

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 [Mitrans](#). 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

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I do know that some people are suspected of being spies for the Americans and also for the communists at the same time. It is as irrational, as illogical as that. (pause)

Anyway, we've illustrated this sufficiently. "As for the mistrustful, theirs is the loss of logical abilities. As to the defiled, theirs is the loss of the Good Law." Defiled meaning, presumably, those who have defilements or klesas or afflictions. So theirs is the loss of the Good Law, they are unable to practise the dharma. (very long pause)

Alright, the last of these lines. "As for the disbelievers, theirs is the loss of all miraculous blessings." In other words, if you don't have faith and devotion how can you expect any blessings from Buddhas and Bodhisattvas? No one can change the laws of this samsaric world. The law which is (unclear) 'as you sow, so shall you also reap'. In the words of St Paul, I'm afraid. If you don't break the cause you cannot expect, you cannot hope to experience the effect.(very long pause)

Anyway, anything further to consider in the Peacock's speech? Time is practically up.

Aryamitra: He just seems to be saying if you don't produce skilful actions and thoughts in one way or another you won't gain anything.

S: And yours is the loss. Nobody else will suffer the loss, you will. (very long pause). Well, I think we'll leave it there for today. Only two more days left now.

S: Alright, page 32. The speech of the Indian Kestrel.

Silabhadra: "The Indian Kestrel then rose and said: Ki ki.
"Observe this king who has lived too long. He is now no more thana
common man, Ki ki.
Observe this man not content with what he has. He will surely be crushed
by his foes, Ki ki.
Observe this man who ignores the fruits of his evil deeds. He will surely
go to hell, Ki ki.
Observe this man who calculates on staying here for ever. He will surely
be ensnared by death, Ki ki.
Observe these wild men, robbers and thieves. They will surely be
punished by the judge,
Ki ki.
Observe these unrighteous men of false views. They are a disgrace to the
Three Treasures, Ki ki.
All those who see their evil thoughts and deeds accumulate before their
eyes, - let them be mindful of the consequences, Ki ki."

S: So most of these lines deal with the inevitability of the consequences of one's own actions. 'Observe this king who has lived too long. He is now no more than a common man.' What do you think this means? What sort of situation does this refer to? In what sense has the king lived too long?

Silabhadra: He is getting too old to fulfil his duties, perhaps.

S: Either too old to fulfil his duties, or he's lived to see his power taken away. Maybe he's lived only to be dethroned so that he's now no more than a common man.

What about the next one, 'Observe this man, not content with what he has. He will surely be crushed by his foes.' Well, how will that come about?

Aryamitra: Well, if he's not content he'll be after others'...

S: He'll be trying to increase his possessions or extend his territories, and that would surely bring about his downfall eventually.

And what about the man who 'ignores the fruits of his evil deeds' Well that's pretty obvious. It says, 'he will surely go to hell.' That is to say, the mere fact that you ignore the fruits of your evil deeds doesn't prevent them from having consequences.

Really, it's as though in your eagerness for a certain situation or a certain experience, you just ignore the inevitability of the consequences. No doubt the king wanted to go on living very long, but he overlooked the fact that though he might go on living, he wouldn't necessarily be a king. In the same way, the man not content with what he has goes on increasing his possessions, maybe increasing his territory, and he overlooks the fact that that is going to get him into difficulties. In the same way, someone commits evil deeds, ignores that fact that they're going to land him in the state of suffering. One might say that it's the easiest thing in the world to overlook the consequences, or at least the possible consequences of one's own action. At the time of performing the action, you are so immersed in it, so intent on it, so concerned with a particular kind of result or experience that you overlook completely, you ignore completely what the consequences of what you're doing may be, or perhaps almost certainly will be.

Aryamitra: this must be what we do most of the time. If one were not performing skilful actions.

S: Well yes, because no one willingly lands themselves in suffering, and unskilful actions almost invariably bring about suffering. So presumably, when one performs the unskilful actions one is forgetful of, or at least ignoring the fact that, those unpleasant consequences will ensue.

But one does find this, that most people are so completely taken up with what they're doing, so blinded even, they just can't even think about consequences. what to speak of ignoring it, doesn't even think of them. It's as though it doesn't even occur to them that there are such things as consequences. (pause) As when, perhaps, for instance, you steal something, you are tempted by something. It seems easy just to take it, maybe to shoplift. At the time it doesn't occur to you the very heavy consequences. You've just yielded, as it were, to momentary temptation without a thought. (pause)

And then, 'Observe this man who calculates on staying here forever. He will surely be ensnared by death.' That was something which, no doubt, he didn't look for. Especially when it actually happens.

And then, 'Observe these wild men, robbers and thieves. They will surely be punished by the judge.' Very often people who live by theft, they're pretty confident that they are going to get away with it. Sometimes, of course, they do unfortunately under the conditions of modern society. But more often than not, they don't - they're punished, they don't escape. Even if they escape the judge, they don't escape the Yamaraja. They don't escape judgement, so to speak, after death or even during this lifetime in other ways.

Prasannasiddhi: And they are setting up conditions. If you thief things and you get away with it, you are setting up a condition so it's sort of an aspect, perhaps, of society; that people do thief, and if that built up, the society would revert to a, you would lose your ethical basis, I would think. So they're sort of setting up conditions.

S: Yes, too many people getting away with it too much of the time, and so then honest men would be in a minority and then you wouldn't have an honest society. Society would no more be based on law, no more be based on any ethical principle. (unclear) the law of the jungle.

And then, 'Observe these unrighteous men of false views. They are a disgrace to the Three Treasures.' Presumably the text is referring to purely nominal Buddhists who live unrighteously and entertain false views. They're wrong both in theory and in practice. It doesn't even say what the consequences are. Perhaps the consequences are too awful to contemplate. They are simply a disgrace to the Three Treasures, in which they profess to take refuge. Three treasures, of course, means Three Jewels.

And then the text summarises; 'All those who see their evil thoughts and deeds accumulate before their eyes - let them be mindful of the consequences.' That's a very basic point, and I've dwelt on it before. But it's one that people very easily ignore. To say what I said yesterday in the same words, one has to remember that actions have consequences, all actions have consequences. You never actually get away with anything. You might think that you do (laughter) but you don't. Not in the long run. You can even be very clever, you can outwit other people, you can outwit society, you can outwit the law, you can outwit the police, you can outwit even your own conscience, but you can't outwit the law of karma. That's much too clever for you.(pause)

Silaratna: Seems to be a really important thing, you know, that, say for us dealing with the people who are coming into the Dharma, that that point you emphasise, really emphasise it; the consequences of your actions.

S: But that's another simple point, that's the sort of third simple point that has come up in these two study groups. What were the other two? I mentioned them the other day, what were they? Very simple basic points that one needed to emphasise on a wide scale. What were these?

Khemananda: One was about happiness, that you're responsible for your happiness. It's a

S: (interrupting) You're responsible for your own mental state, yes.

Khemananda: You can't get it from out there.

S: So today we're saying, you know, actions do have consequences. But what's that third basic simple point?

Khemananda: Was it something to do with leisure?

S: Ah, yes, that's right. yes, how to use one's leisure, the right use of leisure. These were the things, these were the points that one needed to raise and to discuss with and clarify with as many people as possible, before one started talking about Buddhism or the Four Truths, or the Eightfold Path. The right use of leisure, that you are responsible for your own mental state, and that actions do have consequences, that your actions do have consequences. It's as though we take a lot for granted. In a way, the Dharma takes a lot for granted - those are basic underlying principles which aren't always made fully explicit. (long pause)

Can anybody think of any unskilful action they ever performed where there were no consequences at all - either objectively or subjectively? Did you manage to get away with anything? (laughter) completely?

Aryamitra: It's difficult to say really, isn't it, because some things are very subtle.

Silaratna: Some things might still be coming round.

(several unclear voices talking at once)

S: You might even go back to Scotland or to England to confront them. (laughter) Someone says, as they are looking through some papers, 'do you remember when you....?' (laughter)

Prasannasiddhi: But you did mention earlier in the study that you can actually kind of nullify karma, if you just set up such positive conditions that actually, in a way, you can...

S: Yes, you don't exactly nullify it, you sort of counterbalance it, it's....

Prasannasiddhi: (interrupting) It just loses its weight because of the weight of something you did that's skilful.

S: In other words, you always have to make sure you have a sort of surplus of positive karma in hand, as it were.

Aryamitra: Soon as you have so much merit, you know...

S: Perhaps one shouldn't think in those terms too literally. But nonetheless, there is a certain amount of balancing out, as it were.

Ratnaketu: There's one really simple reason for meditating every morning - because you don't know what's going to happen during the day.

S: That's true.

Ratnaketu: If you haven't meditated in the morning.

S: Or even giving dana every day- of course if you have anything to give. At least meditation doesn't cost anything! Well, hopefully those who've spent three months here will have accumulated so much good karma that they'll have a heavy balance to their credit, which I hope they won't go and squander as soon as they get back to wherever they came from.

Ratnaketu: Pity you can't cash it in for money like you can change lira into pounds.

S: You can always just turn it into happiness because when you cash good karma, that's what you get, in a sense, happiness.

Well, what do you think it is - to go into this a little, just for a moment - what do you think it is that compels people almost, or causes them certainly just to ignore the consequences of their own action - in those cases where the action is unskilful?

Aryamitra: Could it be something to do with, or at least sometimes, their drives are frustrated or their desires are frustrated?

Amoghacitta: One knows about karma intellectually, but your emotions are really the driving factor.

S: Yes, yes. The present pleasure can become all important or the present gratification can become all important.

Amoghacitta: Your perspective becomes distorted.

S: Yes, or you, in fact, don't have any perspective left at all.

Prasannasiddhi: A lot of people have never had any perspective in the first place, no intellectual (unclear) In fact, the things they do get drive them in the direction of unskilful states right from the start. Get into marriage and things.

S: Anyway, there isn't anything especially new, I think, in this particular speech. All these points have been made before in one way or another. So maybe we should pass on to the speeches of the parrot, who's apparently going to make his a very long speech, but this is the last of the speeches before the cuckoo speaks again.

Prasannasiddhi: "Then from the centre of the ranks rose the parrot, skilled in speech, and said:

*"Listen you beings of this samsaric world:
What you desire is happiness, what you find is grief.
While you inhabit a state of woe, salvation is not yet at hand.
Thinking on this must make me sad.
I now recall the good, the unique Law;
Hear it you denizens of this samsaric world,
Perennial for time without beginning.
Because its benefits are so immense,
Let us here recall that unique Dharma:
These ills in our state of woe are but the fruits of evil deeds,
The karmic outcome of your own accumulated acts:*

*For you and only you could make them'.
So now strip off the veil that clouds your thoughts:
This life, like dew on grass, is but impermanent,
And your remaining here forever out of question.
So here and now, think on these things, and make your effort!
'The pain from heat and cold in hell,
The hunger and the thirst which Pretas feel,
All are the fruits of evil deeds.'. So has the Muni spoken.
Here, from within my heart, I make the vow to shun all evil, to
achieve the good.
From deep within my heart I seek my refuge in the Three Treasure
ever changeless,
Never failing, never fading,
Our precious ally through the whole of time.
In my mind, now free from doubt, is faith established.
Resolved to know the holy Dharma,
I now reject all things in this samsaric world.
And so, you great and noble bird,
We, this assembly, beg you grant us
Your esteemed instruction, teach us to understand the nature of
all life!'"*

So he spoke and made three salutations."

S: Well, most of the points that the parrot makes have been made before, but there is one difference. Do you see what it is? He says something or does something that nobody has done before, which none of the birds has done before.

Buddhapalita: He's asking to go for refuge.

S: Yes. Or he actually does go for refuge, doesn't he? And he makes a vow. This reminds me of what I was saying in that talk, the edited transcript of which I read out on Sangha day, about what used to happen in the Buddha's own day. That somebody heard the Buddha speaking, somebody heard the Dharma from the Buddha and was very deeply impressed. In fact, was overwhelmed by that, and his emotional response to that experience was that he went for refuge. So, much the same sort of thing seems to happen in the case of the parrot. All the birds have had some sort of spiritual experience after listening to the cuckoo, the great bird, and the parrot also. But it seems that the parrot is the only one that comes to the point of actually going for refuge, or making a vow. Do you see what I mean? So, having in a way recapitulated the main points that everybody has made the parrot, as it were, draws it more to a conclusion, or makes the appropriate emotional response and says, 'Here from within my heart, I make the vow to shun all evil, to achieve the good.' That's a little bit like that famous verse from the Dhammapada; Sabbapapassa akarunum etc'. The non-doing of all evil, the accomplishment of good, the purification of the heart. So he makes that vow. Then he says, 'From deep within my heart I seek my refuge in the Three Treasures, ever changeless, never failing, never fading, our precious ally through the whole of time.' What do you think that means - 'our precious ally through the whole of time'?

Silaratna: That the Dharma is perennial.

S: Yes. He does even mention that earlier on; 'I now recall the good, the unique law. Here it you denizens of this samsaric world. Perennial, for time without beginning,' that's akaliko. Perennial literally means springing up again and again, year after year. So, however long you live, or however many births and rebirths you may have, through the whole of time even, the three jewels will always be your precious ally, your support, your friend, your helper. Then he says, 'In my

mind now free from doubt is faith established. Resolved to know the holy Dharma, I now reject all things in this samsaric world.'

So several things happen here for the parrot. In having understood the Teaching, having experienced something of it, having had some element of Perfect Vision, perhaps, he makes a vow to shun all evil, to achieve the good. He goes for refuge. He declares that his mind is free from doubt, that faith is established. He's resolved to know the holy Dharma, he rejects all things in this samsaric world. He experiences a sort of revulsion, he withdraws. He disentangles himself from samsaric existence, and then he waits for further instruction on behalf of himself and for the whole assembly.

Aryamitra: In the line, 'In my mind, now free from doubt, is faith established', it's a bit like in dependence upon suffering - seeing what (unclear) were talking about, arises faith.

S: Yes, right, good. (long pause).

