were, almost neurotic sort of fashion. But, on the other hand, there's turns sour in its other sense that you realise that the pleasure you took in doing something was, in a way, wasted because the activity itself turned out to be completely futile. whether your own or that of somebody else... the 'seeing aged parents turned from house and home, the pleasures of raising children turn sour'. It's not that the pleasure itself is impermanent, but that the thing that you derive pleasure from, even becomes a source of harm to you, a source of suffering to you when, in a sense, it need not do because children need not turn their aged parents out of home. Do you see the difference between the two things? Alright, supposing you have pleasure out of, say, raising children but you realise that those children are impermanent, they are going to die, that's bad enough. So in that sense the pleasures of raising children turn sour because you are not raising anything permanent. But supposing those children don't simply naturally grow old and die, assuming you could live to see them do that, but they actually turn against you. Well then the pleasure of raising children becomes, as it were, even sourer. Do you see what I mean? Because that, as it were, is not in the natural order of things that children should turn against parents. It doesn't have to happen in the same way that they have to die. So that's an even sourer sort of experience. So it seems that in this particular section the expression 'turns sour' is used in these two rather different senses.

S: There is a sort of danger here if one thinks too much along these lines. What do you think that danger is?

aryamitra: Sort of saying, 'What's the use of doing anything?'

S: yes, you develop a sort of cynicism, perhaps. Your sort of general attitude towards life becomes rather sour. That certainly isn't a spiritual sort of state. For instance, take this line, 'Seeing the crops destroyed by the weeds and hail, the pleasures of tilling the earth turn sour.' Well, one could take this in two different ways. if one is a farmer and one is engaged in tilling the earth, well one knows that sometimes the harvest is better, sometimes the harvest is worse; some years you have a good crop, some years you have a bad crop; some years you have plenty of weeds and insects and other years there are not. A farmer, as it were, accepts that. Surely it isn't that when the farmer has an experience of his crops destroyed by weeds and hail, that then his attitude becomes so sour that he gives up farming. That would be in a way a rather unbalanced reaction because if you are engaged in farming at all, you know that those are the hazards, you have to be prepared for those, you take those into account, you take a longer view. You realise that, well, some harvests are good, some years the crop is plentiful. Do you see what I mean? It's not that the farmer should sort of wash his hands of the whole business in disgust as soon as he has one poor crop. But he shouldn't expect too much. He should be prepared for disappointments. In a sense, he shouldn't even be disappointed, because he knows how precarious and uncertain the whole business of farming is. and he shouldn't perhaps go into farming unless he has that sort of attitude. Many farmers, in fact, are very sort of solid, stoical sort of creatures. They know only too well how variable the weather is and all that sort of thing, how risky the whole business of farming is, at least by traditional methods.

So one must be able to see the limitations of things without that sort of causing one to behave in an unreasonable manner. Without causing one to go to extremes or to become sour, cynical, or disillusioned in a negative sort of sense.

Prasannasiddhi: One shouldn't try to get out of the world what it can't actually give.

S: Yes, yes. And also the fact that you shouldn't try to get out of the world what it can't give you doesn't mean that you shouldn't take advantage of what it can give you. For instance, this line, 'Since, when the time comes one must depart alone, the pleasures of love of friends turn sour.' Well, does that mean that because when you die you go alone, does that mean that, well, there's no point in making friends because you've got to leave them? But when you make friends you can benefit from that, especially if they are spiritual friends. You can benefit in such a way that you're more ready to die when the time comes. you can die more happily. But even though you make those friends you make them with the clear understanding that you are going to have to part one day, at least part physically. you accept that.

Khemananda: It's almost as if you have a clear understanding of what the friendship can give, it becomes more real, more important that you really do have friendship, whereas if you try to take too much from it, or give something you can't give, well then it becomes distorted.

S: Yes. Well, this is why, I'm sure, so many marriages fail. Each partner expects from the other what is quite impossible for any human being to give another human being. The expectations are quite unrealistic. So it seems to me...er.. though perhaps again we should bear in mind the original audience of this little work, that the little lark is being a bit one sided, 'Since these pleasures all turn sour, what use are all these things?', including, apparently, friendship. So no doubt this sort of advice, this sort of warning was useful to the people to whom it was originally addressed, who were no doubt deeply attached to all these things. But it's the attachment that needs to be loosened, rather than a cynical sort of attitude inculcated.

Silabhadra: Also, with the introduction of the lark saying she's weary at heart from countless rebirths and weeping, gives the impression that maybe she may not have seen the other side yet.

S: Yes, because, again, 'Since these pleasures all turn sour, what use are all these things?' Well, what use *in the ultimate sense*, that is perfectly true. But does it mean one should never eat, does it mean one should never have a friend? One should never have a house, etc, etc? But no doubt in the case of people strongly attached to all these things as the original audience of this work must have been, this sort of strong language is perhaps necessary.

Also there is this question of, 'what use are all these things', even, 'what use are sons', for instance, 'when their upbringing is so profitless: What use are friends when they are not sincere in our defence?' This almost suggests that you are disillusioned with these things because they don't turn out to be as useful to you as you had expected, which is a somewhat sort of self-centred attitude.

Prasannasiddhi: This, the first bit, could it be possible that the translation actually, of saying 'it turns sour' might not actually be quite the original?

S: Well, that may be. We can't say. It's possible.

Prasannasiddhi: Because maybe the emphasis is a bit, you know, is affected by the translation, or something. Maybe it was something more along the lines that the pleasures do eventually die out or something - don't last.

S: 'Turns sour' is quite a strong or often emotive expression. So they leave a bitter taste in your mouth. Not that you enjoy them and are thankful for them, and say well, they are impermanent, it's a pity but that's that. It's as though the fact they are impermanent turns you sour which suggests that your original attitude towards them was not really very positive. Because you can enjoy a pleasure, you can enjoy something pleasant and accept that it's impermanent, but not let that experience turn you sour. Because you fully accept that the thing is impermanent and you've enjoyed it on those terms fully understanding the situation. There's no reason, then, for you to

turn sour when eventually you have to give up that thing. I mean, otherwise you could apply it to all sorts of things. You might say, 'What's the point of coming to Il Convento if, after three months, you've got to go' and that is a very souring experience. Well, no - it isn't. You're thankful that you've been here for three months at all. Do you see what I mean? So that applies even to worldly things. I mean you might have enjoyed your lunch but you don't think, 'Ah well, it's a pity I couldn't go on eating for ever' so the experience turns you sour. You enjoy it, alright, then you forget all about it. It's just a worldly experience - it can't last. Or you enjoy a holiday at the seaside; it's a really good holiday. But the fact that it can't go on for ever, that after a week you've got to go back to work, it doesn't turn the whole thing sour for you. So I think one has to distinguish between recognising the impermanence of things, recognising that things, that mundane things, can't give you lasting satisfaction, and the attitude that they can't give you any satisfaction at all - that's more like disgruntlement if you say, 'well, if it can't give me lasting satisfaction, then I'm not going to let it give me any satisfaction at all'. Perhaps it's in that that the sourness consists; almost the bitterness. You haven't fully accepted that it can't give you lasting happiness. You're not prepared to accept what it actually can give you and be thankful for that.

Ratnaketu: Some people, of course, try to use that as a rationalisation for, like you only live once, in a way, so you might as well.... I'm fully aware that my relationship with this particular woman one day going to come to an end, so I might as well enjoy it while I can.

S: But here I was thinking of things of enjoyment, the quest for enjoyment, the quest for pleasure, and that has its limitations, as we say yesterday.

Ratnaketu: It's probably as well if they really did know that it, really felt that it was one day going to come to an end.

S: They wouldn't get into it as deeply as they sometimes do.

Any other points in connection with what the lark says? There's one point that occurs to me, which is, in a way, interesting at the foot of page 29; 'What use these families, rent by strife, yet even in unhappiness not parting?' Well, this is something that one sees in the case of families, in the case of husbands and wives, in the case of relationships. People are not getting on; they're really miserable together, but they can't part, they can't separate. They're just as much stuck together as though they'd been deeply in love. This seems very extraordinary. They are bound together by their mutual dislike; even their mutual hatred.

Aryamitra: I knew a girl for a couple of years now, and every time I meet her she says, 'yes, we're thinking about separating', you know, she lives with a man and they're thinking about separating. It's been going on for two years now.