Any particular point arising from the parrot's speech? Most of what he says in the first part of his speech is a recapitulation of some of the things that have been said before by other birds.

Silabhadra: He also says, earlier in the speech, 'Thinking on this must make me sad', which implies an element of compassion arising.

S: Yes, yes. Again, it reminds me of the passage from a Chinese translation of a sutra - translated by Arthur Whaley - where the Buddha is speaking and where each line concludes with, 'and for this he was moved to pity.' Whereas the Buddha sees people desirous of happiness, doing those very things which will lead to suffering. And that is a pity. Sometimes, one feels this in a way when people come to one and relate the troubles that they are having with their relationships, because it's clear that they entered into the relationship, they plunged right into the relationship looking for some kind of happiness, or some kind of bliss even, at least something positive. But very often it hasn't turned out that way. Sometimes they just don't understand why that is so. And they entered upon it with sort of high hopes, but those hopes haven't been fulfilled. The parrot sums it up again, in a way, by saying, 'what you desire is happiness' referring to beings in this samsaric world, 'what you desire is happiness, what you find is grief', because you go about it so unskillfully. Not that happiness cannot be found, but it certainly can't be found in the way that you try to find it.

'Law' here translates the word 'Dharma', and you notice that twice the Dharma is described as unique. Do you think there's any special significance attaching to that?

Khemananda: It's to emphasise it's the only thing to get you out of - there's nothing else to get you out of samsara.

S: Yes. (pause) The Buddha, according to the Mahaparinibbana sutta of the Pali canon, shortly before his final passing away, says that there is no true sammana, there's no true religious person outside the eightfold path. So this is not the sort of narrow sectarian statement that there is no salvation outside Buddhism. What it means is that unless certain principles are fulfilled, that there is no salvation, there is no Enlightenment. Unless you live in a particular way, unless you have a certain kind of understanding, a certain kind of realisation, there's going to be no salvation for you, no Enlightenment. So the Dharma means the sum total of those principles which conduce to Enlightenment. And those principles are, of course, embodied in the historical tradition which we call Buddhism, at least to a great extent - perhaps not perfectly. Well almost certainly not perfectly. And this is perhaps a question with which you may be confronted, if you have any contact with the public. They might even ask, 'In what respect is Buddhism unique? How does it differ from Christianity?' Some people might even try to say that there's nothing in

Buddhism that's not found in Christianity. I remember I had an experience of this sort myself some years ago - shortly after my return from India and I was not, perhaps, so well versed in the ways of some of our Christian friends as I've since become. But I was invited to give a talk at a church somewhere up in Hampstead. And it was to a group of young people who were sort of being 'run' - if that's the right word - by a quite well known Christian clergyman called the Reverend Joseph McCulloch - clearly a Scotsman. Has anyone heard of Joseph McCulloch? He's quite well known, he's the vicar of St Mary le Bow in the Strand, quite an old, well-known church, and he's a quite active sort of person in the City of London, quite a public figure. And he holds lunch-time debates with various people, well-known in public life, in his church. You've not heard about these? Perhaps they're not as well-known as I thought they were! But anyway, in a certain circle - clearly a circle that doesn't include the FWBO - he's a quite well-known figure. So he was there, I gave my talk, and I think this question arose. Somebody asked me, 'well, what is there in Buddhism that there is not in Christianity?' So he was there, apparently to counteract any influence I might be having. So, rather to my astonishment whatever I said about Buddhism he said, 'well, Christianity teaches that too.' He said that without turning a hair, 'well, it's found in Christianity too, you don't have to become a Buddhist to believe that, or practice that.' So I thought, anyway, I'll try him, so I said, 'what about karma and rebirth - Christianity teaches that? What about the anatma doctrine? "Christianity teaches that?" (laughter) He said it completely with confidence. So, for once in my life, I didn't know quite what to say. Well, I knew what to say, but I knew I shouldn't say it! (laughter) I wanted to say, well I think you're being completely dishonest - and you know it. And he must have known it. But he just wanted - well he didn't want those young people to be left with the impression that there was something in Buddhism that they would not find in Christianity. So supposing one does find oneself in that sort of situation, or supposing one is even asked, what is there in Buddhism that we can't find in Christianity? Why should we change our religion or leave the religion of our ancestors and our own religious culture? It's a very big step to take. Surely all the things that we find in Buddhism are found in Christianity? Well, what would you say to that in reply if you were asked? What is there unique about Buddhism? What is there in Buddhism that you can't find in Christianity? What would you say to that? In what does its uniqueness consist if it's unique? You may well be asked this because, in a way, it's a question of practical (unclear) or a practical upshot.

S: From my early experiences shortly after I returned from India, there's a lot of people, even some who like to call themselves Buddhists, who don't like to think that Buddhism is any different from Christianity. So in what does the distinctiveness, in what does the uniqueness of Buddhism consist?

One needs to give some thought to this question if one's going to have anything to do with the public, or answer questions from the public.

Khemananda: I think I would relate it to - if that person were a Christian - I would say, 'has your Christianity made you more happier? Are you a happier person as a result? Are you fulfilled? Are you growing? Are you becoming more positive? Does it actually work for you?'

S: I think a lot of people, especially the sort who might come along and challenge you, would say 'yes!' Yes, since Jesus came into my life I feel so happy, I'm full of joy. I'm more happy than you are. I'm more happy than any Buddhist. The Buddha can't give you this sort of joy - look, you're not as happy as me! (loud laughter) I think you have to be quite careful in that sort of way. So he'll say, 'Well, Buddhism - are you happy? Are you full of joy since you became a Buddhist. No, you're not as happy as I am. There can't be the same sort of joy that Jesus gives. Jesus is the son of God.' In that way, he'll carry on, and perhaps give a whole spiel perhaps in your class or after your lecture. (laughter)

Amoghacitta: In a way, in Buddhism there's only (unclear) for those who actually want to change, who actually realise that they, that they perhaps even need to change, or definitely want to change.

Ratnaketu: No, Christianity's for people who want to change, people who want to receive the grace of God!

S: Yes, they will quote Christianity insists on change. Yes, Jesus says 'except a man be born again', that's what he said to Nicodemus when Nicodemus came to him in the night, 'except a man be born again he will no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.' So what could be a greater change than that? Jesus is talking about change. And then he might, if he's a bit well read, he might go on to say, 'well, the word which is usually translated as repentance (metanoya) really means 'a turning about', a complete change. So Jesus insists on that, we call it - he might say - conversion, or being born again. Well, I'm a born-again Christian, I've been made new.

And again, he might say, 'Well, Christ in the Book of Revelations says, "Behold, I make all things new", so does Buddhism do that?' They're not such easy people to deal with!

Aryamitra: Couldn't you say, 'yes, they are quite similar.' Say, 'yes, it could be possible, maybe that Christ was influenced by Buddhism.' (laughter) 'After all, Buddhism came before Christianity, so it's quite possible that he was influenced - because there are a few similarities, you know - he does teach ethics and so forth. So it's quite possible, yes, that he could have been trying to practise Buddhism.' (loud laughter)

S: You'd have to be very clever to get away with that one! (laughter) Because they might come back and say, 'well that's only a possibility, no reputable scholar really has said that.'

Amoghacitta: I've successfully encouraged somebody to give up Christianity and make them realise that they are a Buddhist by initially suggesting that by practising Buddhism you could be a better Christian. Because Buddhism is just a series of methods which help you develop, be more compassionate, and so on. And after all, that would be good for a Christian to do. And this did have an effect, and after a while, she realised she was a Buddhist - to her satisfaction.

S: It's just a question of being able to select the right moment of pushing someone over the brink. I suppose that, to get back to the question I asked, that if someone asked you, 'well what is there unique, distinctive about Buddhism as compared with Christianity', what could you say?

Silaratna: I was thinking what about getting more to the Dharma with formulations, like the way that you develop samatha, you develop vipassana. That seems to be quite unique. There's a method there. It implies that you have to have insight.

S: Well yes, one can certainly say that. One can say, 'well, Christianity just gives you abstract ideals, it doesn't tell you how to realise them.' This is a point I have made myself more than once to Christians; that Christ says, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' But supposing you don't love your neighbour, supposing you hate your neighbour. Your Christianity doesn't give you any method whereby you can change your hatred into love. Buddhism does. And this is what we call the mettabhavana. Then again, Christ is supposed to have said, 'you shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free.' But you don't know the Truth now. How shall you know the Truth. How can you go about it? Buddhism says it can be experienced through meditation. On the basis of samatha you develop vipassana - Insight into things as they really are. You come to understand the Truth for yourself. Christianity doesn't teach you how to do that, certainly the Bible doesn't. Certainly Jesus doesn't in the four gospels.

So here you can say Buddhism is unique, it's distinctive. It doesn't just hold up abstract ideals, it gives you definite methods, definite practices for actually realising those ideals in your own life in a way that Christianity doesn't do. Then you might want to say, 'well, it's because Christianity did not have these practical methods from the very beginning, that it hasn't been successful, hasn't been very successful at least, in realising its own ideals. It's upheld the ideal

of love, no doubt, but has it been able to practise it. You look at Europe after 2,000 years of Christianity. Is Europe, are the peoples of Europe an example of love to the rest of the world? So you can develop it in that way. So Buddhism is unique, is distinctive as regards its actual practical methods for realising spiritual ideals.

Ratnaketu: it's a clean record, I suppose.

S: It's a clean record. Yes, there's that too, which is very, very clean compared with that of Christianity.

Ratnaketu: Could you also say, I thought of one thing, one difference was, in Buddhism every single being can become a Buddha, in fact the aim of every single being is to become a Buddha. You can't really become God in Christianity, or the equivalent with Jesus. you can't do that.

Prasannasiddhi: I think Christians would speak in terms of a union with God, knowing God. That's probably how they....

S: Some Christians are quoted nowadays as saying in the Bible, Christ is supposed to have said, 'Ye are all gods.' There is one particular verse which hasn't been quoted much before, but some Christians are beginning to draw attention to it. They say clearly it can't mean God with a capital 'G' because it's used in the plural, but it does suggest a somewhat more positive way of looking at man than has been customary in Christianity in the past.

Silabhadra: Well there's never really that possibility in Christianity of getting as far as God as God.

S: Well - within the framework of Christianity - that is self-contradictory. How can the created ever be the same as the creator? There's an impassable gulf between the two. Once you've acknowledged that the relationship between God and man is of creator and created, how can the created being ever become the creator of himself? It is impossible, it's logically impossible. So for a Christian, that possibility just doesn't exist, can't exist. Not within that particular framework of reference.

Aryamitra: But say, going back to your argument, couldn't the Christian come back and say, 'well, look at Buddhist countries, look at India, what has it done for India?'

S: Ah, well, that's quite easily answered. You can say, 'look at India now, that's true, but what about India during the Buddhist period.' Everybody agrees, historians agree that that was the golden age of India, of Indian culture and civilisation. And India started degenerating after it gave up Buddhism. And you could then point to the Buddhist countries of Asia, like Burma and Thailand. They've always been much more prosperous than India, with a much higher standard of literacy right down to the present day. And surely, Buddhism must have had something to do with that. You can go on to say there was a far higher rate of literacy in the Buddhist countries of Asia than there was in Europe during the corresponding period. It's only just recently - the last 130 or 140 years- that Europe has forged ahead as regards literacy. Before that, it was way behind the Buddhist countries of Asia. Tibet had a very high standard of literacy. Burma was well known before the annexation of Burma by the British I think the Burmese had a standard of literacy of 60%, which wasn't the case in England at that time. Because every village had a monk, and every monk ran a little school, and all the boys and girls in the village, practically, were taught at least to read and write. So it's not very difficult to 'come back' over that one. And all the Buddhist countries of Asia have never launched great wars, unless you come down to modern times in the case of Japan - who armed in self-defence against Russia, initially. But certainly, the Buddhist countries of Asia, they kept quiet until they were molested by invaders and colonisers from a Christian Europe. So I think one wouldn't find it very difficult to answer that sort of 'come back'

from a Christian.

Prasannasiddhi: And what about the golden periods in Chinese culture?

S: That is true, yes. the T'ang and Sung dynasties. Those certainly were the golden ages of Chinese literature, poetry, painting, everything. And they were the very periods when Buddhism was the most prominent and the most influential. (pause)

Well, any other way in which the Dharma is unique? I don't think we're doing very well, actually. I don't think a lot of Christians would be all that convinced; not if they were convinced Christians that wanted to hang on to Christianity.

Prasannasiddhi: Considering that creator/created business? I think that would go with standard Christian doctrine, but if you started talking to someone who had been reading up on Christian mysticism, well then, you'd probably be in a bit of - you'd find it difficult, because he'd start talking about God being a part of every living being, every drop, every atom.

S: I don't know about God being a part, because that would be pantheism - which is regarded as a heresy in Christianity. A lot of mystics have been accused of it, but they've all been very careful to deny that actually they believed in pantheism.

Ratnaketu: The one thing I've found when talking with people who were trying to defend Christianity is their greatest means of defence is by bringing in all these heretical Christians, all these gnostics, who actually...

S: Yes, it's no use quoting people like Eckhardt and others who've been condemned and persecuted. The churches resuscitate them for propaganda purposes nowadays when they're needed, but they represent, well, not even a minor tendency within the Church; they were very much on the fringes of things. but this is very often what Christians do, in a way not very honestly, in talking with non-Christians; they cite or they refer to figures in Christian history who are not at all representative.

But what, when we talk about Christianity - well we mean mainstream Christianity - what is generally regarded or recognised as Christianity, because that is what exists, historically; that is, in a way, what we're up against, that's what we have to deal with, or cope with. So it's not use, say, if you criticise Christianity quoting William Blake - who was hardly a Christian at all - or Master Eckhardt who was imprisoned for his beliefs - or somebody else may be, who was burnt at the stake during his lifetime. It's no good Christians quoting these sort of people at us, or referring to those sort of people.

Ratnaketu: So it's like, one of the most important things to do is come to a quick definition of what you're actually talking about.