S: Well, it could go on for twenty. Why do you think people can't separate under these sort of circumstances? It's easy to say well they're just attached. But what is it, what is the mechanism, so to speak, that keeps them together?

Silaratna: In the case of marriages it seems to be, you know, perhaps something to do with like the Christian attitude that marriage is a binding thing, bound by - supposedly - by God and can never be sort of pulled apart.

S: This is certainly the case with some people, with, say, orthodox Catholics. With women who are really fed up with their husbands, who really bitterly regret having married them, but they also believe the church's teaching that marriage is indissoluble, so they can't even consider leaving them - however badly they are treated.

Amoghacitta: Usually it's probably more to do with not being able to envisage life without them

- the partner.

S: Yes, yes, yes.

Aryamitra: they may have to live on their own for a while, and that seems even worse.

S: Yes, yes.

Khemananda: It's like even if they hate each other, at least they know they hate each other. Whereas like if they leave that they're going into the unknown. It's like a kind of desire for certainty.

S: I think also if there's this sort of strong hatred which sometimes does develop between married people, separation would mean giving up the possibility of sort of scoring off the other person and punishing the other person. And you feel a need perhaps to do that. You stick with them just so that you can give them a bad time because you're so angry with them. If you separate, if you part, you won't be able to continue giving them a bad time. Well yes, and sometimes it's mutual; you stay together just so that you can continue giving each other a bad time, take it out on each other, punish each other, for not living up to your own completely unrealistic expectations. This is the story of many a marriage, as I've seen myself - not from within, but from outside.

Ratnaketu: I heard once a sort of Tibetan story about this man and wife who had been reborn lifetime after lifetime, and that the wife had been always sort of gone and got married to him in order to distract him from the Dharma because, at one time, several lifetimes before he had refused to teach her something about the Dharma, so she had sort of made this vow that she would always get reborn and distract him from it.

S: Well that throws a lot of life on certain situations I could mention - a lot of light on certain situations I could mention.

(laughter) We'll have to see about that.(laughter)

'Families rent by strife, yet even in unhappiness not parting'. I think that very often there are deep rooted psychological reasons... you can't forgive. This is what it basically amounts to. They can't accept responsibility for their own unrealistic expectations, and just stop blaming the other person. To realise it's their fault because of their unrealistic expectations - not their partners fault for failing to live up to those expectations.

Silaratna: It seems it's more ignorance. they don't realise that they don't have to be in that state.

S: Oh yes, there's that too. They don't realise that they could even live happily together, or that they could live happily apart, perhaps more happily apart.

Prasannasiddhi: It seems it's more ignorance. They don't realise that they don't have to be in that state.

S: Oh yes it's that too. They don't realise that they could even live happily together or live happily even apart, perhaps more happily apart.

Prasannasiddhi : It's sort of like in families they're born together, they're brought up together, they kind of think that they should always be together, just the sort of status quo almost.

S: Mm, regardless... whether you're happy or unhappy - that's irrelevant. The main thing is that you should be together. One big officially happy family.

Prasannasiddhi: Of course, there could be a positive side there, in sort of overcoming conflicts.

S: But then one has got to want to overcome the conflict. One has got to be willing to look into the causes of the conflict and do something about the conflict which usually means, you know, changing oneself, and it's that which people so often find very difficult to do. Sometimes it happens, but I think not very often without outside help.

What about this line, 'What use are friends if they are not sincere in our defence'. Leave aside this question of friends being useful, expecting friends to be useful, but what does it mean? Doesn't it suggest that the sincere friend is one, a friend really is one who will be sincere in our defence? This is a point which is made in Buddhist literature, that someone who is a friend will spring to your defence. That not only literally - maybe that was quite a consideration in Tibet, that your friend would side with you if you were involved in a fight - but that if someone speaks ill of you, that your friend should defend you against that. This is a point which was often made in Buddhist literature. That is one of the duties of a friend, not to just stand by and listen, much less still join in when his friend, you, are being criticised unjustly. When something false is being said about you it's the duty of a friend to correct that, to defend his friend.

Khemananda: It's a bit like what you were saying yesterday about a friend will defend your interest when you're not there. That's a real test of friendship (unclear) defend your own interests.

Prasannasiddhi: But if you're in an argument where you're actually in the wrong, well your friend then would presumably want to defend your interests to the extent that he would kind of take sides with the correct party.

S: Ah, but then what does one mean by 'take sides'? It depends also on the nature of the argument, on the nature of the discussion. If it's a genuine discussion, in that case a friend will not support his friend at all costs even if that friend is in the wrong. But supposing the discussion is not of a very pleasant or objective kind and supposing his friend is getting the worst of the argument, well, he may well come to his defence, come to his rescue even though he thinks he is wrong. But then afterwards, you know, sort the matter out with him, say 'well look, actually what you were saying wasn't quite right.' Do you see what I mean? It just also depends on the nature of the discussion.

Prasannasiddhi: It can be a sort of 'jumping in' with another person just because he is your friend, you know, when in actual fact it might not be a good thing to do. If, sort of...

S: (interrupting) Well, the text says, 'what use are friends when they are not sincere in our defence?' The assumption being, presumably, that one is in need of defence, and that defence is a good thing, I mean whether you are attacked physically, or whether you are sort of attacked verbally. This seems to implicate that there is an attack. If it is just a friendly discussion among a number of people, the question of 'attack' doesn't come into it, even if there is a disagreement of opinion. You don't have to defend your friend then, because he's not being attacked. It's just a disagreement. different people see things in different ways. you may not necessarily agree with him.

Prasannasiddhi: And there's also the word 'sincere' as well. Someone who is sincere...

Ratnaketu: Bhante, every now and again you've said in Buddhism it speaks of friendship, it says friendship, you know, I wondered whether there was a text, sometimes there's all these lists, is there a text?

S: Oh yes, there's the Sigalovada Sutta. In fact, we're going to have a study group on the

Sigalovada Sutta back in England early in the New year. Yes, the duties of friends to each other are set forth there, you know, quite clearly.

: How do you spell that?

S: Sigalovada: S-I-G-A-L-O-V-A-D-A, 'the advice to Sigalo' it means. It is quite a lengthy sutra, it's found in the Digha Nikaya, as everybody knows!(laughter)

You should at least have read the Digha Nikaya.

Aryamitra: Oh yes!(laughter)

S: In the intervals of running your co-ops.

Silabhadra: Yes, at lunch break!

Ratnaketu: Yes, we always sit down and browse through our Digha Nikaya!(laughter)

S: It's advice to a young householder called Sigalo, and it deals with the main relationships of life, that's why we're going to study it this New Year. (pause) Any other point arising out of this piece?

There is a footnote against 'What use in this unrighteous world to eat and thus maintain the body?' Apparently the text is quite obscure and Doctor Conze isn't quite certain of the meaning.

What does it mean, for instance, 'What use concern for other's good when one is full of selfish interest?'

Aryamitra: Well, you can't really have concern for others if you...

S: Is that so? You may, for instance, have a concern for the good of others but it may be a selfish interest, but none the less one may objectively do some good which is of some use, perhaps. I mean, supposing you give money to a poor person, well your interest may be completely selfish, you may just do it for the sake of a good reputation, none the less, that poor person is objectively helped. They are glad to have the money. Do you see what I mean? So it does seem that the lark is going a little to extremes, is a little, as it were, carried away. Even a little hysterical, perhaps. The lark seems to be a rather emotional creature. I don't know whether this is intentional on the part of the original author; introducing a touch of exaggeration, or whether he is illustrating the different effects of the cuckoo's teaching on different birds, different kinds of beings. So no doubt there are some who are affected in this sort of way, but the author is not necessarily endorsing all these different attitudes completely.

Aryamitra: Sometimes I've had a feeling that it's not one person who's written this, but maybe somebody with a few disciples, and who's got ideas, because some of them have a different feel.

S: It could be, you just don't know. Maybe one day someone will speculate, well, some of my disciples gave actually some of my lectures! They were quite different from the rest of my lectures, couldn't have been written by him, even the voice sounds different, they might say. One can only speculate in such matters, one doesn't really know. We find it's a bit like the apocryphal plays of Shakespeare. Some people feel that they are very much in Shakespeare's style, some people who've studied them all their lives. Other people who've also studied them all their lives feel this is not in Shakespeare's style at all. In the absence of any hard objective evidence it's very difficult to come to conclusions. But these are all different birds speaking, different classes of religious people, all kinds of religious people speaking, so the cuckoo's words have affected them

in different ways. I mean there is a basic similarity, but there is certainly some difference of approach, some difference of emphasis as they recount their experiences.