S: I think one needs to make it clear that what one is talking about when one talks about Christianity is what I call mainstream Christianity, which means - as regards western Europe - mainly Roman Catholic Christianity plus the major Protestant sects. I mean, the Quakers are Christian no doubt, but they're not representative.

Silaratna: There is a whole realm of ethics that you could explore, the principles of how an individual, like a Buddhist quite consciously takes, undertakes, the silas, the precepts, whereas Christianity, in standard Christianity, it seems like the things like the commandments are just impositions - they're very much worded in that way.

S: Yes, I mean as regards the commandments, though of course the Christian must say, 'well,

they are found in the Old Testament, they're part of Judaism, but then again, Christianity's incorporated that part of Judaism. The ten commandments are, you know, hung in the church. And that God did say thou shalt do this, and thou shalt not do that.

Amoghacitta: Someone once said to me that they didn't know whether there was a god or not, but if there was a god then surely we should obey him and follow his commandments. It's difficult to get round that.

S: Well that's quite true, it's like saying if there's a powerful dictator ruling a country, well we have just to take notice of what he says under fear of punishment. So if the universe is constituted in that way - if, in fact, there is a god, supposing there is a god of the kind described in Christianity, well clearly one would have to obey him. One might have one's own secret reservations and not really think much of him and all that, but you'd have to act as though you believed in him or loved him, and so on, because otherwise he'd punish you. But then clearly this is a lot of power. This is a dictator as a figure of power, and one of the points of Buddhism is that - well, to use the language we've been using lately - the power mode is quite incompatible with the love mode. And the Dharma, Buddhism, operates in accord with the love mode. Whereas Christianity, even at its best, even taking the most favourable view of it, is definitely a mixture of love mode and power mode. The power mode deriving mainly from the Old Testament and the love mode mainly from the New.

So if - so this is where, if you criticise Christianity for acting in accordance with the power mode which is, yes, a part of Christianity, they'll shift their ground and quote some manifestation of Christianity which relates to the love mode - even though the power mode may have been predominant in Christianity; one can refer to the wars of religion. Buddhism doesn't have anything like those. One can here refer to this whole question of compulsion. Christians have tried forcibly to convert other people, to bring pressure to bear on them. Buddhism has never done that. Buddhism has consciously only tried to persuade people, to convince people by reasonable means. It has never tried to convert them, or force them, or to punish them for following other religions, or penalise them, or even kill them as Christianity has done.

Aryamitra: Ah, but that's not Christianity, that's what people say.

S: Ah, but then we come back to the point that I made. Well, one is concerned with mainstream Christianity. I am not concerned with any alleged 'real' Christianity or 'ideal' Christianity. I'm concerned with Christianity as it has actually existed in the world - especially in western Europe - for a very long time. That is what I am talking about. If you choose to talk about some ideal Christianity, well you can talk about that, but that's a separate subject, to be talked about on a separate occasion.

Amoghacitta: But if you're actually arguing with Christians, they're usually the same I've found. They dissociate themselves to some degree from the mainstream Christianity and proclaim themselves as following the ideal Christianity, which could be as good as...

S: Well, that's fair enough. Then I'd go on to say, 'In what way do you dissociate yourself?' I want to know whether they do in practice dissociate themselves before I could be convinced of their sincerity.

Silaratna: So you sort of throw it back on them.

S: Or ask them what they are doing to undo the harm which has been done by the 'official' Christianity in which they say they do not believe.

Prasannasiddhi: It sounds like you have to know your Christianity.

S: Yes indeed.

Prasannasiddhi: Otherwise you'd best not...

S: One has to be very careful not to go into a situation where you just show your own ignorance over Christianity - and Buddhism too.

Ratnaketu: I think you could possibly win an argument by not fighting on a sort of Christianity versus Buddhism debate, but just getting right down to personal things - 'what you are doing, what they are doing with their life'. Are they doing anything heretical. And what you are doing with your life, what your ideals are. And just say, well I don't know anything about Christianity. You could say that. But what are you doing, what are you practising.

Aryamitra: It's amazing how they get round eating meat.

S: Well, there is a passage in the Acts of the Apostles where apparently St Peter had doubts about eating meat, and he had a dream that night, a sort of vision of a great sheet let down from heaven in which were all sorts of animals and birds. And a voice from heaven was saying, 'that which I have created, why are you calling that unclean?' That is to say, refusing to eat it. So the vision converted him and he went back to meat eating.

Ratnaketu: That's another point, when you meet people who have heard God speaking to them, or seen visions, what do you say to them?

Prasannasiddhi: Actually, with regards to asking Christians what they're doing with their lives, they may well say, 'well, I practice charity quite strongly. I pray every day to God. I'm happy because I'm living in a moral way.'

S: I go to church every Sunday.

Prasannasiddhi: They may go to church everyday, some Christians do.

S: Go along to Mass every morning.

Ratnaketu: But do you still have those nasty little thoughts in the back of your mind of all those desires that you want...

S: Well then, they could just as well turn round to you and say, 'even though you meditate, do you find it easy to control yourself, have you got rid of all your defilements?' (laughter)

Some Christians are very surprised that all practising Buddhists are not Enlightened. Because they say, 'well, you're supposed to be a serious Buddhist, how come you're not Enlightened? I'm a Christian, I've believe in Jesus, but I'm saved. I've reached the goal - you haven't reached the goal of Buddhism - you admit it! (laughter) I think it's probably very difficult to argue with a convinced Christian, or even argue with someone who's got some remnant of Christian belief and is sort of wavering. But I think it's quite difficult to reason with a convinced Christian because he hasn't been convinced by rational argument, but with emotionally so to speak.

Prasannasiddhi: However, if you knew your Christianity you could make a pretty good show in public.

S: Yes, if he asked you a question in public, even though you didn't convince him, you might well impress a lot of other people who were listening.

Ratnaketu: I've often thought it would be quite good in communities to have debates within the community, one person taking up the side of Christianity.

S: But most of you don't know enough about Christianity. They couldn't really argue well enough to present the Christian case. They'd let the Buddhist opponent get away with it much too easily, out of sheer ignorance perhaps.

Ratnaketu: They could try and convert us.

Khemananda: If someone was a really determined Christian, though, and you're just in a one to one argument, wouldn't you just say, 'well, fair enough. If that's what you believe that's all we can do, we both disagree and you carry on with your life and'

S: See you in ten years time.

Khemananda: Yes, a parting of the ways, as it were because you've reached aif some is a really determined, convinced, evangelical Christian, well there's no common ground. You haven't got the genuine openness.

S: What I've sometimes felt is simply to shift their exclusiveness. Because some of them are Evangelical Christians or Pentecostal Christians or even some others, that they really don't know anything about other religions at all, they really are convinced that salvation is only through Jesus, etc. So I remember an experience I had when I was in Kalimpong, not long after my arrival there - maybe two or three years after my arrival. There happened to arrive two very fresh, very zealous young missionary ladies, fresh from Bible School, who had come to convert the heathen. Apparently they had done what Christians often do - so I'm told - Christian missionaries or would-be missionaries, they had left where they were going to, well, entirely to God. So they'd opened a map of the world, closed their eyes and then prayed to God, and then took a stab with a pin and in their case the pin came right down on Kalimpong. (loud laughter) So, to Kalimpong they had come. Now I remember they were both quite young women, wenchies one might say, in their middle twenties, and one was sort of short and fat and a bit jolly, and one was tall and thin and a bit mournful. They always went about together, always together. One of the first things they came to know after arriving in Kalimpong to convert the heathen - well, I'd been there before them! (laughter) There had been this Buddhist. They'd never heard of any westerner being a Buddhist - this was in the early fifties, don't forget - and Buddhism wasn't really known at all in Britain. So they were really horrified, really shocked. But anyway, to give them their due unlike other Christians and missionaries, they took the trouble to get into contact with me. They came to see me with their Bibles under their arms. They came to see me more than once. So I received them in a friendly way, gave them tea. They were really quite, almost sort of nervous, as though I was some kind of devil. Really, that was their sort of attitude. But anyway, I let them have their say, I had mine. But I took the line, well yes, Christianity is very good and I can understand you following it and accepting it and wanting to serve it, but do you really believe that all the people following other religions are totally insincere? I mean, do you really think that all the people following Buddhism, all the people following Hinduism haven't got the same kind of sincerity that you've got? Don't you think they're also trying to find the Truth? And what about those who've never heard of Christianity, what about those who've never had a chance to hear about Jesus? Do you really believe that they're going to be damned? Do you really believe that they're going to go to hell? Don't you think there's some truth at least in all religions? And I saw the fat one beginning to waver. Yes, I could see the way her mind was going, she was affected by what I said. And they never came to see me again. I got the feeling that they didn't dare to. They felt, at least not exactly their faith, but the exclusivity of their faith beginning to be moved. So I often saw them in town, because they stayed for years and years, but as we passed by they didn't usually greet me, they just sort of turned aside or looked away with an expression of something like horror, as if to say, 'you devil, you tempted me, you really almost shook my faith.' This was

how they used to look at me.

Again, that reminds me of a story, but this is by the way, this is a digression, really from the text. A Christian clergyman came to see me, a Church of England clergyman from Darjeeling. There were not many followers of the Church of England in Kalimpong - there was a big Catholic mission for this little tiny town, there was a great big Protestant mission - Scottish Presbyterian - but there was no Church of England church. So there were a few Church of England people so every month a clergyman used to come over to Kalimpong, just to celebrate the Holy Communion for the six or eight Church of England people who were there. And he used to stay with an Anglo-Indian woman whom I knew, who was a member of the Church of England. Anyway, he was an old man, he was quite jolly, and - like many Church of England clergymen - didn't bother too much with tradition. He wasn't probably very strict or very narrow minded. He was about seventy, with white hair. And apparently he had met a Buddhist monk in Lumbini years and years ago, and he wanted to find out where he was, get his address. So he heard from the Anglo-Indian lady that he was staying with that there was a Buddhist monk, an English Buddhist monk, living just nearby. So he thought he'd come up and see if I knew this Nepalese monk - which in fact I did. So we got chatting, and he was very friendly and he was quite pleased to meet another Englishman. He didn't bother that I was a Buddhist, you know - he had a cup of tea, he didn't bother much about Christianity either!. So I asked him where he was staying, so he said, 'oh, I'm staying with Mrs Hamilton'. So I said, 'does she know that you've come up to see me?' 'Oh, yes', he said, 'she's warned me against you!' So I said, 'what did she say?' So he said, 'well, she said if you're going to see that Englishman be very careful. He can be very charming.' (loud laughter) So this is the sort of reputation I had.

Ratnaketu: A charming devil!

S: But the missionaries, apart from those two women, never came near me. I had a dreadful reputation with the west. Anyway, that was a digression. But this all comes from considering the fact that the Dharma is unique. you may be asked by people to explain in what Buddhism is unique, and where it does differ from Christianity, so you need to be prepared with some sort of reasonable reply. Otherwise you are saying, in effect, you don't know why you're a Buddhist. If you don't know why or how Buddhism differs from Christianity, perhaps it's better - well, you don't really know why you're a Buddhist or why you've given up being a Christian. So you have, in a way, to be able to justify yourself. If, of course, you were a Christian. If you weren't a Jew or a Hindu or whatever else you might be. Some people are brought up Agnostic. But don't think that Christians will necessarily give you an easy time, or let you get away with anything. In some ways they're just as smart as you are, if not smarter. And they may, in some cases, know more about Christianity than you know about Buddhism. In a few cases, they might even know more about Buddhism than you do - if they've studied it at university as part of, maybe, a course in comparative religion. They may be quite well up on the Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths, and all those sort of things. So don't assume, when you're talking with a Christian, that you're dealing with a benighted creature who has a truly anthropomorphic notion of God and blindly believes in the Bible. No, you might find that he's a much more sophisticated person than that. And he will be correspondingly more difficult to deal with.

Anyway, let's go on. Any other points arising from the parrot's speech? (long pause) The parrot says, 'In my mind, now free from doubt, is faith established.' How is one to understand that? When does one become free from doubt? When does faith become established?

Silabhadra: Would that not be at Stream Entry?

S: Yes, but is the parrot possibly referring to Stream Entry? Has he, in fact, entered the stream, so to speak?

Ratnaketu: Could it not be that he's saying now, this moment?

S: Yes, yes - that could be.

Ratnaketu: Thing is, the rejection though seems to back that up, because that's the next condition for...

S: So regarding what has he no doubt? Regarding what is his faith established?

Aryamitra: In the ills of the samsara..

S: Also in the Three Jewels. That the Buddha has gained a transcendental state called Enlightenment; that the Dharma is the way, is the path to the realisation of that state. That there is a community of people actually treading that path and, in turn, arriving at the goal of that path. That actions do have consequences, that there is such a thing as karma. There's that kind of faith. You've no doubt with regard to these things. (pause)

What exactly is meant by 'Rejecting all things in this samsaric world?'

Silaratna: He's had an Insight into their impermanence, into their insubstantiality. He sees nothing solid that makes it worth grasping at.

S: So how does that work out in practise?

Aryamitra: Going forth?

S: It could result in going forth. But does one reject all things in this samsaric world literally? For instance, does one reject food? Presumably one continues to eat. Or does one reject clothing? No. Does one reject shelter? No. So what does one reject? Is it merely an inner rejection, or does it show itself externally in any way at all? If so, how does it show itself?

Khemananda: Well, you use them, but you reject the idea that they can give you lasting satisfaction, or that you can put your whole existence on to them, that they can provide something. Just seeing into their nature, as you were saying in the study group before, you can use them but you really do see into their nature.

S: And this certainly does affect the amount of time and attention that you devote to them. You might have spent hours in the kitchen before hand, just preparing especially delicious dishes, but you don't do that anymore, you don't bother. Just eat for the sake of keeping the body strong and healthy.

Prasannasiddhi: Although you do derive some pleasure from things such as eating. It's not that you just eat to meditate. You do enjoy your eating.

S: Well if you don't enjoy, you probably can't assimilate properly anyway. Any further points?

Khemananda: He seems to really be stressing how responsible we are, in the sense that you - and only you - can make them, in the karmic outcome And make your effort. It's up to you; you get that kind of feeling from him. You've got to be responsible, you've got to make an effort. He's really stressing that.

S: In this particular - the latter half of the part of the parrot's speech could be quite appropriate readings say at the time of ordination. The parrot says; 'Here from within my heart, I make the vow to shun all evil', that's one's negative precepts, 'to achieve the good', one's positive precepts,

'from deep within my heart I seek my refuge in the Three Treasures, ever changeless, never failing, never fading, our precious ally through the whole of time. In my mind, now free from doubt, is faith established. Resolved to know the holy Dharma, I now reject all things in this samsaric world.' It just about sums it up, one might say, quite neatly and quite simply.

Aryamitra: it's a bit better, I mean he is especially good at speech. The actual lines are a bit better, aren't they, than the other ones?

S: Yes, there's more structure to the parrot's speech. He's a bit of a scholar, he quotes the Buddha.

Silaratna: This also seems to be the one who actually first saw the cuckoo right back at the start.

S: Who saw the sort of practical consequences, the practical (unclear) It's as though, in his case, he's started entering on the Path of Transformation. In the case of the other birds, perhaps they've achieved the Path of Vision. It seems something like that, but the process of transformation hasn't yet begun. Perhaps they haven't realised, in a sense, that they've even achieved the Path of Vision. They certainly don't seem to realise its consequences or implications as the parrot has.

end of tape 13

tape 14

S: So all the little birds have finished their seed. Who's going to be the cuckoo?

Amoghavajra: "Thereupon the Cuckoo, the Great Bird, spoke as follows:

"Birds, large and small assembled here, well have you understood. In all the speeches you have made not one has denied the truth. Well have you spoken, well indeed! With undistracted mind keep well these words within your hearts. And so, O birds assembled here, the large birds and also the little youngsters lucky to be here, hear me with reverence and attention!"

The things of this samsaric world are all illusion, like a dream.
Where'er one looks, where is their substance?
Palaces built of earth and stone and wood,
Wealthy men endowed with food and dress and finery, Legions of retainers who throng round the mighty, -
These are like castles in the air, like rainbows in the sky.
And how deluded those who think of this as truth!
When uncles - nephews - brothers - sisters gather as kindred do.
When couples and children gather as families do,
When friends and neighbours gather in good fellowship, -
These are like meetings of dream friends, like travellers sharing food with strangers.
And how deluded those who think of this as truth!
This phantom body grown in uterine water from a union of seed and blood, -

*Our habitual passions springing from the bad deeds of our past,
Our thoughts provoked by diverse apparitions, -
all are like flowers in autumn, clouds across the sky.
How deluded, O assembled birds, if you have thought of them as
permanent.
The splendid plumage of the peacock with it's many hues,
Our melodious words in which notes high and low are mingled,
The link of causes and effects which now have brought us here together,
-
They are like the sound of echoes, the sport of a game of illusion.
Meditate on this illusion, do not seize on them as truth!
Mists on a lake, clouds across a Southern sky,
Spray blown by wind above the sea,
Lush fruits ripened by the summer sun, -
In permanence they cannot last; in a trice they separate and fall away.
Meditate on their illusion, do not think of them as permanent!"*

S: Let's stop there and consider what the cuckoo says so far. (pause) There's "Birds, large and small assembled here, well have you understood. In all the speeches you have made not one has denied the truth." Do you think that there is any significance in the way the cuckoo put that? "In all the speeches you have made not one has denied the truth." Why should he not have said, "everyone only has spoken the truth"?

Khemananda: But that speech by, I forget which bird it was...

S: The lark, are you thinking of?

Khemananda: ... seemed a bit too despondent and a bit too - he hadn't actually denied the truth, but perhaps...

S: He hadn't given expression to the truth in it's fullness. One or two of the expressions perhaps have been a bit one-sided. So no-one has actually denied the truth, at least that is something. "well have you spoken, well indeed! With undistracted mind keep well these words within your hearts. And so, O birds assembled here, the large birds and also the little youngsters lucky to be here, hear me with reverence and attention!" So again, much of what he says is a recapitulation, almost a repetition, of some of the things that they have said. From some of the things that he says one gets the impression of a rather primitive state of society, even of civilisation, in a way, certainly materially speaking: "Palaces built of earth and stone and wood, and wealthy men endowed with food and dress and finery" - hm? Well that's about all your wealth could buy you in that sort of society; food - extra food, dress, and finery. There wasn't much else.

"Legions of retainers who throng around the mighty, - these are like castles in the air, like rainbows in the sky. And how deluded, those who think of this as truth!"

Amoghacitta: What's that 'legions of retainers who throng around the might'?

S: Well retainers are sort of armed servants; the mighty are the local chiefs, the village headmen, the big landlords, the aristocrat. He's got his crowd of servants, they're not just servants in the modern sense but sort of like a body-guard, they're retainers, as was the case in England until the reign of Henry VII. Henry VII is famous, among other things, for having abolished all retainers; they were what was left of the private armies of the old barons. So a retainer is someone who has some sort of feudal responsibility towards you, who's not just a servant - he's certainly not just an employee - he's your man; he's around, he serves you, he's willing to fight for you if need be. So, 'Legions of retainers who throng around the mighty'...

Prasannasiddhi: You say primitive state of society when it mentions palaces of stone, wood, and then you said this is the primitive state of society. That's referring to Tibet?

S: Yes, referring to Tibet. Well, primitive materially speaking yes? Even a palace is just built of earth and stone and wood; even wealthy men just have extra food and dress and finery; they don't have much more than ordinary people.

Prasannasiddhi: That's primitive, just in the material...

S: In a material way. And legions of retainers. Even right up to the present century it was pretty much like that in Tibet.

Prasannasiddhi: That means, it's not that there's anything actually bad about that is there?

S: No, because the point the cuckoo is making is that all these things are illusory, even the best that you can think of, even the greatest that you can think of. But even so, their standard, their idea of what was great was quite limited, materially speaking.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, in a way, I mean what I was thinking of was, actually, just because they didn't have much doesn't mean that they were any less better off than we are now with lots of different gadgets.

S: Well, I don't think that is the point of what the cuckoo is saying; he's pointing out that even if you've got the best that is available, even if you've got everything that your culture or civilisation can offer - and then he enumerates it - then that's just like castles in the air. But from the things he enumerates we can infer that the standard of material civilisation wasn't very high. It was quite, in a sense, primitive. None-the-less, people could be deeply attached to that.

Amoghavajra: I think it would be easier to see these things like castles in the air in a more primitive society. It would have been probably a bit more precarious, You couldn't sort of delude yourself as much. (pause)

Ratnaketu: Are they illusions - the palaces - because one day they are going to fall down, or are they illusions for some other reason?

S: Well, there is a close connection between what is impermanent and what is illusory. If you notice, the cuckoo passes from one to the other. But things are illusory in the sense that they are not permanent, therefore they are not absolutely real. That which is absolutely real is permanent, so these things cannot be absolutely real because they are impermanent; hence they are called illusions. Not that they are illusions in the sense of being completely non-existent, but they are illusions in the sense that they are not what you think they are. you tend to think they're that, but they're not that. They're illusions in the sense that they're not really permanent, they're impermanent.

Aryamitra: But would he be saying the same as what the other birds have said? In other words, he saying the same as what the other birds...

S: Yes, though he does seem to be going a little deeper, because I think the other birds didn't say much about illusoriness, they spoke more in terms of impermanence, or suffering. You could say that the other birds spoke more in terms of the first two laksanas, whereas the cuckoo is also speaking in terms of the third laksana - in other words going a bit deeper.

Ratnaketu: So, could things be illusory for reasons other than them being impermanent? Like

maybe you believe that something is going to bring you happiness and that is what you believe, and it doesn't, and therefore it is illusory?

S: Well, not so much that it is illusory in itself. What is illusory about it is your wrong view of it. It's illusory as seen by you. You see it as permanent when it isn't permanent. So, as you see it, it is illusory.

Ratnaketu: So it's our perceptions which are illusions?

S: Well, it's not so much, no it's not even the perception, it's our judgement which is wrong.

Prasannasiddhi: So it's not illusory in itself, it's just the way we see it.

S: Well, it's not illusory in the sense that it has no existence whatever; it does exist in a way, one could say that it exists relatively, it's relatively real. But it's got no absolute existence and that's what one tends to invest it with - it's in that sense that it's illusory. It's illusory in the sense that it doesn't possess absolute existence or absolute value. So to the extent that you think that it does have absolute existence or absolute value, to that extent you are subject to delusion let us say, rather than illusion. When you are deluded you see illusions.

Aryamitra: So, from the standpoint of the Transcendental, the whole mundane samsara would be an illusion? (l o n g pause while recording equipment is adjusted)

S: Alright then, let's carry on... we are switched on. We'll have to keep a special eye on it now. (pause) Anyway, what was the point that we were talking about, or going to talk about?

Aryamitra: It was a lead on from what Ratnaketu was saying about can we see this illusion not just as being the fact that it's impermanent but some other thing like, I was saying could you say that from the Transcendental point of view, that all the mundane is illusion, or all the, all samsara...

S: Well, one might say that from the Transcendental point of view one wouldn't think in terms of illusion, one wouldn't need to. I mean, from the point of view of the Transcendental you'd see conditioned existence as it was - you would see it as conditioned existence - you wouldn't have to think in terms of illusion. I mean, one speaks in terms of illusion to draw people's attention to what the conditioned is really like. It's their false perception which is illusory, which constitutes the illusion. So if you don't have a false perception, there's no point in speaking in terms of illusion. So from the point of view of the Transcendental, there's no illusion, it sees the conditioned as conditioned. That's the end of the matter, so to speak. It has no false perception to understand as being illusory.

Prasannasiddhi: Is... things like in a visualisation practise, the clear blue sky, and this is supposed to resemble sort of refinement or something closer to reality, so how does that fit in with the kind of ... on the one hand you've got seemingly real, solid entities which are impermanent, on the other hand you've got something which points to actually this big, empty sort of, or just big vast kind of nothingness, a big void or something...two sort of different ideas in a way..... there's no obstructed clear blue sky, the actual material object that you do see but which are impermanent...

S: So what's the question?

Prasannasiddhi: Well, how do they relate to the concept of illusion? I'm a bit puzzled with illusion...

S: Well, in the first place the clear blue sky relates to or one could even say, symbolises Sunyata. But it's, in a way, a sort of, even one-sided sunyata. Because one is thinking of sunyata in terms of ultimate reality, as distinct from relative reality, one is thinking of the blue sky of sunyata as the unconditioned as distinct from the conditioned. But then again, one might say that reality in a deeper sense transcends the distinction between conditioned and unconditioned, between the absolute and the relative. So therefore that blue sky stands for sunyata, for reality, for the unconditioned, as it were provisionally. That is to say, so long as one's consciousness - so long as one's outlook - is dualistic, you cannot but distinguish the unconditioned from the conditioned, nirvana from samsara, you cannot help doing that. Now what you visualise, that stands for, as it were the conditioned. That stands for rupa, that stands for form. In fact, what you visualise has a form. Do you see what I mean? So to begin with, you see the form as one thing and you see the sky as the other; you see rupa as one thing and you see sunyata as another thing. But that is still dualistic. What you have to try to see, what you have to try to experience as, is, the sunyata as rupa and the rupa as sunyata. That is to say, the sky not obstructing the form, the form not obstructing the sky. (pause)

So when it is said, it's also said that you have to try to see the forms that you visualise as sort of rainbow-like. They're not sort of solid objects. Because if you see them as solid objects, well, you can't see them as non-differentiated from sunyata. you try to see them, as it were, transparent, sort of diaphanous, or as illusory in a positive sense. Illusory here means, in a paradoxical sort of way, real; because they're not really solid, they really are sort of diaphanous, they really are sort of transparent, they really are sort of letting you see sunyata through them. Do you see what I'm getting at? (pause)

In other words, it's as though, the stage at which you see the sunyata and the rupa as two separate things and try to sort of join them together, that is a provisional stage; you have to sort of blend them, you have to sort of unite them. So that you see, or you experience, the two things at the same time, even though on the logical level, so to speak, they are sort of contradictory. This is what the Heart Sutra says, rupa is sunyata and sunyata is rupa. Now in the course of the visualisation you try to actually experience that.

Aryamitra: The fact that it appears out of the blue sky and dissolves back, that does help a little bit, although you still see...

S: Yes, although this is what one has to do, this is the sort of procedure you go through; though this is still, as it were, on a dualistic level. When it is said that the form appears out of the blue sky or rupa appears out of sunyata - it's not meant that the one is different from the other, not that literally one is produced. It's as though you see the blue sky, you see the void, then you see the form; because if you see the one you must see the other, because they're not separate, they're not two - it's more like that. (pause)

Silaratna: The same thing applies in a subjective visualisation like, perhaps, the Tara practice, where you're certainly not doing it against a blue sky.

S: Yes, because you realise that you yourself are void, you try to experience that in visual terms by imagining yourself as sort of hollow; in fact, you do visualise yourself as being hollow because your interior is sort of filled up with all the rainbows. Do you see what I mean?

Ratnaketu: What I can't understand is, if we are trying to do this blue sky as representing sunyata, and sort of blending in with form, rupa, you know, this is sunyata... it's voidness, it's emptiness. I mean, I can't even - how can I imagine what it's like to then sort of imagine what the form is? You know, I have an experience of form, but I don't have experience of sunyata. So how can I imagine a form as being sunyata?

S: Ah, because this is where doing the practice in regular steps comes in. At the beginning of most practices you have this mantra, that is to say; 'sarva dharma sunyata', or 'sarva dharma suddha'; that all dharmas are pure by nature, svabhava, and I also am pure by nature. In other words, all things are sunyata. So this represents the stage of the realisation of sunyata. this is supposed to embody the whole of the Perfection of Wisdom. So one is really supposed to be well into that before going on to the visualisation, if you do it thoroughly and properly.

Ratnaketu: So how do you develop that? How do you develop that stage.