Prasannasiddhi: It does say in the back of the book that the Tibetans had quite a knowledge of birds. It does actually say, I think, that the lark was not considered a good bird, I think, in Tibet. Unlike in England, with Shelley's 'skylark' and things.

S: The lark seems to almost represent the sort of religious person who, although quite genuine and sincere, in a way goes a bit over the top, a bit - overdoes it. He's a bit extreme, a bit too fervent, almost a little bit fanatical.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, I suppose if there were Tibetan people, village folk, well Tibetan folk people listening to a discourse of this sort, in a way they would get, if they're also quite familiar with the birds, it would kind of add more interest to the story.

Silaratna: It's sort of a bit too much reality principle and not enough pleasure principle.

S: That's true, also, yes, yes.

Alright, let's go on to what the little red lagopus says, whatever kind of bird that is. I don't think I've ever seen a lagopus. Does anyone know what a lagopus is? Ah, well it's a small bird and it's red anyway. Who would like to be the little red lagopus?(laughter)

Ratnaketu: "Thereupon the little red lagopus rose, looked from the corner of his eye and said: *tig tig med*, which means, *no certainty*.

"For an imperfect yogin, - no certainty!"

In a dharma which transcends the whole of Samsara, - no certainty!"

In rumour which has travelled far, - no certainty!"

In the talk of a seasoned liar, - no certainty!"

In the gossip of the garrulous, - no certainty!"

In the affairs of busybodies, - no certainty!"

In the conversation of the stupid, - no certainty!"

In the possessions near to enemy lands, - no certainty!"

In the moment of death, once one is born, - no certainty!"

In the speech of the ever deceitful, - no certainty!"

In the yield of the barley crop, - no certainty!"

In the mind of a fool, - no certainty!"

In a woman's control of the household, - no certainty!"

In the wanderings of the stray dog, - no certainty!"

In the rain from a summer sky, - no certainty!"

For the husband of the whore, - no certainty!"

In the walk of the bow-legged, - no certainty!"

In the friendship of beings - no certainty.""

S: Well the little red lagopus seemed to have a sense of humour.(laughter) more than the lark, certainly. He just sees things out of the corner of his eye, his acute little eye.

So, 'For an imperfect yogin - no certainty!' Conze says, "i.e., a yogin cannot achieve full certainty as long as his practices and meditations fall short of perfection". I suppose one could put it like that. One could say that for an imperfect yogin there's no certainty of success. No certainty of achieving your aim, when you're not doing your bit. Why should you achieve certainty, why should you achieve success.? Certainty here presumably means certainty of success.

Aryamitra: One could sort of imagine maybe the author looking out of his window where he was living and just seeing these birds, and imagining... ah...(laughter)

S: There are all sorts of little birds in our garden at Padmaloka. We've got little robins and blue tits, we've got pigeons and pheasants and starlings, and thrushes and blackbirds and sparrows, jays, wood pigeons. See the odd seagull circling overhead.

Amoghacitta: I was just thinking of that tape of your last lecture, 'A Case of Dysentery', and those birds tweeting in the background all the way through.

S: Yes, yes.

Amoghacitta: It really adds something...

Prasannasiddhi: I imagine also in Tibet, one gets the impression that these sort of, you get a small village and miles and miles of sort of hills and country and wilderness between the next sort of human habitation. So in a way, things being very simple, they'd have quite an awareness of the sort of animal and bird life which surrounded them.

S: Anyway, the next line. There's a note on the next line which says, 'In a dharma which transcends the whole of samsara, - no certainty!' Conze's got a note which seems to me a bit far-fetched. He says, "The dharma which transcends the whole of samsara is nirvana. The allusion is here to one of the more obscure teachings of Buddhism. Nirvana is said to be 'signless', in other words, it has no marks at all and it cannot therefore be recognised as such. This excludes certainty, as it is usually understood. The reader who finds this hard to grasp is well advised to pass on."(laughter)

I think I personally would be inclined to think that there is some mistake of the printing - if not of this book, even maybe of the Tibetan text. I'd be inclined to read it as 'In a dharma which does not transcend the whole of samsara, there is no certainty.' Do you see what I mean? I mean, if there was a religious teaching but it doesn't transcend the whole of the samsara well, there's no certainty in it. Because to the extent that it doesn't transcend the whole of the samsara it's mundane, and in the mundane how can there be certainty? I would prefer to understand it like that. Whereas there doesn't seem to be any sort of reference implied to 'the signless' here. I think that's quite far-fetched. And sometimes one does find in Tibetan texts that a negative prefix 'ma' just drops out. So I would say, well, probably, maybe, the author originally wrote, 'In a dharma that does not transcend the whole of samsara, no certainty!' The Tibetan author may have been thinking of the Bon faith, or he may even have been thinking of various Hindu teachings. So there's certainty in a dharma which is, well, there is certainty only in a dharma, only in a spiritual teaching which is genuinely transcendental, which really does take you beyond the Wheel of Life, which really does take you on to the spiral. There is only certainty in that kind of spiritual teaching, not in any other. So there's no certainty in psychology, no certainty, perhaps, in orthodox Christianity, no certainty in Spiritualism, no certainty in Freud, no certainty in Reich, no certainty even in Jung. They don't carry one very far. There's certainty only in that which takes you, or lead you to the transcendental - which transcends the whole of samsara. It doesn't sort of conduct you merely say, to an improved version of the human realm, or merely to the world of the gods. I mean that's my suggestion. I'm sort of also partly thinking of one of the Precepts of the Gurus. I was just trying to thinking exactly how it runs. But it is a bit relevant here, it seems to support this sort of interpretation. So I think what one of the things one needs is a spiritual teaching which enables one to turn all the experiences of worldly life to account.

Ratnaketu: To account?

S: Yes, to good use. Anyway, which little bird is going to fly off and bring the

seeds?(laughter)[Transcript checkers note: "seeds" is a metaphorical expression meaning tea/coffee!]

end of tape 11 tape 12

S: "In a rumour which has travelled far no certainty", that's pretty obvious, but it is really strange, the extent to which one finds, even within the Friends itself, the extent to which people place reliance on things that they've heard and must surely know that they've heard only at second, third, fourth, fifth seventh and so on hand. Perhaps they're a little bit more cautious now than they used to be but even so not sufficiently cautious perhaps. Especially in connection with what somebody is supposed to have said. You get it at third or fourth hand but you take it as gospel and perhaps act upon it.

So "in a rumour which has travelled far, no certainty". You can be sure only of those things that you hear at first hand.

Ratnaketu: One thing I thought about that was that you can get rid of rumours from the other end by making sure you disseminate knowledge in what you are doing. Some people in Australia and New Zealand were complaining about rumours that had been going on and I thought, well, rumours are in some cases the only thing I've had to go on. You can't blame me for listening to what I hear if nothing ever appears in *Shabda* or in the Newsletter about what's happening.

S: But even then you can be blamed jumping to conclusions because you should think well it hasn't appeared in *Shabda*, no-one's written to me about it, maybe I should be cautious before believing anything, otherwise it becomes virtually one's own imagination or fantasy. I hear all sorts of strange rumours emanating apparently from Glasgow, not to speak from New Zealand but I don't even believe 99% of them!

Aryamitra: Just as well!

S: Even when I did hear one particular rumour, one particular report reached which, had it been true, and it did turn out to be true was so serious that I felt I should write about it, I prefaced my letter by saying "This is what I have heard, if it is true then it is a serious matter" but even though I was pretty certain it must be true because I'd heard it from a reliable source, even then I wasn't going to be completely certain so I wrote to the person concerned saying if this is true. This is what one must do.

Silabhadra: That was a point you made in the "Case of Dysentery" wasn't it.

S: Yes, that's very true, yes that is so. The Buddha didn't jump to any conclusions.

Prasannasiddhi: It seems extremely difficult not to jump to conclusions, to wait, not to say until you were certain of the facts.