S: Well, the Six Element Practice will help. Do you see what I mean? I mean the Tibetans themselves very often, they just repeat that mantra, then they pass onto the visualisation; that's not really enough.

Ratnaketu: You're supposed to really reflect and...

S: Yes... possibly not all the time - not necessarily at that time, but that mantra should call to mind all that type of experience in which you previously were versed, perhaps. It sort of recapitulates your previous experience of that whole sort of dimension. (pause)

Amoghavajra: Would that mantra hold true for all the visualisations or is that.....

S: Yes, I mean it may actually occur in the text but yes, it is to be - in a way - understood. I mean, it's represented by the blue sky - the blue sky is that in visual terms. Do you see what I mean?

Aryamitra: maybe it's worth pointing out...

S: This is why, you know, we have the Six Element practice before the ordinations - because in connection with the ordination you get the visualisation practice, so that sort of helps lay the foundation, that connects with the - in the case of those practices which do have the mantra, the 'sarva suddha, sarva dharma svabhava suddho ham'. Suddha here meaning sunyata.

Prasannasiddhi: So it's on that basis that you should do the visualisation practice.

S: yes, yes. In other words, when you're visualising the form, it's not a sort of material form you're visualising. That's why it's sometimes said that - the standard description is - it's like a rainbow, or a reflection seen in a mirror, or it is like an illusion, a magical city. In other words it's not something solid and not something sort of seen in dualistic terms; you see it, was it were, from the standpoint of reality, from the standpoint of sunyata. In other words, it's as though sunyata doesn't cancel out the rupa, the unconditioned doesn't cancel out the conditioned, but it makes it, as it were, transparent; so that the conditioned becomes an aspect of the unconditioned, you could say, rupa becomes sunyata. Do you see what I mean? So you try to see these visualised forms in this way; in a way you see the Samboghakaya and the Dharmakaya together. And then, of course, starting from that practice, you try to see everything in those terms, everything around you. Not that you don't see anything any more, but you see in a different kind of way. Things become, as it were, purified, or they become brighter or more transparent. Do you see what I mean? In other words, reality is not something that cancels out the whole world, but something in the light of which you see the whole world in another kind of way.

Amoghavajra: So when you do a practice like that you begin to see things more as they really are. It's not as if it's sort of fabricated and that's in a way as you should begin to see things outside your practice as well.

S: Yes

Prasannasiddhi: So you would then, after having practised the practice in that way, you would come back to a situation like sitting down with people, and it would be sort of, your experience would be, different...

S: Yes, yes.

Prasannasiddhi: ...and that's what meant by illusion.

S: Illusion is, in a way, used quite ambiguously, it's used in a negative sense, but it's also used in the positive sense. It's not very easy to explain this because, it's as though when you no longer perceive things in an illusory way, you no longer see them as illusions, or they are no longer illusions, they've become, as it were, more real. But they're not real in the sense in which one thought of reality before. (pause)

There's sometimes the illustration of the stained glass window. It isn't completely an adequate as an illustration, but one can say something like this; supposing you're inside an old building and there's a building and there's a window, and that it's a stained glass window, but it's all covered with grime and dirt, so you gradually clean it. Once you've cleaned it, what comes through is not just pure white light, it's the light of all these colours, you see the picture made by the stained glass window, do you see what I mean? So, in the same way, when you get rid of illusion, it's not just a sort of bare, featureless reality that you see, separate from the world, it's the world as... you see, yes, that light is there, but it lights up the world, the world corresponding to the stained glass window with all the beautiful colours... that you now see. (pause)

Prasannasiddhi: I think I'm sometimes confused by thinking that you can follow.... there's all these different impressions and you can follow these different impressions. It almost seems as if reality has got something about it which is really clear and is known. I was just sort of thinking in terms of some days are just full like that, of so many ideas, and you feel like, you know, like when you go to sleep, these ideas are still spilling over, but reality is being something that just kind of goes beyond all that.

S: Well, this is the sunyata aspect in the more, as it were, what shall I say, dualistic sense - in a manner of speaking. It's the unconditioned as opposed to the conditioned. But it's as though you have to get really deeply into the unconditioned, so to speak, before you can see the conditioned in the light of the unconditioned. If you are trying to see the conditioned in the light of the unconditioned prematurely, you'll just remain sort of involved with the conditioned, with maybe just a little gleam of light thrown onto it from the unconditioned, but not much more. That's not enough.

Amoghacitta: So in your analogy - perhaps I've misinterpreted it -but the stained glass window is, if you like, the reality of the conditioned.

S: Yes.

Amoghacitta: Whereas the light is the reality of the unconditioned.

S: Yes, you could say that, yes. And you bring the two together ultimately.

Amoghacitta: You kind of fuse together the form and sunyata.

S: Yes, yes.

Amoghacitta: Because without the light shining through the window we wouldn't see it at all.

S: Yes. And without the window there wouldn't be the beautiful colours, there'd only be the white light. The white light is there, but the colours are also there.

Amoghacitta: Is it the dirt on the window that stops the light coming through, that stops you seeing the light?

S: Well, the dirt on the window - you could pursue the analogy this way - the dirt on the window not only prevents you seeing the light, it prevents you seeing the colours. So it's as though the unconditioned represents the light and the conditioned seen in their reality represent the colours, not of course solid, opaque colours, but transparent, diaphanous colours. Do you get the idea?

Prasannasiddhi: So the conditioned makes you, you can't see the light...

S: It's not the conditioned itself that stands in the way, it's more the way in which you see the conditioned that stands in the way; just as it's not the stained glass window that prevents you seeing the light, it's the dirt on the stained glass window prevents you seeing the light and prevents you seeing the colours of the stained glass window itself too. In other words it's as though when you get rid of illusion or when you get rid of delusion, you're not just left with the unconditioned as opposed to the conditioned. You haven't sort of wiped out the conditioned entirely so that you're left only with the unconditioned. That would be a sort of dualistic way of thinking. You also wipe out the distinction between conditioned and unconditioned so that you see the conditioned as the unconditioned, the unconditioned as the conditioned, just as you see the light coming through the stained glass window and the stained glass window or the colours of the stained glass window at the same time. So one's experience of the visualised form should give you a sort of foretaste of that.

This is why it is said at the conclusion of some practices that afterwards one sees all beings as Tara or Avalokitesvara and one hears all sounds as mantras and so on. But this is quite a big thing, one needs to go step by step.

Prasannasiddhi: So from being conditioned you start to go for the purely unconditioned in a way, but the visualisation practice kind of approaches them both in a way.

S: Yes in a way it does. It brings in not only the unconditioned but what one might call the purified conditioned, the purified form or the form in that aspect where it reveals the unconditioned instead of concealing it.

Prasannasiddhi: So would that actually make it easier or more difficult to approach the.....because in a way you aren't just approaching the unconditioned you're trying to approach both of them...

S: Yes, in a sense it makes it more difficult. (pause) Some people who do do visualisation practices - especially in Tibet - they don't bother about all this, they just visualise. They develop feelings of devotion and concentration, and that, as it were, is enough. But you can't really say that this is the full practice, or is really in the Vajrayana.

Ratnaketu: You can't think of doing, or really just think in terms of doing the visualisations to gain, to alter our psychological and emotional states.

S: Well you can, but that is limiting it, very, very much; very much indeed.

Aryamitra: It's almost like you have to alter your psychological state first say with the metta and devotion and so forth and even sunyata practice.

S: So this is why I laid down this sort of series of practice. First of all there's the mindfulness, let us say, which helps with awareness and integration; and then there's the metta bhavana which creates emotional positivity; and then from that you can come onto the six element practice which sort of breaks down your crude egocentricity; and from that you come onto the visualisation practice - you know, where you get onto a different level altogether. In Subhuti's new book, there's a whole chapter on this - the method of meditation. I think there was an article, maybe also by Subhuti, in an old, er...

Amoghavajra: Vessantara, I think.

S: Ah, was it? Anyway, someone has done an article in either the Newsletter or else I think there's a Mitratra on this whole subject.

Prasannasiddhi: Could you say perhaps that these Tibetan yogis who go off to the mountains for ten, twenty years or something, are in a way just trying to develop the sunyata aspect of things, the unconditioned?

S: Not necessarily, not necessarily, but it may be so in some cases. (pause) That would be a more logical connection, you mean, between going away and that type of practise. Well there would be, but I wouldn't like to say that this is what most of them go away for. I think probably that wouldn't be the case.

In Tibet - from what I gathered from my friend Mr. Chen who had quite a vast experience of these things - the Tibetans very often tended to skip over the preliminary practices, which meant that they didn't in many cases get really into the Vajrayana. Because he made the point that if you hadn't had a real experience of sunyata first, well, the visualisation was not a genuinely Vajrayanic visualisation. Do you see what I mean? You are just, in our language, producing an idetic image.

So, strictly speaking, if you do the visualisation practice in the traditional way, there are verses which you recite which stand for the Four Brahma Viharas. Now normally the Tibetans just recite those verses as though they just - well, a single verse once and that's that, they've done the Brahma Viharas. So doing it that way you haven't really laid a very solid foundation. You see, first of all they repeat the refuges, then they repeat the Bodhisattva Vow, and then the four Brahma Viharas, and then they repeat this mantra for sunyata, and then they go straight into the visualisation. Well, if you follow the path of regular steps, that's not really the way - you should do it more the way we do it. that is to say, you actually practise the metta bhavana quite seriously first, increase you emotional positivity, and you do something like the Six Element Practice, which reduces your crude egocentricity, and then you get into the visualisation practice.

Silaratna: I've heard that the prostration practice comes in that sequence.

S: Well yes, because there are Four Foundation Yogas, that is to say, foundations of the Vajrayana, that introduce the Vajrayana; the going for refuge and prostration practice is one of those, and within the Vajrayanic context it recapitulates the Hinayana - the Hinayana being represented by the going for refuge, just as the Brahma Viharas and the Bodhicitta, they sort of summarise or epitomise the Mahayana.

Amoghacitta: Wouldn't it be a fair criticism of the Friends to say, alright, do lots of metta bhavana first off, that's a good foundation. Most of us have probably only done a few sits of Six Element Practice before taking up a visualisation. (pause)

S: Well, if one wanted to criticise, one could say, well, all these things should be done much more than they actually are. The more you can do them, the better; the stronger the foundation that you lay the better. You could even go further than that and say well, most people haven't even perfected their sila. If you're going to be strict about your path of regular steps you should give much more attention to that, what to speak of mindfulness, what to speak of awareness.

Prasannasiddhi: Could you also say that these Tibetans, if they're going straight onto the visualisation, will they get anywhere, or... ?

S: Well, I wouldn't say they won't get anywhere, but it becomes more of a devotional sort of practice, in a simple sort of way. They don't get out of the practice what it can actually give. They develop their devotion to that particular Buddha or Bodhisattva which is a good thing, yes. They become more concentrated; that's also a good thing. But these are still, if you consider the path as a whole, comparatively elementary things - if you consider the path as a whole. You should be getting, ideally, more out of that kind of practice than just that.

Prasannasiddhi: But if they continue doing the practice over a period of years would they not slowly build up their devotion till it started to kind of overflow and then.....

S: It may be, it could be. It is all a question of whether one has a sort of intellectual understanding of the whole path before you start practising it or whether you're just content to practise a stage at a time, without knowing what the other stages afterwards are. People in the west always want to know quite a lot about everything but they don't have much faith or trust, they want to hear all about it first, but it isn't always like that in the east, in Tibet.

Silaratna: So that would be a good basis to have a solitary on. If you did that mindfulness, metta, six element..

S: Well a lot of people have done this actually. I mean, I've suggested that you do all of these five practices in the course of the day; quite a few people have done that, well, Order Members have done that. The mindfulness, metta, six element practice then also recollection of death or, in some cases, the contemplation of the chain of the nidanas, and then the visualisation practice which everyone does. We've probably talked about these things in the Dhyana for Beginners seminar; I've certainly talked about them on a number of occasions, the information perhaps isn't yet generally in circulation.

Aryamitra: I suppose in a daily practice one could do, say, metta and six element practice or some sunyata practice, and then in the evening do a visualisation practice.

Khemananda: But would that be sufficient, particularly if you were working, if after doing the six element practice you were working somewhere you wouldn't be able to carry the practice on.....

S: I think if you're a beginner and you remain a beginner for several years, I think you have to be quite careful how you try to combine something like the six element practice with a working day. It could result in a bit of disorientation. (pause) You might be just staring at the nail, just staring at the nail, it's... sunyata, you know (laughter) You don't get any further! (laughter) Just staring at the nail you see it as sunyata! in a sort of daze (laughter).. yes, it can happen...

Ratnaketu: I've noticed that sometimes in FBS, you get a bit like that, you can get into a bit of a daze.

S: As a result of meditation you mean?

Ratnaketu: Yes, in fact the bosses at the work who employed us, they said, 'you're useless' after a retreat (laughter). They knew if we went on a retreat, when we came back we weren't very good!

S: That's interesting (laughter) In principle, I suppose it shouldn't be like that. But psychologically speaking it just is. But anyway, perhaps one shouldn't concern oneself too much about the metaphysics of visualisation, as it were, but pay more attention to actually doing the practice - though obviously there will be things that one just wants to understand.

Prasannasiddhi: You said that these Tibetans, they just do the visualisation, so they don't get as much out of it. So that implies that there were a lot of Tibetans up in Tibet just doing that and not going very far.

S: Yes, I'd say so. I mean the majority of the monks in the monasteries who just did a little bit of meditation, very often no real meditation at all. They'd have the text of what we'd call a visualisation practice, and they'd chant some hymns in the early morning maybe to that particular Buddha or Bodhisattva, or to the guru, and then they'd just sort of run through the text, chant it to themselves, or repeat it by heart. They may just do a bit of visualisation, and then they repeat the mantra. That's mostly what they do. And then they get on with their days work. Well, it's not so very different from what a lot of our own Friends do, except that perhaps they have a bit less intellectual understanding of it all.