S: You can't disseminate complete information about yourself - that's impossible. There is always some little gap or little loophole. People will say ah now, what was he up to then, he hasn't said anything (laughter) about that particular five minutes. What was he doing then I wonder. Why has he said so much about everything else but he hasn't mentioned what he was doing then. (Laughter) In a rumour which has travelled far, no certainty. Sometimes even a rumour which has travelled only a very short distance, there's no certainty. Maybe in some cases from this room to the next. By the time it reaches the next room the information is completely distorted.

Anyway it seems everybody's well aware of this so one hopes we can all act upon it. "In the talk

of a seasoned liar, - no certainty". Well that's also pretty obvious. If someone is a seasoned liar you just can't believe anything he says. But again one has to be careful here because occasionally even the liar will speak the truth even if only by accident.

Silaratna: The boy who cried wolf.

S: Yes

Ratnaketu: Can somebody speak the truth by accident?

S: Well in a factual sense yes, but if you're such a habitual liar that people in the end just don't believe you at all, don't even believe you when you're speaking the truth, then you've only yourself to blame. If you've given them cause to doubt you on so many occasions well you can't complain if they doubt you on every occasion even when you are speaking the truth. So in the talk of a seasoned liar, - no certainty. "In the gossip of the garrulous, - no certainty." What does one mean by that? Why should there be no certainty in the gossip of the garrulous?

Silabhadra: Because they're continually talking about anything that crosses their mind.

S: Yes, you can't be certain what they're going to be talking about. You can't be certain that they're going to mention something, you can't be certain that they're not going to mention it.

Amoghavajra: Gossip's just small talk, it's not of much importance.

S: And in the affairs of busybodies, - no certainty. In much the same way I suppose they might do just anything. One can't be sure what they're going to get up to. They might interfere in anything, in any sort of way, for any sort of reason or no reason. "In the conversation of the stupid, no certainty. One would have thought there was certainty there at least. You could be pretty certain that the conversation of the stupid would be stupid! wouldn't be interesting, wouldn't be worth listening to, but what does it mean do you think?"

Khemananda: We haven't got certain whether it going to be stupid or not.

S: Perhaps.

Silaratna: Someone that's seemingly completely stupid, they might come back with something that's.....

S: They might say something intelligent by accident do you mean? Sometimes it happens like that.

Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps it's more concerned with you just won't hear anything clear and intelligent.

S: Yes, there's nothing that you can grasp, nothing that you can even disagree with. They're so stupid they can't even be wrong, not to speak of being right. For someone to be perceptibly wrong, there has to be a certain clarity in what they say for you to be able to see that it's wrong but sometimes what people say is so confused and so stupid, you can't even make out whether it's wrong what to speak of making out whether it's right. In that way there's no certainty.

"In possessions near to enemy land, - no certainty". That's pretty obvious isn't it. Why is there no certainty in such possessions.

Khemananda: It can be raided.

S: It can be raided and overrun at any time. "In the moment of death once one is born, no certainty". Well again that's obvious. No one knows the moment of death. It can come at any time. There's no certainty except that it will come and certainly no certainty about the actual time, the actual moment when it will come.

"In the speech of the ever deceitful, - no certainty". What do you think is meant by deceitful. It's more than just untruthful surely.

Aryamitra: Deliberate deceiving, conjuring up something.

S: The question of motivation. Sometimes you're not quite sure of the motivation of certain people. Why they are speaking to you in the way that they are. Whether you can take it at its face value or whether there's something behind it that they're concealing from you. So if you know that they're deceitful, if you know they're always deceitful, you can't be certain about what it is they're saying, what it is they're getting at, what it is that they're really up to, even if you understand what they say and it seems alright, it seems quite straightforward, but you can't be sure. You know that they're deceitful, that they're ever deceitful. That there's some sort of hidden motive in what they're saying.

Aryamitra: It's like one doesn't trust politicians.

S: What they say sounds alright and you can agree with what they say. You can't be sure why they're saying it or what they're really up to, what their purpose is in saying it. It may be completely different from what you think.(Pause)

"In the yield of the barley crop, - no certainty". Well you can say that about the olive crop too. About any crop, no certainty because it depends on the weather to a large extent, so you'd be a fool to depend on the yield being of a certain amount. "In the mind of a fool, no certainty. Why is there no certainty in the mind of a fool? It's as though a fool has got no control over his own mind, no control over his own thoughts. He may think of anything, think about anything, say anything. There's no certainty, no knowing what he going to say, no knowing what he's going to think of. There is a sort of saying that even a wise man can't understand a fool.(Pause). "In a woman's control of the household, - no certainty". What does one mean by this. Is it suggesting that a woman's control of the household is less certain than that of a man?

Aryamitra: No, I don't think so.

S: Or is it simply referring to the fact that a woman customarily controls the household, but that there is no certainty in it, if so why is there no certainty?

Aryamitra: I think it's more like the man who maybe goes out to work or whatever puts his trust in the woman to take care of the household and yet there's no certainty in that. There's no certainty that it will all be....

S: There's no certainty that she would in fact successfully look after your joint interests. Things may be beyond her control, the children, the animals, the servants. Most of these instances are pretty obvious. "In the wanderings of a stray dog, - no certainty" Well the stray dog may wander anywhere. It's a stray dog, its nature is such. "In the rain from a summer sky, - no certainty". How is it that there's no certainty in the rain from a summer sky?

Ratnaketu: Maybe in this part of the world when it rained there is a rainy season. You know it's going to rain but in the summer if it rains you don't know how long and how much.

S: Yes. And what about the husband of the whore. Why is there no certainty there. In what

sense is there no certainty?

Silabhadra: Well the husband hasn't got a very secure existence.

S: Well he hasn't got a very secure relationship anyway. You can also say that he can't be sure whether the children are really his, there's that too. No need to linger on that. "In the walk of the bow-legged, - no certainty" (laughter). You can't be sure that they're going to walk straight!

Prasannasiddhi: Does that refer to any phenomena....(Loud laughter)

S: Well you could say that the Tibetans, especially the nomadic Tibetans spent a lot of time on horseback and if you spend a lot of time on horseback you do develop bow leggedness and you do have difficulty walking straight and you used to see that in old cowboy films. The cowboys used to always be bow legged and walk in a funny kind of way.

Yes I think the little red lagopus certainly has a sense of humour which the lark didn't have. These are all just the sort of jokes that would appeal to a village audience. The yield of the barley crop, the mind of a fool, the woman's control of the household, the wandering of a stray dog, - every village has a stray dog or two, rain from the summer sky, the husband of the whore, - well that would raise a laugh at somebody's expense!!(Laughter). The walk of the bow-legged, well that would raise another laugh at somebody else's expense. Maybe there is a little bow legged Tibetan in the village.

Ratnaketu: Maybe it's after the lark's speech for...

S: Yes, a bit of a change, to cheer people up a bit.

Ratnaketu: In a way they're all saying don't invest in things which you know are unreliable.

S: Yes. Things that are known to be unreliable can be relied upon to be unreliable. What about this last one, - "In the friendship of beings, - no certainty". What sort of friendship is referred to here.

Ratnaketu: Self interested?

S: Yes, presumably friendship based upon a temporary sort of community of interests, no friendship in the more genuine sense, and certainly not spiritual friendship. (Pause) Anything further about that slightly comic but still quite meaningful little interlude? Tibetans certainly have a sense of humour. It isn't very refined, it isn't very subtle. It's inclined to be quite coarse. Even quite educated Tibetans I've found including lamas had a quite coarse sense of humour usually. They really laughed at things like people tripping over banana skins and falling into something unpleasant. This sort of thing they regarded as absolutely the last word in humour! Perhaps it is not without significance that when the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama came to India in 1956 the Governor of India wanted to be very hospitable, wanted to show them a film, they asked the Dalai Lama what film he'd like to see and he chose a film of the Marx Brothers. (Laughter). The Panchen Lama chose "War and Peace". I thought that quite interesting.

Prasannasiddhi: How old was the Panchen lama?

S: They were both about the same age. I think the Panchen Lama was slightly older than the Dalai Lama, the Dalai Lama must then have been in his very early twenties, about 23 and the Panchen Lama likewise.

Ratnaketu: The Panchen Lama went to the Communist Chinese, didn't he?

S: He was imprisoned for years and seemed to have a lot of difficulties but he seemed to have maintained, not his position, he certainly seemed to have maintained his principles and there were certain things he just wouldn't go along with and he seemed to have been doing his best just within that very difficult situation. But he suffered a lot and was imprisoned for some years but no one has any very definite information. Mostly just a lot of rumours, but he seems able now to move about pretty freely.

Silaratna: He's still in Tibet?

S: I couldn't say. I haven't read anything for some time. Anyway let's go on to the red-beaked Chinese Thrush.

Amoghacitta: "The red-beaked Chinese Thrush then rose, and said: *bcud lon bcud lon*, which means, *profit from, profit from.*

"Profit from the holy teachings once you have gained a human form!

Profit from the holy Dharma, and achieve your aims!

Profit from your possessions, and give them all away!

Profit from the pure doctrine, and choose a lowly place!

Profit from you knowledge, and meditate upon the guardian gods!

Profit from your discontent, withdraw yourself from this samsaric world!

Profit from the Buddha, awake to the essence of absolute thought!"

S: So the dominant thought here seems to be just make positive use of your opportunities. Make as positive a use of them as you possibly can in fact. Profit from them. Profit from the holy teachings once you've gained a human form. Well here you are with a human form, endowed with sense organs without any deficiency, here you are with the human intelligence, here you are with leisure, here you are with health, here you are with the opportunity of practising the Dharma, so profit from the holy teachings, once you've gained a human form. Don't waste this opportunity. It may not come again or at least may not come for a very long time. One does find that very often people don't profit from their opportunities. Sometimes they hardly seem to realise that they are opportunities. They throw them away so to speak so heedlessly. Anyway this is sort of very standard Buddhist teaching.

Then "profit from the holy Dharma and achieve your aims". What do you think the significance of that is? Profit from the holy Dharma and achieve your aims. What are these aims?

Amoghacitta: Happiness, contentment.

S: It's as if the Chinese Thrush is saying that everybody wants happiness, everybody wants content, everybody wants fulfilment but there's only one way to do that and that is by profiting from the holy Dharma, by practising the Dharma. If you do that you will achieve your aims, otherwise not. Or it could mean profit from the holy Dharma by actually practising it and in that way achieve your religious aims. But in any case profit from the Dharma. You've got the Dharma, the Dharma is available, make use of it, benefit from it, don't waste it.(Pause)

Then the Chinese Thrush says, "Profit from your possessions and give them all away!" which is perhaps rather unexpected. How literally is that to be taken? Give them all away. It raises the whole question of possessions. To what extent is one justified in having possessions.

Aryamitra: I suppose anything more than you need in the human sense.

S: It would benefit you more to give them away, thereby practising dana, than to hold onto them; you're not practising the Dharma by holding onto them but you are practising the Dharma in giving them away. There's a rather interesting sort of traditional Hindu teaching, or perhaps I

should say rather view or attitude in this connection. It's sometimes said in that Hindu tradition that you're only justification, or your main justification for being a householder and earning wealth is so that you can give dana. If you don't give dana the whole meaning and purpose of your life as a householder is rendered useless, so that's quite a sort of point of view isn't it. That you don't even become a householder, you don't even raise a family just for the sake of your own selfish pleasure or your own benefit. you live as a householder, you function as a householder so that you can give dana. That's why you have a family, that's why you have a job, that's why you work, that's the meaning and purpose of your household existence, that you can give dana to the poor or to beggars or to holy men.

Prasannasiddhi: This is in India.

S: This is in India. This is a Hindu attitude. One could say that it's shared by Buddhist to some extent. I came across this quite strongly in South India, I think I mentioned it in my memoirs, that there are some orthodox Hindus who won't eat until they've found somebody to feed, until they've found someone to share their food with that day, and they'll go out looking for somebody if necessary. They go walking around the streets of the town just looking for a beggar or looking for a holy man and take him to the house and then feed him before they eat themselves. They think it's sort of irreligious and selfish that they should only eat themselves. That's not the purpose of a householder's life, just to enjoy himself selfishly. They feel that you were justified in living as a householder only if this was your attitude, only if you lived in that sort of way. So profit from your possessions and give them all away. It doesn't just mean scatter them unthinkingly. Give sensibly, give judiciously, give things to people that can really use them, give them to people that they'll really benefit. Give them away rather than throw them away.

Prasannasiddhi: It does seem a contradiction that on the one hand Hindus could have the attitude of giving to that extent and yet on the other hand they could treat Untouchables.

S: That's true, it is contradictory, yes. But one does find both attitudes, not necessarily in the same person but certainly in the same tradition.

Amoghacitta: I think that's common to all theistic religions isn't it.

S: Well Hinduism is mixed to the extent it's not even exclusively a theistic religion. There are definite non-theistic trends in Hinduism too as with the Advaitavedanta or with the Sakya philosophy. Popular Hinduism no doubt is broadly speaking theistic but Hinduism as such as a whole is not theistic.

Aryamitra: It sounds a very good thing to do, or rather a good attitude.

S: Yes indeed, at least it means that even in the case of a household life there's some sort of spiritual or at least sort of ethical orientation. Your life as a householder is not completely selfish, it's not just a matter of self indulgence.(Pause)

Silabhadra: How would something like that work with the caste system. I mean in certain towns you couldn't just go and find a beggar or something.

S: Well it seems to vary quite a lot with different people. Some will give only to members of their own caste, others will give to anybody. Because if you invite someone into your own home and feed him then of course no doubt caste considerations will arise. Because you can give food to anybody of any caste who's sort of just standing outside your door and if you don't touch him. Sometimes people who are generous but at the same time who practice the caste system will be careful to give food to someone of a lower caste provided he's not so low that he can't approach the house at all, but if he is not so low that he can approach the house they will be careful to give

food without touching him. They will tip or pour the food into his bowl or into his outstretched hands, they will be careful not to come into contact with him. There are all sorts of sort of conventions. If for instance someone is a little lower than you but not too low, alright you'll invite him to maybe sit on the verandah of your house and have his food there. If he's of the same caste or a higher caste then you'll invite him right in. If he's of quite a low caste but still approachable you make him stand outside the door and give him the food there. If he's even lower than that you may make him stand at a distance and throw it to him. This may happen. Or if he's very very low, the lowest, well you won't even allow yourself to see him.

Prasannasiddhi: What about if you're in a caste above the caste who's in the house. Would you go into the house for a meal?

S: Well that would depend upon you again. There are some Hindu sadhus who'll only take food from high caste lay people but there are others who will take from anybody, it varies again. In theory sadhus who've given up the world are supposed to be beyond the caste system and not to observe it. In practise many of them in fact do as I found myself.

Aryamitra: Is the attitude of say a lower caste just as much a belief in the caste system as the higher castes?

S: Oh yes! Very much so in almost all cases. Not only do they believe that the higher caste people are higher but it's almost impossible to be so low that there's no one lower. It's a very vicious system because you can compensate for the fact that people are looking down on you by looking down on those who are even lower than you are. They beat you so to speak so you beat those who are even lower down on the scale, even lower in the pecking order. So you can find, I've found this, even among some of our ex-Untouchable Buddhists, not those who are closely connected with us, they deeply resent the Brahmins and the higher caste people for the way in which they treat them, but amongst themselves they've got divisions. Untouchables who are a bit sort of higher among Untouchables will treat badly those that are a bit lower among Untouchables. It's a very vicious system indeed. Anyway something perhaps we don't need to dwell upon.

So profit from your possessions and give them all away. And then, "Profit from the pure doctrine and choose a lowly place." Well how does that follow? What's the reasoning here.

Silabhadra: In that way they won't be distracted by other things. Maybe they just meditate on the Dharma.

S: But why a lowly place, why not say a solitary place or a secluded place or a quiet place, why a lowly place?

Buddhapalita: A place which isn't going to attract say robbers of some kind. or frequent distractions.

S: Yes, it could mean that. It could also mean profit from the pure doctrine by not only learning it and practising it but also by not being puffed up on account of your learning and your practice. Because you can learn it and you can practice it but if you're puffed up on that account are you really profiting from the pure doctrine. So profit from the pure doctrine and choose a lowly place. I think it means something more like that. You noticed it says Pure doctrine. What do you think it means by pure. We talked about purity the other day. I assume it means pure in the sense of sort of chemically pure. There's nothing except the doctrine. It's not mixed with anything else, anything extraneous, anything worldly. He's just concerned with the spiritual life, just concerned with Enlightenment. In that sense the doctrine is pure, unmixed, unadulterated.