Aryamitra: Was it that they actually, if they really wanted to get into mediation, they would go outside the monastery into...

S: Yes. Most big monasteries had hermitages attached where monks could go from time to time just to have what we would call a solitary retreat. The Tibetan system was a bit different from, say, the Zen system; you didn't have any collective meditation in the case of the Tibetans; collective pujas and chanting but no collective meditation. The Zen people, of course as we know, always had a lot of collective meditation. In Tibet, meditation is usually an individual affair - there's no what we would call group meditation, that is more a Ch'an and Zen tradition.

Silaratna: That's quite interesting because I always imagined all these monks sitting in the monasteries all meditating together, hundreds of them!

S: No, not in Tibet. In China and Japan, yes - at least in the old days - but not in Tibet. Their system was different.

Prasannasiddhi: I suppose they didn't have any reasons, or did they have reasons?

S: I've not heard of any reasons. But in many of the things that they chant there are sort of descriptions of deities, so it passes as a sort of visualisation. Maybe they ought to stop and actually visualise, but no, they just chant it, they just chant the text usually. And some people practising individually just do that. I used to have Tibetan lay friends in Kalimpong. If I'd go to see them - maybe in the morning which was a time of visiting - they'd just be finishing off their daily practice, but they'd just be sitting in the sitting room with the book in front of them and they just sort of - well not exactly chanted - just sort of recited it to themselves. And it would actually be in some cases a sort of description of a Buddha or Bodhisattva to be visualised, but they just recite the description, they don't actually stop and meditate. But having finished the recitation, they'll just chant a mantra with a rosary for a short while, they may chat to someone in between, even. But they do the practice, or they read a religious book. Some people may spend an hour, hour and a half in this way. But they don't do it very much as a meditation practice, it's more just a reading or a recitation, or a chanting, that just reminds them about that Bodhisattva or Buddha, rather than strictly visualising him. That tends to be the way in which the majority of people

practise in Tibet - including most of the monks. They did this in the morning, sometimes in the evening too. But if they wanted to meditate seriously they went away to a more solitary place - that is in the case of the monks. In the Zen monasteries meditation was an integral part of the daily routine of the monastery. This was not the case in Tibet. So in the Friends, in a way, in this respect, we follow much more the Zen tradition, you could say.

Prasannasiddhi: So perhaps a lot of these Tibetans just ended up in a bit of a sort of deva realm, so to say, just...

S: you could say so.. Really positive, eh? But not much in the way of Insight perhaps. Very hard working and very sincere. (pause) No doubt with a great deal of faith.

Aryamitra: Do you see us ever having something like a Buddhist university or something of that kind?

S: Probably. Probably not in my time, but things seem to be moving logically in that direction because this is now the second Tuscany course that we've had. Well, I suppose, you'd have to say a bit later on, a six month course, you could think in terms of that perhaps - before very long - a six month course? Or once you start thinking of a sixth month course, well a year long course, a two year course; well you've got then the nucleus of a sort of Buddhist university. Do you see what I mean? I think it's only a question of time. Though how long it'll take I don't know. What we have to be careful of is that it doesn't become just something academic, but real study, discussion, practise of every kind. An intensive period of training. Not that once that is over, well then you're trained and off you go, you don't bother about any more training, it just gives you a very good start, and you keep up things after that.

Prasannasiddhi: That's the sort of feeling that this Tuscany gives you. Well you couldn't really say the start - it gives you a big boost - but in terms of a real, solid foundation.

S: Well in the old days, so to speak, people used to think that a week was a good solid foundation. (laughter) If you'd spoken then in terms of three months they would have said, you're joking, how can we get away for three months? But now you know there are so many people. I mean two years running, twenty odd people have gone away for three months. That would have seemed extraordinary, well even within your memory. In the Balmore Street days, wouldn't that have seemed extraordinary - to get away for three whole months, for a three month long retreat in effect?

Ratnaketu: Plus that there has already been a month as well, previous, so like people have had four months this year.

S: Yes, right.

Ratnaketu: A third of a year they've been away on retreat.

S: So things are moving in the direction of prolonged full time study come practise come training situation, and that, presumably, is what would be one's Buddhist university. Even if it didn't have a palatial building of it's own to begin with. (pause)

Prasannasiddhi: There was just one thing I was wondering about, with mention to the visualisation practices... you said that the Tibetans used to, just to like in the mornings and then, you know, they wouldn't do anything else, and in a way it wasn't enough...

S: And I was talking about ordinary monks and the more serious minded lay people, not monks who are doing a lot of study and meditation, and taking things very seriously. Because a lot of

the monks in the monasteries were members of the spiritual community, but were for the most part involved, in a sense, in non-spiritual activities - the cooks, the builders, the cleaners, the water carriers, a lot of those sort of people; they were the majority. So they would just do the kind of practise that I described in the morning, and not much study- they'd just be working during the day, but participating in the sort of congregational gathering of all the monks which they held morning and evening - and more often than that on special occasions.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, I was thinking about people in the FWBO who are working in the co-ops and whether it's worthwhile just doing your visualisation practice in the morning - if that's all you have time for - if you're working the rest of the day, or whether you should leave it for retreats.

S: That probably isn't advisable. I think one needs to keep in touch on a more regular basis, because you were working you wouldn't be getting away on retreats very often, perhaps. I think it's best to try and keep up a visualisation practice every day, regardless of what you are doing; you may have to do it in abbreviated form - I think even that would be better than not doing it at all.

Silabhadra: What about frequency of six element practice within the Order, is there any recommendation as to how often we should do it?

S: That I think people normally do more when they're away on retreat, especially solitary retreat because we don't have that practice for obvious reasons on open retreat, or even for mitras - for obvious reasons. (pause) But I think in order to be able to do the six element practice one needs to have built up a reasonable amount of emotional positivity, that's why we're a bit careful about introducing that. Though unfortunately the rumour of these things gets around and so people hear all the Order is doing this and that, and why can't we do it, why should we be excluded? They think in those terms and then maybe a well-meaning Order Member actually introduces that practise on a retreat, and then people start doing it outside the Order, or even explaining it to others - it's quite difficult, as it were, to keep things under control. There have been instances of well-meaning Order Members even leading visualisation practices of Bodhisattvas on ordinary open retreats.

Silaratna: It certainly happened with the stupa visualisation and the Sakyamuni visualisation.

S: Yes, well one doesn't have to lay down hard and fast rules - maybe that occasionally it may even be appropriate - but there is a tendency for people to want to grab things for which they're not really ready; this happens constantly. (pause)

Anyway, would anyone like to read the remainder of the cuckoo's speech? It continues at the top of page 36. It's mostly in prose.

Aryamitra: "The Great Bird then continued:

'Certain indeed it therefore is that these our speeches, like our happiness in this samsaric world, the trivial joys of this our life on earth, are like a magical illusion, like a dream, a rainbow in the sky, the echo of a voice shouted into a deserted valley. These similes have all been taught (by the Lord Buddha) to show that these things have no permanence and no abiding substance.

Again, consider then the total lack of substance in this samsaric world! Hold fast to the Three Treasures, - safe refuge never failing! Clothe yourselves in the good Dharma, - the hope of this and the after life! Reduce your wants, - for death comes soon! Cut off from all attachments, - separation from your friends is certain! Hold not to anything as truth, - it is all illusion whatever it may be. All the elements of this samsaric world and of nirvana, - all are the products of your own thought. Pure thought in it's beginning is not distracted by any object whatsoever. It is empty and impersonal, unproduced, unstopped, it stays not, neither does it go nor come. If one seeks it, one finds it not; if one looks for it one sees it not. There is nothing that has perfect and complete reality. It cannot withstand analysis, - for that splits it's seeming unity into multiplicity. That is why it is not perfect and complete. Mark in your minds the true nature of all conditioned things. The fully enlightened Buddhas of the past have taught that these are non-existent, - not to be described in words. Meditate with undistracted minds their precepts which are the fruits of unconditioned knowledge. All those here assembled are assembled in a dream. All birth is but a dream-birth, all death a dream death. Buddhas are only dream-Buddhas, and those who drift about caught in the cycle of birth-and-death do so only in a dream. How can one know oneself by oneself? Even though the root of error be cut off, still not a single atom of perfect truth can be discovered. You must therefore seek salvation in your own Thought! I have placed your task before you.'

S: Let's stop there for the moment. (pause) Well again, the cuckoo, the great bird, doesn't really say anything that hasn't been said before, except he does go into emptiness a little bit more. In his previous speech he dwelt a bit more on the third laksana, - the other birds had dwelt on the first and second, suffering and impermanence, - he dwells more on no-selfhood and illusion, and he goes a bit more into this in this speech. It's in a way, not exactly a summary, but a sort of glimpse as it were of the Perfection of Wisdom but it's certainly not very systematic.

Ratnaketu: What does this bit here, 'There is nothing that has perfect and complete reality. It cannot stand analysis, - for that splits it's seeming unity into multiplicity.'

S: He seems to be adopting here a more Hinayana Abhidharma point of view; that things can be reduced to their constituent, ultimate elements or dharmas. But of course, the Mahayana maintains that the dharmas themselves ought to be reduced to sunyata. (long pause)

I think probably this whole question of illusoriness needs clarification; it is quite confusing. In a way, the Yogacharins tried to clarify it with their teaching or their doctrine of the Three Knowledges, or the Three Levels of Being. There is a discussion of this in the study retreat I took on Suzuki's 'Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism'. There's a chapter in that on these Three Knowledges or Three Levels of Being - we found that the most helpful chapter in the whole book. But broadly speaking, the Yogacharins distinguished between what they called Absolute Reality, what they called Relative Reality, and what they called Illusory Reality or Truth - the word here is satya, this can be translated as either reality or truth. (pause) I think I touched on

these in the 'Survey'. The main point is that whereas the Madhyamikas had distinguished between Absolute Reality and Relative Reality, or Absolute Truth and Relative Truth; the Yogachara introduced this third category of Illusory Reality, or Illusory Knowledge. In other words, distinguishing that which had only a relative existence from that which had in fact no existence at all, or only an illusory existence. Do you see what I mean? (pause) Well you could say that from the Mahayana point of view that the dharmas have a relatively real existence; but those things which you imagine the dharmas to be, or to make up, those things have only an illusory existence. So you could say from the Mahayana point of view, sunyata is the reality - sunyata represents Absolute Knowledge or Absolute Being, or Truth; the dharmas represent the Relative existence or Relative Reality or Relative Truth; and those things which one imagines the dharmas to make up, these things are illusory, these things represent the level of Illusory Truth, or Illusory Reality or Being.

Amoghavajra: Did you say what makes the dharmas up?

S: Yes, what is made up out of dharmas as it were; what you imagine to exist in the dharmas, you don't see just the dharmas.

Prasannasiddhi: Could you give an example?

S: Well, suppose you take the example of the mirage in the desert. Now this example is used in two different ways - this is the point I'm making. It's used to illustrate relative existence, but it's also used to illustrate illusory existence. So when it's used to illustrate relative existence, the danger is that one may think that relative existence doesn't exist at all - really just like an illusion. But the point of using the mirage as an illustration for relative existence is not that it is completely illusory, but that it only has a relative existence as the actual mirage has, not that it's completely unreal. (pause)

Prasannasiddhi: Not that it is completely unreal. So what would be an example of the illusory aspect?

S: Well, for instance, from the standpoint of Buddhist thought the self, the ego... this is the principle example of that which is illusory. You might say that the Buddha was Enlightened, so the Buddha had no ego you could say; but none-the-less there was the Buddha walking around, so there was as it were, something functioning - relatively speaking. Do you see what I mean? But that illusory ego which is the basis of the motivations and therefore actions of most people was no longer there; but not that the Buddha therefore ceased to exist - just because there is no ego and no ego based actions. So there is a distinction between what is illusory and what is only relatively existent. Or one might say, from the standpoint of Buddhist thought, that the relatively existent is that which arises in dependence on causes and conditions, but the illusory is that which does not, in reality, even arise. (pause)

Ratnaketu: So when you see a shape which you think, you assume to be, say, a person coming towards you and it's actually only a shadow, that is completely illusory, is it? Not even relative. Whereas if you saw someone coming towards you and there actually was someone coming towards you, then you could say relatively there was someone coming?

S: Yes, you could say that; that would be an analogy.

In other words, what this speech is really getting at is that reality is not something that sort of excludes differences, not something that excludes phenomenon, but it only excludes the unreal things that you've imagined in the phenomenon, but it does not cancel out the phenomenon itself. Do you see what I mean? (pause)

Khemananda: Well, you could say it enhances the phenomena, it shows it clearly.

S: Yes. So in a way you could say that when you visualise a Bodhisattva, you're visualising a being who exists relatively without any element of illusion, even though, paradoxically, you have to visualise the Bodhisattva as being like an illusion, like a mirage and so on - but only in the sense that it's not the absolute reality. (pause) Not as it were taken separately.

Amoghacitta: So it's a bit like because you see something as illusory (unclear) to actually perceive that as it really is.

S: Well, you haven't see - when you say something is an illusion, you haven't seen it as it really is, you see the basis upon which the illusion is superimposed, the illusion has concealed the basis on which it is superimposed. So you see a relative thing as it really is when you no longer see it in the illusory way that you did before. You might be walking along the road and you see a scare-crow in a field, well, you might think it's a man, then you get nearer and you see it's not a man, it's a scare-crow; it's not that you don't see anything at all when you realise it's not a man, no, you see the scare-crow that is there. It's not a very good example because the scare-crow is less than a human being, but supposing it's the other way round, supposing you say that you thought it was a scare-crow but when you get nearer you see that it's really a man; it's more like that perhaps. (pause)

Prasannasiddhi: This is sort of one way of looking at things...

S: What is one way of looking at things?

Prasannasiddhi: Ah... absolute, relative and then there's other things like interpenetrability and...

S: Yes, well that comes into play with regard to rupa and sunyata; that sunyata does not offer any resistance to being penetrated by rupa, nor rupa any resistance to being penetrated by sunyata. But when the element of illusion is there, it's as though there is a resistance to that mutual interpenetration, there's something that gets in the way, and that is illusion.