Prasannasiddhi: Do you think he's saying profit from the pure doctrine in the way that a person feels the doctrine is really good so profit from it, or, profit from the pure doctrine emphasising that you could understand the doctrine in different ways but one way is the pure way, the true way, the true doctrine.

S: It could be. And choose a lowly place suggests that you prefer the lowly place, you don't just put up with it, you choose it, but how would that work out in practice. A lowly place. How would you choose a lowly place, what would be a lowly place?

Aryamitra: Would it be other than a place of high responsibility and so forth?

S: Perhaps one has to bear in mind the Tibetan manners and customs even Tibetan etiquette. Tibetans are very hierarchy conscious both in a religious sense and in a social sense. For instance they pay very careful attention to seating arrangements. People are seated in accordance with their rank, their position, their general standing in society and in the Sangha. The higher your position, the better your standing, the higher the seat that you're given, even the cup which you are offered differs. I had to find this out dealing with Tibetans in Kalimpong. If you commit any faux pas in this respect you can seriously upset them. You had to know exactly how high somebody's seat should be and exactly what sort of cup they should be served tea in. For instance Tibetan cups are actually chinese cups, so there are broadly speaking three sort of degrees of cup. First of all there's just a plain china cup, then other cups have stands, silver stands which are sort of like saucers with a big foot on and the cup fits on top there. That's the second kind. The third kind is a cup with a lid to it as well as a stand and there are different kinds of lid because the lid will be decorated, the knob at the top of the lid would be a jewel or semi-precious stone and this will differ in value. So the way that you're received, the sort of seat that you're given, the sort of cup you're served with, you can estimate exactly how people, that is to say Tibetans, regard you. So you have to be careful to observe these things when dealing with them. So I had to find out all this. So it's a sort of etiquette that you don't sort of march to your place. If you're very very polite you have to be dragged to your place. People will even sometimes literally seize you by the sleeve and compel you to sit on the higher seat. It's etiquette to sit on a lower seat first and allow yourself to be sort of first to take the higher seat. There's very polite Tibetans, especially in aristocratic circles where minutes are taken up over this sort of performance and sometimes it's a bit of a joke and there's a lot of laughter and someone's dragged eventually to a higher seat and they quite enjoy all this. If you just enter and someone says well please sit down and you just sit down well this is regarded as a terrible sort of faux pas, really lacking in breeding and someone not properly brought up. you must sort of resist. And in the same way when you're served with a second or third cup of tea, you're supposed to put up resistance, but only a token resistance. If you actually refuse they're quite surprised! If someone comes along to fill your cup up with tea and you say, oh no, no no thank-you and you try to cover the cup with your hands but you're actually supposed after a bit of a struggle to take your hands away and they get the tea in! So this sort of social game goes on.

Prasannasiddhi: Does the amount of time you struggle depend on your rank as well?

S: Yes it does. If it's pretty obvious that you're the leading person present and that seat is for you, well it's a bit ridiculous to put up too much sort of resistance but as people sort of go up in the social scale and maybe they've never been given that sort of position before, they're expected to put up quite a bit of resistance and be dragged there mainly by force or apparently by force. So against that sort of background one must read this - "Profit from the pure doctrine and choose a lowly place". Don't be too eager for advancement. Don't be too eager for respect and honour. It suggests all that sort of thing.

Khemananda: Would you say that held true for us in the West?

S: Choose a lowly place. Well we don't have that sort of social system, not to that extent so how would it work out, how would it work out in the FWBO? Is there a lowly place for you to choose anyway where everyone is so democratic?

Ratnaketu: It the back seat of the van!

S: Yes, maybe it is. Sometimes I've been quite amused the way in which, automatically, mitras all sort of pile into the back of the van and the Order member takes his seat in front. I've sometimes wondered whether that was quite right in all cases. Or is it that Order members always get a second helping first or a bigger piece of cake. I think that the general rule is don't sort of give yourself airs of any kind on account of your alleged knowledge or practice of the Dharma.

Then it says "Profit from your knowledge and meditate upon the guardian gods". I think this meditation upon the guardian gods stands for practice in general. Profit from your knowledge, your theoretical knowledge by actually putting the teaching into practice, whether it's by observing the precepts or meditating, whether on guardian gods or bodhisattvas or buddhas or whatever, but profit from your knowledge by actually putting it into practice.(Pause)

Then he says "profit from your discontent, withdraw yourself from this samsaric world". What sort of situation is the Chinese Thrush referring to here? Very often people get discontented, discontented with the world but they don't do anything about it, they just go on grumbling. If you're really discontented, if that's really the way you fell well profit from that feeling of discontent. Give up the world, just go forth, go for refuge, start leading a spiritual life. Don't merely stew in your own discontent. Do something about it. Take positive action.

Ratnaketu: It's almost like all of them so far have been turning things that could be disadvantages to advantages, even knowledge could be a disadvantage, possessions and even the Dharma if you don't practice it.

S: It's wasted. It might just as well not be there. You often meet people who sort of grumble but they never do anything about anything. So if you have occasion to grumble about the world well do something about it. Withdraw yourself from it.(Pause)

What about this last line, "Profit from the Buddha, awake to the essence of absolute thought". I'm not sure what the technical term in Tibetan is for this essence of absolute thought but roughly it means Buddhahood, it means Enlightenment. So profit from the Buddha and attain Enlightenment. That's what the Buddha appeared in the world for so to speak. That's why the Buddha gained Enlightenment, so that others also could gain Enlightenment. So if you don't gain Enlightenment, you're not profiting from the Buddha. The Buddha has lived in vain so to speak. So benefit from the fact that someone has gained Enlightenment before you, follow in his footsteps, gain Enlightenment yourself. In other words profit from the Buddha, profit from the fact that a Buddha has lived in the world, that an enlightened being has lived in the world, and you do that by gaining Enlightenment yourself. Otherwise it's just like being the son of a rich father who leaves you millions and millions of pounds and you just leave it lying in the bank. You don't do anything with it. You don't profit from it. So the Buddha has left say an infinite spiritual treasure but one doesn't profit from it, one doesn't use it, doesn't spend it, doesn't enjoy it. In other words one doesn't gain enlightenment, doesn't become like the Buddha.(Pause)

Alright let's hear what the Peacock has to say.

Khemananda: "Next the Peacock in all his splendour rose, displayed his tail three times and said: *kog go kog go*, which means, *yours is the loss, yours is the loss.*

"If you must dwell in the state of woe, - yours is the loss of happiness.

If you cannot have the Good Law, - yours is the loss of the Buddha.

If you have no will to give, - yours is the loss of pleasure in possessions.

If nothing vital is achieved, - yours is the loss of your labour.

In dealing with the treacherous, - yours is the loss of confidence.

In new friendships, - yours is the loss of sureness in their constancy.

As for the self-complacent, - theirs is the loss of judgement;

As for the hate-ridden, - theirs is the loss of higher opportunities;

As for the mean, - theirs is the loss of chance to offer gifts;

As for the stubborn, - theirs is the loss of self-possession;

As for the mistrustful, - theirs is the loss of logical abilities;

As for the defiled, - theirs is the loss of the Good Law;

As for the disbelievers, - theirs is the loss of all miraculous blessings;

For no one can change the laws of this samsaric world."

S: So what is the basic point here, underlying all these particular references, all these particular applications? The basic point seems to be that if the karma is yours the effect will be yours, the vipaka will be yours. If you set the cause in motion you have to experience the effects. "If you must dwell in a state of woe, yours is the loss of happiness". As if to say well if you insist on dwelling in a state of woe, if you insist in performing those unskilful actions which will lead you to a state of woe, a state of suffering, then the loss of happiness will be yours. You will lose happiness. Nobody else will, just you. You have to suffer from the consequences of your own actions, not anybody else. You notice how the peacock says, if you must dwell in a state of woe, as if to say well if you insist on doing that, if you insist on performing unskilful actions, well then you have to accept the consequences. In the same way with "If you cannot have the Good Law, yours is the loss of the Buddha". If you cannot have means if you don't care to make the effort to have. Then yours will be the loss of the Buddha, yours will be the loss of Enlightenment. If you don't take the trouble to practice the Dharma then the loss of Enlightenment will be yours. Amoghavajra: This seems to be the other side of the "Well might one despair".

S: Then it says "if you have no will to give yours is the loss of pleasure in possessions". Presumably in a future life. If you don't wish to give then you will lose in future life the opportunity of enjoying the pleasure in having possessions, because it's from your generosity in this life that your possessions in a future life will come. I assume that that is the meaning.

Ratnaketu: What I thought was that sometimes if you've got a possession and you don't share it it does go a bit sour on you even in this life.

S: Well with some people, maybe not with everybody.

Prasannasiddhi: If you read a good book and you can't share what you've read it does detract. If you can share what you've read in a book to someone else that makes it.....

S: In the case of something like what you've understood in that way well you can share without losing, you can give without having to give away. In the case of material possession you can't sort of give without giving away. I think it refers here more to the giving of material things. The usual sort of line of thinking is if you give then you lose the pleasure of possession but the traditional Buddhist view is that if you give you gain the pleasure of possession because by giving you create a karma which ensures that you do possess things later on.

Prasannasiddhi: But that seems a little kind of...you give so that you can get something later on in a way seems a little sort of...

S: That is in a way the traditional view.

Ratnaketu: What would be the point because say if you've got £50 and you think well I'll give now do you expect to get £60 later on or £40.

S: Some would expect to get £100.

Ratnaketu: Because if you believe that you're only going to get £40 then there's no point in giving at all, but then if your sole reason for giving is that you're going to get more it still seems a bit strange.

S: Yes it probably is strange if that is a sole reason because someone would have to have great faith to give in that way. If you had that sort of faith maybe you couldn't give in that sort of way. But Buddhists traditionally do believe that by dana you gain punya and that punya ensures that you are in future in an even better situation than the one that you are in now, that is much the traditional way of looking at things.

Prasannasiddhi: It's a bit as if that's the kind of by product. It's a bit like pleasure. You don't go after pleasure itself, you go after the ideal in a way and perhaps you give because you enjoy seeing other people being happy, and the byproduct may be that you're acquiring lots of merit.

S: There's no doubt though that in Buddhist countries, even today, people do go, as it were, in pursuit of punya. This is very much the attitude of the lay person. They give especially to the monks specifically so that they can gain punya.

Ratnaketu: But will they?

S: Well that's another question.

Ratnaketu: Because isn't it really the mental state rather than the action, so if you're not really giving you're just transferring materials in order to gain something, not out the mental state of generosity.

S: But they will say well that is giving because you have to act upon it and it's not easy to give anything. You're giving away your precious material possessions. They do believe that they are making or earning punya.

Ratnaketu: I was meaning I can imagine if it is of some sacrifice to themselves, I imagine some really rich person giving away some money which they don't really even need, they don't feel it, and thinking by that that they're actually having a generous mind.

S: I think they would think that because they would think well I've worked and I've earned all this money by my skill and my cleverness and here I am giving it away for a good purpose. Yes I think from what I've seen that they do feel that they are being very generous. You might not feel

it but they usually do. I'm not saying that people give just for the sake of punya in a cold-blooded sort of way, no they definitely get some pleasure out of giving but their eye is mainly on the punya, in most cases which is perhaps not quite as it should be but that is what happens,

Prasannasiddhi: So that's actually what this statement refers to.

S: I won't say that because since it's a translation it's difficult to be absolutely certain what it means but it certainly can bear that meaning. One could argue that if you are not generous then you lose the enjoyment even of the possessions that you have. You could argue in that way but I'm not sure that the actual line intends to mean that.

Amoghacitta: It does imply that if you had no will to give therefore you want to keep the object because you're attached to it. Presumably you can't get pleasure from something just because you're attached to it but by clinging to it.(unclear)

S: If you've not will to give well supposing you give up everything then the second half of the sentence - yours is the loss of pleasure in possessions - will be nullified. So it does seem to suggest that you don't have any will to give, you hang on to your possessions but nonetheless you can enjoy them. In view of the general Buddhist teaching about karma and about dana and about punya I say that this probably does mean that if you don't have any will to give then you'll just not have the opportunity of enjoying possessions in the future. I think it's more likely to mean that even though one can't be absolutely certain.

Then "if nothing vital is achieved", nothing of real significance, "yours is the loss of your labour". That's fairly straightforward.

And what about "In dealing with the treacherous, yours is the loss of confidence - how is that?"

Amoghavajra: You lose your confidence in other people because

S: It could also be that other people lose their confidence in you, just because you are dealing with treacherous people. It could be either probably.

Prasannasiddhi: It just sort of reflects the people you associate are going to have an effect on you both ways.

S: If you associate with people who can't really be trusted well you may end up thinking that no one can be trusted. You may develop a sort of habitual attitude of distrust and lose your confidence in people altogether.

What about this one. "In new friendship yours is the loss of sureness in their constancy"> Why new friendship and how does one lose sureness in their constancy?

Silaratna: It seems to come back to the thing where you said it takes a long time really to get to know someone, to get to know them properly.

S: It's as if to say well if you always insist on changing your friends, if you don't have any old friends, if you're always making new friends, well you'll never know anybody long enough to be able to gain any sureness in their constancy, their fidelity. This time element in friendship seems to be very very important, because as we've seen formerly, trust is an important element in friendship or confidence is an important element but you can only know whether you can trust someone if you've known them over a certain period and been with them in certain situations, even maybe in certain emergencies, or at least certain exigencies. It does seem as though, other factors being equal so to speak, that time is an essential ingredient in friendship. There can't be

any such thing as a hasty friendship or very strictly speaking even a new friendship. If it's new in the full sense it can't be a friendship. Friendships take time to develop. Maybe this is one of the less desirable features of the modern world, that people can get away from one another so quickly and easily. It's so easy to travel, it's so easy to meet new people, make new friends in a sense. You give yourself no time to develop any relationships in depth. You're always on the move.

Ratnaketu: It's also one of the faults of the FWBO. Too many centres to start, too many projects in different places....

S: Well one doesn't have to go. One is free to stay in one place for ten or even twenty years if one so wishes.

Khemananda: And also you could start the new centre with your friends who are old friends. You're sure of a really good basis because you know them.

S: Well the place and the people don't necessarily go together. You can change place without changing the people. You take your old friends with you if they'll go of course! I suppose it depends upon one's priorities really. If you give overriding importance to your friendship with somebody well you'll just go wherever they go presumably in order to keep it up or to continue to work on it. Or they would stay with you or go wherever you go if they feel the same way. Do you think people do tend to change their friends anyway, in the sense that they were getting tired of their old friends and wanting a bit of a change?

Prasannasiddhi: It was certainly my experience prior to coming into the FWBO, at least with close friendship it seems like you would have a close friendship with one person for maybe about a year and a half. That's the way things sort of went in my circle, and then it would kind of peter out but you would strike up a friendship with someone else. But nothing seemed to last. It might have lasted.

S: But doesn't that sort of thing tend to happen when you are still quite young and you're just sort of exploring this area. Maybe you just want a bit of companionship, you just want someone to go around with. You don't want to go around on your own but it takes you maybe a year or two years to discover that you don't really have many interests in common.

Silaratna: I've got a friend who I've known for about nine years now and he's not actually involved in the FWBO. I do find that whenever I meet him now we don't seem to have to catch up at all. We can take each other very much on how we are every time. It seems to have been something that's had to be established over the years I've known him.

S: But next time he meets you he might have a bit of catching up to do! It would be strange if he didn't have. If he could catch up with you well that would say quite a lot for him.

What about this next one, "as for the self-complacent, theirs is the loss of judgement". Why should loss of judgement be the consequence of self-complacency. What is self-complacency, what is judgement?

: Thinking that you know, thinking that you understand.