Prasannasiddhi: Back to the visualised form, is it because it's just kind of visualising you do it within the context of a meditation practice, that in a way you can't hang any illusory.... because of it's nature you've sort of left the illusory behind. So in a way, all that you've got there is the relative and the absolute.

S: Yes - the relative, which is purified as it were, purified of illusion and therefore doesn't offer any obstacle to being penetrated by the unconditioned, by the absolute; so you can see that form in the light of the absolute. It becomes, as it were, an embodiment of the absolute, an embodiment of enlightenment; it doesn't offer any sort of obstacle or hindrance to being that, just as the stained glass window - when it's been rubbed clean - doesn't offer any obstacle to the light.

Prasannasiddhi: Is it possible to see the visualised form in the illusory reality, kind of way...?

S: What, you mean in the sense that you'd regard it as a sort of ego? Yes, I think that would be possible if your outlook was a bit naive and you thought there really was an existent Bodhisattva out there on a mundane level, thinking of him as a sort of god - do you see what I mean - you could then sort of endow him with a kind of ego-type personality similar to your own, instead of realising that he embodies something quite different. In other words, you could see that particular form, but taking it as indicating something mundane, because that is the world to which you belong, not seeing it as embodying some higher dimension of things. In other words, you'd be seeing the Bodhisattva as a god rather than as an embodiment of an aspect of Enlightenment.

Prasannasiddhi: But you still have a feeling for the figure...

S: Oh yes, you must still have a feeling for the figure. It's more that you don't realise the significance of the figure.

Prasannasiddhi: But you do get it in the scriptures, I mean things like Manjushri, he holds a conversation and things like that so, in a way, he's got...

S: In a way but then the Buddha also holds conversations, even though the Buddha has no ego and therefore no illusory personality in that sense. But someone when meeting the Buddha might think, well, he's like an ordinary man; there's an ego there etc. etc.
end of tape 14 tape 15

S: A little bit to finish off. Would someone like to read that last section?

: "The Cuckoo, the Great Bird, continued:
'Now all of you met here and now, - you all will gain in happiness if only
you can act for others. Spread the good word of the Dharma, and the
fruits of that act will bring you benefits.

'Next year, in the fifth Turkish month, we will meet again in Yalung, the
great land of the birds, where in that fertile spot we shall be still more
numerous. Then, O Birds of Tibet, shall we meet again. Till then may all
of you enjoy good health! And henceforth may you never lose the spirit
of the Dharma! And pass some of the Dharma's precepts to the small
birds, even to the very tiny ones who could not join us here.'

Thereupon each bird in turn made an offering of food and fruits to the
Great Bird, performed salutation, and returned each one to his own home.
Instantly the Great Bird entered into a perfect trance."

S: (long pause) Anything needing comment or discussion there?

: This bit where it says you will only gain happiness if you act for others, that's the only sort of touch of the Bodhisattva Ideal so far, in the whole work so far.

S: In a way, yes. But I think there were one or two touches before. (pause) But certainly the Bodhisattva Ideal certainly wasn't emphasised. (pause)

: Is it because presumably that these birds are in a low state, first of all they just need to look after themselves?

S: Well, that they need just to develop some Insight. They need to go for refuge and the Bodhisattva Ideal comes in as an aspect of that in a way. (long pause)

You notice the cuckoo says that, 'henceforth may you never lose the spirit of the Dharma!' Not that, 'may you not forget what I have said'. It's as though it's the remembering of the, or not losing the spirit of the Dharma that is important - the spirit of what the cuckoo has said. (long pause)

Amoghacitta: Can I take this back just before this one to the end of the last section, these last few sentences are quite interesting where he says, 'How can one know oneself by oneself?' and the

sentence after that as well, especially interesting, 'Even though the root of error be cut off, still not a single atom of a perfect truth can be discovered.'

S: So what do you think that means? (pause)

Amoghacitta: Well it's if you're no longer deluded, you ought to be able to experience truth.

S: But it says you can't - "still not a single atom of perfect truth can be discovered". It seems to be denied. For even when you've cut the root of error that there's any truth for you to discover. Don't think that because you've got rid of error therefore you will wind up with the truth - what does that mean?

Amoghacitta: That truth is not something outside.

S: Ah! truth is not something outside - what have we got outside, it's not a sort of object that you can grasp hold of, because to think in those sort of terms is part of the error itself! So if you've cut off from the root of error, or cut through the root of error, it doesn't mean that that leaves behind an objective truth out there which you can then proceed to grasp. It's the same with, 'How can one know oneself by oneself? You can't, as it were to 'know himself' - inverted commas - you have to rise to a higher, a sort of non-dualistic level. Therefore he says, 'You must therefore seek salvation in your own Thought' and Conze puts thought with a capital T, to indicate it isn't the usual dualistic consciousness. It doesn't pertain to the level on which you cannot know yourself by yourself. It's a non-dual thought, a non-dual awareness. (pause)

Aryamitra: Did the Tibetans have an idea of the atom or something similar?

S: Oh yes, yes. In Indian thought there was certainly an idea of the atom and there was a school of Hindu thought, the Vaisheshikas, who had an atomic theory and that was well known. Mahayana sutras often refer to atoms and sub-atoms (annus) and (permannus) as they're called. They did have a sort of atomic theory.

Aryamitra: Sort of smallest particles.

S: The smallest particles, yes. Well, there's a criticism. I think it's a criticism of the Madhyamikas criticising the Sarvastivadins. The Sarvastivadins had a sort of atomic theory and they maintained, as far as I can remember, that atoms were imperceptible. They also held that atoms couldn't be divided any further and that they were imperceptible and they maintained that only when six atoms joined together did they become perceptible. You see what I mean? But then the Madhyamikas, I think it was the Madhyamikas, criticised that by saying that if one of these atoms, imperceptible atoms, could, as it were, join with five other atoms to become perceivable then, if it could join with them, well that meant it had size as it were. If it has size it had a definite shape or form, and if it had a definite shape or form it could be sub-divided. You see what I mean? So, in that way, they criticised the theory of the Sarvastivadins. (pause) But even the Mahayana sutras use the term atom or (annu or permannu) in a literary sort of way without subscribing to a sort of theory for atoms. But the notion of atoms was quite current in Indian thought.

Silaratna: When would the actual tradition of logic, it seems to be in certain schools of Buddhism, become quite popular in study. Did that actually sort of arise in the traditional, or was it worth of external reading somewhere?

S: No, it did arise within the tradition. There were examples of logical argument in the Pali Scriptures, but in the case of the Mahayana, logic was considered important for the Bodhisattvas because it's through logic, it's through reasoning that one can convince people of the truth of the

Dharma. So in that way because of emphasis on the Bodhisattva Ideal, logic - among other things - was developed by the Buddhists in India. In fact, they were pioneers in the field of logical studies. There was a sort of rather unsophisticated Indian Hindu logic before that, but this was of a (jnaya) school that was vehemently criticised by Dignaga. Then that led to a repost from the Hindus, and then a further counter attack from the Buddhists and in that way went on for a thousand years. There were very intense logical discussions between Buddhists and Hindus which ceased only when Buddhism itself disappeared from India. (pause)

So both Buddhists and Hindus gave a great deal of attention to the subject of logic and the theory of logic. Originally this was for practical spiritual reasons, but eventually it does seem that logic became something of an end in itself, or the study of logic became something of an end in itself. (pause) Any final point? (long pause)

Prasannasiddhi: With regard to page 36, with the idea of sort of human thought, it's sort of empty and impersonal and those things. in a way you can get a bit of a cold feeling from that sort of thing.

S: Yes, but this is the sort of, in a way, Yogachara point of view - it is absolute thought, pure awareness.

Ratnaketu: You could equate pure thought with pure awareness could you? Do they mean the same thing?

S: Well verbally, yes. They can be regarded as verbally equivalent expressions. That is, I'm not saying that there are two things and that they can be regarded as the same thing. I'm saying that there are two expressions which can be regarded as two expressions for the same one thing.

Ratnaketu: And that one thing is....like quite often in Milarepa you get...he's talking about the mind, the pure mind. Is that the same again?

S: Roughly speaking, yes. The way it says it is empty and impersonal, unproduced, unstopped. It stays not, neither does it go nor come, etc. That is the unconditioned as it were from the Yogachara point of view, in a somewhat, as it were, one-sided way. It's the unconditioned as it appears on that dualistic level, where it seems to exclude the conditioned. One hasn't risen yet to the level where the unconditioned is seen as not excluding the conditioned, as seen as - as it were - appearing through it.

Prasannasiddhi: And that is what sort of makes it appear a bit cold.

S: Yes, yes. Just as without the stained glass window. The white light may seem rather cold.

Silaratna: So the Yogachara tradition actually is, from what I gather, that it just sort of didn't get any further than Mahasunyata or did it sort of go.....

S: I wouldn't like to say that because it was the Yogacharins who also introduced the idea of the Trikaya. The concept of the Sambhogakaya. (long pause)

Ratnaketu: Along these sort of lines, talking about pure thought and pure awareness, I was reading in Edward Conze's commentary on the Heart Sutra. He said it's interesting to note that so many words in the Heart Sutra have got this word 'jna' in it, and he said, and he quoted that, you know, meaning intellectual, intellectual activity; that's what he said it was. And I would have thought that pure thought and pure awareness seem a bit more than just intellectual activity.

S: Guenther translates it as awareness, in a sense of a non-dual awareness. I think, perhaps,

Conze reads too exclusively an intellectual meaning into these terms because the words themselves are in a way cognitive; they pertain to thinking rather than feeling. But nonetheless we mustn't interpret them purely intellectually otherwise that would be quite one-sided. It's as though thought and feeling have to be brought together. It's as though thought is represented, thought at the highest level is represented by the unconditioned and it's as though feeling at the highest level is represented by the purified conditioned - you see what I mean? It's as though, one may say, that purified thought is represented by sunyata and purified feeling, purified emotion is represented by form, and the two have to be brought together. (pause) You can't have a feeling about sunyata, consider it just as sort of emptiness in a more literal sense. You can have a feeling about a Buddha or Bodhisattva form. So that the form was, especially the sort of the purified form of the Buddha or Bodhisattva, evoked the sort of feeling element, the emotional element, which then has to be sort of fused with the experience of the unconditioned or of sunyata. (pause)

Prasannasiddhi: You wouldn't be likely to have such an emotional kind of connection with the clear blue sky?

S: No, no, you wouldn't. I mean, suppose you just didn't even think even in terms of a clear blue sky - just empty space! I mean, empty space in a way is a more adequate symbol for sunyata. You couldn't have much of a feeling about empty space. It wouldn't involve your emotions in the same way that a sort of a glorified figure would, or person would.

Prasannasiddhi: It's interesting. Sagaramati was saying that he came to the conclusion that he found the Heart Sutra, he found that he had no feeling for the Heart Sutra. It didn't kind of strike him, he didn't have any great feeling, it didn't arouse any kind of feelings for him.

S: Well, it is difficult to make an emotional connection with it. Whereas one can make an emotional connection, say, with something like the Happy Land Sutra where there's a description of the Happy Land and the Buddha there and the Bodhisattvas there, jewel trees, when one can respond emotionally to all that in a way that one can't, perhaps, to the Heart Sutra. Because whatever the content may be, the Heart Sutra does speak the language of concepts and I don't think it's easy for concepts to arouse people's emotions. Images arouse them much more easily. So it is as though sunyata and rupa - within the context of the visualisation practice - represent the two points of highest possible development of thinking on the one hand and emotion on the other, but then brought together.

Ratnaketu: Could you try and link up these even more? Could you possibly see some connection between the reality and pleasure principles and...

S: I think you could, and also the imagination, because maybe we regard the imagination as including both. But yes, you could say sunyata does represent the reality principle on the highest possible level, and what you actually visualise, the form of the Buddha or Bodhisattva represents the pleasure principle on the highest possible level, because it gives you intense delight or intense joy to contemplate it. It's also beauty. Or, you could even go further. You could say, well if, you say that if sunyata represents the truth then the rupa, the form, represents beauty. And actually in modern Indian language the rupa is used often in the sense of beauty. And if you get beauty and truth together - truth, truth existing in the form of beauty, well that represents the object of the imagination. I mean, the imagination you could say - in the highest sense, with a capital 'I' - is that which apprehends truth through the medium of beauty. Do you see what I mean?

Amoghacitta: Or even vice-versa, perhaps. Could you say that?

S: No not vice-versa, no, no.

Amoghacitta: Isn't truth beautiful?

S: Well, that's metaphorically speaking. Hmm?

Prasannasiddhi: What you said about Imagination combines the two?

S: It is not that imagination combines the two - we don't have a proper word for the objective correlate of the Imagination. We can say the image, but if one speaks of the Imagination as a faculty, as one of the powers of the human mind, then Imagination in the highest sense sort of apprehends truth in the sense of sunyata, that is to say truth in the highest sense, through the medium of form, that is to say beauty in the highest sense. It sort of apprehends them together. So in that sense imagination is the highest human faculty. It's a faculty which integrates thought and feeling. And in that way apprehends reality - using that word rather loosely - in terms of both truth and beauty. So in the case of the visualisation practice, you're concerned with truth and beauty. You're concerned with truth inasmuch as the rupa is sunyata and you're concerned with beauty inasmuch as the sunyata is rupa. You see what I mean? You're bringing together your feeling for beauty and your feeling for truth. You're bring together into the faculty that we call the Imagination. That's why I have been saying that prajna would be considered as the Imagination. It's prajna, not as an intellectual faculty but prajna as non-different from sraddha, from faith. It's as though, in connection with the visualisation, it's through prajna that you intuit the sunyata element, but it's through sraddha that you appreciate the rupa element, ie. the Buddha or Bodhisattva form, so in that practice sort of understanding and faith come together. Your appreciation, your awareness of truth and your appreciation of beauty - they also come together. So that's one of the sort of significances or functions even of this kind of visualisation practice. It caters to the sense of beauty as well as to the feeling for truth. You see what I mean? And truth expresses itself, so to speak, in the beautiful form, but the form isn't just a beautiful form. It's the beautiful form expressive of the truth. You could even say that is what makes it beautiful. So if one wants to say, as Keats says, that beauty is truth, truth beauty, that's only true on the level of the Imagination - in the highest sense. Because I mean, beauty is truth much in the same way that rupa is sunyata and vice-versa. You didn't know that Keats was a Buddhist, did you?