S: You don't sort of choose, you don't sort of care to exercise your judgement, perhaps you don't even think it necessary. you think you've understood already, you know all about it, you've come to your conclusion, so if you are lazy in this sort of way well your power of judgement will not develop or any power of judgement that you had will just diminish, will just wither away, if you're not giving it any exercise. You have to accustom yourself really to thinking about things,

weighing up things, trying to come to a reasoned conclusion, taking into account all the evidence, all the facts, all the different aspects of the situation. If you're self-complacent and if you think well you've understood it alright, there's no need to think about it too much, well you will lose the power of judgement eventually one would think. Just as if you don't reason well you'll lose your reasoning capacity. Judgement is a bit like friendship in that it needs time, well first of all it needs time for you to make up your mind and perhaps you yourself need to have lived quite a few years to be able to come to considered judgements on certain matters because there are so many things to be taken into consideration, so many things that we have to learn about and hear about at least first before you can finally make up your minds on certain questions before you can finally arrive at a judgement.

One could say that young men tend to be a bit hasty in their judgements, a bit self-complacent. They think they know it all. Old men aren't quite so sure. They think that maybe they don't know it all, they begin to have their doubts. Socrates came to the conclusion that the Delphic oracle had hailed him as the wisest of the Greeks because he at least knew that he didn't know. Others thought that they did. So I think the older or at least the more experienced one becomes, the slower one is in forming judgements, coming to very definite conclusions. One waits for the evidence to accumulate, one waits for further information, better information perhaps.

Prasannasiddhi: Presuming one is getting wiser as one get older.

S: Presumably and hopefully. Of course one mustn't at the same time procrastinate and put off ever arriving at a conclusion or ever forming a judgement. Sometimes one has to. Circumstances require one too, even though one may feel that one's knowledge isn't complete.

And what about this, "As for the hate-ridden, theirs is the loss of higher opportunities". What higher opportunities?

Khemananda: The spiritual life. They've cut themselves off from it.

S: Yes, yes. This does suggest that hate is the main obstacle to higher opportunities. This reminds one very much of the Mahayana point of view, that in the case of the bodhisattva hatred is the most serious of all faults, the most serious of all vices. Because it cuts you off from other beings and as a bodhisattva, well, he's supposed to have a great deal to do with other beings. I think there is a Mahayana sutra which says that offenses or faults based upon greed are not nearly as serious as those based upon hatred or aversion because greed at least shows some affinity for beings, whereas hatred doesn't show any affinity for them at all. Please don't use this as a rationalisation! But this is what the Mahayana does say, that hatred is even more opposed to the bodhisattva vow and the bodhisattva ideal than is greed or craving. So as for the hate-ridden, theirs is the loss of higher opportunities. No prospect of being a bodhisattva for them, no prospect of following the bodhisattva path.(Pause)

Aryamitra: Is that the same with the greed types and hate types. Could you say that?

S: Well yes, in respect of the bodhisattva ideal, perhaps one could, though of course a hate type is not necessarily one who actually indulges in hatred. What about the next line, "As for the mean, theirs is the loss of chance to offer gifts", That's very much like that previous one - "if you have no will to give yours is the loss of pleasure in possessions". If you are mean if you don't actually give anything well you've lost the opportunity of practising dana, at least that, and perhaps you won't be rich in a future life and then in any case have no chance to offer gifts.

Silaratna: It's almost like the pleasure that comes from possessions, one of the pleasures of possessions is really that you can give them away.

S: What about that next one then, "as for the stubborn, theirs is the loss of self-possession". What's the connection here? Why should the loss of self-possession be the consequence of stubbornness. What does one mean by stubbornness or by self-possession for that matter. What does stubborn mean?

Khemananda: Just holding on, guarding your position and view regardless...

S: Yes, unyielding, refusing to be convinced. So how do stubborn people lose their self-possession? What is self-possession in the ordinary sense?

Silaratna: Mindfulness.

S: Yes it's mindfulness but maybe more than mindfulness. There's self control. So how is it that the stubborn lose their mindfulness and self-control. There's presence of mind, that's probably the better equivalent to self-possession. Why is it that the stubborn lose their self-possession, their presence of mind?

Amoghavajra: They sort of fossilise.

S: Ah, they fossilise, yes. They become hardened, rigid, they're no longer therefore really masters of themselves. One could look at it in that way. Though the connection doesn't seem completely clear even so.

Khemananda: I would have thought they might actually recognise the truth in what the other person was saying but would really kind of resist that and almost lose contact with themselves. I don't know if that's over interpreting it.

S: One could look at it in another way, that loss of self-possession sometimes means loss of self control in the sense of becoming angry. You just lose your self-possession, lose your self-control. So if you are very very stubborn and people keep pressing you because you're stubborn, trying to convince you well then you may eventually explode and just lose your self-possession, lose your self control, become very angry. That also does happen, doesn't it. Because you're resisting and resisting and in the end you can't logically resist though you want to go on resisting, so you just become angry, you just explode, you blow up. Possibly it means that.

Aryamitra: It does seem a bit funny because I think the stubborn people are quite often stubborn because they feel a certain idea of self control but they don't want to lose,

S: Well they ought to stick to their own point. Once they've sort of said something, they have to stick to it regardless of whether it's right or wrong as though their self respect demands that once they've adopted a certain position they can't change.

What about the mistrustful then in the next line, "As for the mistrustful, theirs is the loss of logical abilities". How is that. What's the connection here? Logical abilities presumably mean the ability to reason.

Ratnaketu: Perhaps because in a way they're being unreasonable, they're not behaving in a logical way.

S: Yes, those who are sort of irrationally mistrustful then it would mean.

Prasannasiddhi: He's sort of wondering, not even looking. If someone says something you're not even looking at what he says, you're just thinking ah what's he really like, you don't trust.....

S: It's more you don't trust your own reasoning capacity to work it out or to be able to work it out. You're so overpowered by your feelings of mistrust you don't even use your own mind, your own rational capacity. You can see this in people on certain occasions. They're so overcome by their irrational emotions, whether of mistrust or any other that they just can't think straight, they can't reason, they can't draw conclusions, they can't be logical. You can actually see this happening.

Ratnaketu: Especially with petty criminals.

S: I haven't had any contact with them recently. I was actually thinking of people within the Movement. (laughter) I'm sorry to say, even one or two Order members. It's if your mistrust is very deep you can't even look at the evidence in a rational sort of way.

Aryamitra: Well maybe you even start twisting...

S: You can't twist logic itself but you can produce something that looks like logic but which really isn't. A sort of pseudo logic. I used to find that with some of the Tibetans, especially with Tibetan officials who are members of the aristocracy. They were very mistrustful. I think they did in some cases lose their logical abilities. They were so mistrustful of one another because in the small world of Lhasa, especially of Lhasa politics, there was so much plotting and counter-plotting, no one trusted anybody else. They used to put all sorts of constructions on other people's actions and give very elaborate sort of explanations of why they were doing certain things which in a sense were logical but on the other hand which were usually completely wide of the mark.

Aryamitra: There's a story of the, I think some German propaganda used to say Churchill was in the Admiralty in the First World War and he was also in the Second World War, therefore Churchill started the war, which is not logical at all.

S: You find also for instance, talking about mistrust, people in India sometimes quite mistrust foreigners and think they must be spies and sometimes they're deeply convinced of this. For instance in Kalimpong some local people were convinced that people who came to Kalimpong to study Tibetan Buddhism couldn't possibly be genuine. Who'd want to come to a place like Kalimpong, a one horse little town, a one mule little town like Kalimpong, who on earth in their senses who had the opportunity of living in London or New York would possibly want to come to Kalimpong and study Tibetan! and Buddhism! Who'd want to study those things! They must have come here for spying. This is how people would reason in some cases. They'd be genuinely convinced of that, that these people could not possibly have come here just to study Buddhism, that's all just a bluff, it's just a bluff, they're just spies and they were convinced of that.

Silaratna: Did you have this with you at all?

S: Not so much because I was there a long time so I think people came to trust me, though on the other hand a few people might have trusted me less just because I'd stayed on there longer but they certainly did mistrust people who just came for short period, studying Buddhism or research into Tibetan, things like that. They were definitely not trusted.

Ratnaketu: They thought well why come to this small little town. They didn't think well what is there to spy on!

S: Oh no, in fact that was where the irrationality came in. No, but certainly at the beginning of my stay there was absolutely nothing to spy on whatever. But logic doesn't concern such people because there's is the loss of logical abilities on account on their mistrustfulness. If you'd asked them what is there in Kalimpong to spy on what would they say? Ah, there must be something, maybe we don't even know of anything, otherwise why should they come here? After all, they are spies. Arguing in a circle.

End of tape 12