Aryamitra: It's good stuff for a talk.

S: Possibly. (pause) So you could say, going back to what we were talking about before, that people seemed to find quite difficult, you could say that seeing the conditioned in the light of the unconditioned meant seeing the beauty of the conditioned. You see what I mean? (pause)

Aryamitra: Do you think that's what Keats meant?

S: Well, there was great speculation as to what he meant. Perhaps that's what he ought to have meant, should have meant if he didn't mean it! He does say '*beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know.*' Of course, if one takes that 'all ye know on earth', well, that's a bit of an exaggeration and not many people know it, perhaps. But maybe it is all you need to know.

Silaratna: In which particular poem did he say that?

Silabhadra: The 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'.

S: Ah right! Someone knows his Keats it seems. (laughter)
Anyway, perhaps we'd better leave it there. It's more than time for lunch.

Next Day, side two of tape 15

S: Would someone like to read the first section.

Buddhapalita: "THE FOLLOWING YEAR, at the beginning of the fifth Turkish month, the Great Bird emerged from his trance, and went to Tibet. The birds, ever more numerous, flew rapidly over the words of Yalung, the great land of the birds. All the Tibetan birds came to Yalung to wait upon the Great Bird and beg of him the Dharma. Like a swaying bamboo hurdle they appeared when first they greeted him. They felt great joy and ardour in their hearts. With the King Vulture and others at their head, they uttered with once voice the following request;

'Greetings, you great and noble bird.
In the year since we last met,
Has your body been in health,
Your mind turned deeper into trance?
Have you continued teaching Dharma
To birds in this samsaric world?
Were you wearied by your journey here?
Did you take care in coming to Tibet?
On all great birds assembled here,
Kindly bestow again your favour!
We beg again some Dharma which befits our minds.'"

The Great Bird smiled, and spoke as follows:
'O birds, both large and small assembled here,
I wish you well.
In the year now past until to-day,
In body free from sickness, and with happy mind,
In the cool shade of a Santal tree,
I felt the ecstasy of trance increasing in my mind
Having withdrawn from all distraction,
I felt the beatitude of well-achieved seclusion
Having rejected greed and hate, those bad companions,
I felt the lonely ecstasy of transic meditation.
Intensively I turned the wheel of Dharma
For the birds of the land of India.
On my journey to Tibet
I had no cause for weariness of body or of mind.
Glad am I to reach Yalung, this country of the birds,
Great happiness I feel in this most fertile place.
O birds of Tibet, assembled here, are you content in body and in mind?
Auspicious the trend of events which allowed us to meet again alive!'"

S: Doesn't seem to be very much here which requires comment. (pause) Except perhaps this line, the last line spoken by all the birds together - 'We beg again some Dharma which befits our minds' In other words, which is suited to our understanding. This is something which one needs to bear very much in mind if one is involved with things like Centre classes or Mitra study groups. The Dharma has to befit peoples' minds, their mental outlook, level of intelligence, cultural background - all those things. (long pause)

Ratnaketu: Bhante, what is transic meditation?

S: Conze uses 'trance' for samadhi or dhyana, so transic meditation is meditation leading to the experience of dhyana or samadhi. It's rather unfortunate that he uses this word, but he uses it quite persistently. For instance, he speaks of morality trance and wisdom in his "Buddhism, its Essence and Development".
(murmurs of surprise)

Ratnaketu: Sounds a bit strange, doesn't it?

Amoghacitta: I'm sorry, is this referring to dhyanic meditation then or transcendental.

S: No, he uses the word trance to translate samadhi or dhyana. So when he says 'trans ic meditation' - using the adjectival form of trance - he means that kind of meditation leading to dhyana or samadhi.

Silaratna: One thing that did sort of occur to me is this sort of matter about self-consciousness and how... I mean these birds, the birds seem to have developed, it might be taking them a little too literally. Like the birds actually for some of these realisations they've had, sort of need to have developed a certain amount of self-consciousness, reflexive consciousness (he laughs) don't know how to quite fit in with birds. (laughter)

S: I think one can take it that the birds represent human beings and one mustn't take it any more literally than one takes Aesop's Fables literally.

Silaratna: But then there is that, you know, there's that sort of passage right at the start where it says that the Lord Buddha has said in the language of angels, although that's right, because it did say, er...

S: But, in any case, here the language of birds is being spoken.

Amoghacitta: Why does he say, 'I felt the lonely ecstasy of transic meditation'?

S: One can't be sure, because one hasn't got the Tibetan to refer to. Perhaps it was solitary rather than lonely. Lonely has a definite connotation which would seem to be inconsistent with the experience of samadhi. When you experience samadhi by yourself, it might be a solitary experience in a sense, but you hardly experience it as lonely. (pause) But maybe one has to read it in conjunction with the preceding line, 'Having rejected greed and hate, those bad companions, I felt the lonely ecstasy of transic meditation'. He was alone in a sense, but being separated from the 'bad companions' of greed and hate. So it wasn't a real loneliness. (pause)

The polite enquiries which the birds make about the health of the cuckoo follow the general pattern of Tibetan politeness, which of course is based on Indian Buddhist tradition. In the Pali Canon one finds the Buddha enquiring after the health of visitors in this sort of way, and visitors enquiring after the health of the Buddha. This is a quite common sort of procedure. Even nowadays if you meet Tibetans at least they say (Tibetan phrase?) which means 'Are you all right in your body, is your bodily health in order.'

Aryamitra: I think, er, maybe we kind of lost a bit of that ourselves.

S: I think perhaps we have. (pause) Well sometimes you ask people if they've had a good journey - if they've travelled a distance, of course.

Aryamitra: You say 'How are you feeling?' not, 'How are you?'

S: Yes. One doesn't expect very often a genuine reply.(laughter)

f you say to someone, 'How are you feeling' they're expected to say, 'Oh, quite alright, thank you.' If they were to say actually how they were feeling, you'd probably be surprised because you haven't really asked how they're feeling. You just made a few polite noises.

Aryamitra: Is it necessary then.. I mean you could say, well, we've lost this form of greeting. We could say is it necessary.

S: Or, what function does it serve?

Khemananda: Just to, kind of break the ice, to lead in as it were.

S: Yes, yes. We can't plunge into intensive communication straight away - not usually.

Amoghacitta: Is there any significance where he says, 'I felt the beatitude of well-achieved seclusion' - why is this seclusion well achieved?

S: For him to be secluded was a positive thing. It was a good achievement, a worthy achievement. Or it could mean well-achieved in the sense of complete. I think where it's a translation and one doesn't have the original, one can't look too closely at the exact meaning of the words. (long pause)

Aryamitra: He says at the end, 'Auspicious the trend of events which allowed us here to meet again alive!' As if they must have some good karma.

S: Good karma in common because if one considers how many birds there were and how great the dangers are to birds life, even in a place like Tibet, well, it was really fortunate, it was really auspicious that they all managed to reach that place alive. It's a bit like getting here - to Il Convento. I mean last year - I don't know about this year, I think this year was comparatively free from mishap - but last year one or two of our friends had unfortunate experiences on the way. One lost, or I think perhaps had stolen, most of his money.

Prasannasiddhi: It's as if there's sort of pockets of safety, havens around the world or in Tibet and India, and you sort of travel from one to the other. It could be a bit dangerous in between.

S: It's like when some of our friends travel from London to Bombay or London to Delhi. In a way, you don't know what might happen on the road, or in the air rather. I mean Asvajit who is now there wrote, for instance, that he'd booked on a certain airline but he wasn't sure if he'd actually go on that or transfer to another because the one he'd booked on was scheduled to fly through Damascus. He thought they might be fighting there all the time. He arrived, so I don't know whether he did change or not, anyway, he did have an uneventful and quite safe journey to Bombay. But things can happen on the way - one might even be hijacked! (laughter) On my last visit but one we had to be re-routed because of strikes in Bombay airport, to change to another airline and go through Delhi and that added about an extra twenty four hours onto the journey. (pause) Not to speak of flying between London and, say, Sydney, or London and Auckland. Lots of perils for little birds on the way!(laughter)

Prasannasiddhi: Not to speak of the planes themselves.

S: Not to speak of the planes themselves! (laughter) Better not dwell upon these things - our little birds will be afraid to fly off anywhere! (laughter) Just hop from branch to branch looking from side to side carefully.

Anyway, there doesn't seem really anything that needs to be gone further into here so maybe we could go on and see what the guru of the small birds has to say.

Ratnaketu: "Thereupon the Guru of the small birds rose, made his three salutations, and said:
'Greetings, you great Cuckoo of wide renown!
Fair to see your body's beauty,
Sweet to hear your gentle words,
Meek and friendly is your nature,
Devoted from compassion to enlighten us.
A learned Indian bird, coming to Tibet,
To this great flock of small and tiny birds,
Who did not meet before 'twixt' India and Tibet,
Extend to us the kindness of your heart.
We beg such Dharma as befits the mind of each.'"

S: Yes. So it doesn't say who the Guru of the small birds is, what particular kind of bird. He seems to be a sort of Mitra Convenor, you might say. (laughter) It does seem just like that, doesn't it? "Thereupon the Guru of the small birds rose, made his three salutations, and said: 'Greetings, you great cuckoo of wide renown! Fair to see your body's beauty, Sweet to hear your gentle words, Meek and friendly is your nature, Devoted from compassion to enlighten us.'"

There's a note here, which might be worth looking at by Conze
"Literally", that is for the line Devoted from compassion to enlighten us. "You who are endowed with compassion and the thought of Enlightenment" - the Bodhicitta. "This is the way of saying that the cuckoo is a Bodhisattva, for the characteristic of a Bodhisattva is that from compassion for all beings. He makes a vow to gain enlightenment for the benefit of others, or to help others to win enlightenment in their turn."

Aryamitra: It's much more poetic.

S: Yes, one notices that the cuckoo, being an Indian bird, appears in the light of an Indian teacher travelling to Tibet, as many Indian teachers did. 'A learned Indian bird, coming to Tibet, to this great flock of small and tiny birds, Who did not meet before 'twixt' India and Tibet, Extend to us the kindness of your heart.' Just as some Tibetans were able to go to India and study there, others, in fact many of us, but a lot of people not, so the Indian teachers had to go to Tibet. So one should understand this section against that sort of historic background.

(unclear) 'We beg such Dharma as befits the minds of each', or the mind of each. There is in a way quite an insistence on this, because earlier on they all said, 'We beg again some Dharma which befits our minds'. The way in which the Dharma is presented really does have to be appropriate to the mental state of those to whom one is speaking. (long pause)

Amoghacitta: Bhante, why is it that Indian sages want to go to Tibet.

S: Well, to spread the Dharma. Because Tibet wasn't originally Buddhist. It became Buddhist only from about the seventh century, so there was a whole stream of Indian teachers going there. Just as Padmasambhava and Santarakshita went.

Aryamitra: It must have been very risky.

S: Indeed yes, yes. In fact, they went mostly on foot or at best on horseback or muleback. Quite a long journey, very different climatic conditions, completely different culture. The Tibetans then

were comparatively barbaric, comparatively savage. At the very beginning they had no written literature, they had no alphabet. That came in only with Buddhism.

Aryamitra: Who's that Russian painter?

S: Russian painter? That was Roerich, Nicolas Roerich.

Aryamitra: I've been hearing that he used to have to carry a gun to ward off bandits when he was painting.

S: Oh yes. This, this was the case until very recent times. There were many areas of Tibet, especially eastern Tibet, Kham, where the Lhasa Government didn't exercise any effective control, where the country was under the control of local chiefs. Some were even bandit chiefs. It was those people who put up very stiff resistance to the Chinese. In fact, are still putting up some resistance fighting for the old(unclear) bands of (Tibetan name) in the mountains of eastern Tibet, holding out, refusing to surrender, harassing any Chinese troops that pass through the area.

Aryamitra: And they're probably more used to the mountains.

S: Yes, yes. (pause) This also seems pretty straight forward. Carry on then, see what the Great Bird says.

Amoghacitta: "The Great Bird then rejoiced and smiled, saying:

'Cuckoo! So be it, little birds! Excellent is your request for the Dharma. Certainly it comes as a consequence of your bright deeds in earlier lifetimes.'

He then went on to expound the Dharma in such a way that it could be understood by all birds, large and small, good and bad. His discourse was beneficial to their heart, spreading a salutary understanding through their minds."

S: Anything that requires comment here?

Prasannasiddhi: What's the word 'salutary' mean?

S: Salutary literally means promoting health, the same as health, but it means beneficial, healthful.

Ratnaketu: So its beneficial to their minds and hearts?

S: Yes. In other words, so to speak, both emotionally and intellectually beneficial. Though again, since its a translation, one shouldn't perhaps press that point too much. (pause)

Khemananda: It does seem a bit of a contradiction that the 'bad' birds, as it were, would understand the Dharma. I should think their badness could well cut them off from the Dharma, or an understanding of it.

S: You're referring to the following.....

Khemananda: No, it's 'He then went on to expound the Dharma in such a way that it could be understood by all birds large and small, good and bad.' He must be very talented to get the bad birds to understand the Dharma.

S: I notice Conze, at the beginning of the next paragraph says, 'The ill-omened birds'.

Khemananda: Oh, right!

S: That's a slight slip on his part, in a sense that it should really be, I suppose, 'birds of ill-omen'. It's not that the birds themselves are ill-omened, but their presence is an ill-omen. The birds themselves may be perfectly good, but having to see that particular bird was a bad omen, an ill omen.

Prasannasiddhi: I thought that the fact that, that certain birds actually were ill omened because of their character and their (unclear)

S: Not necessarily, not necessarily. With regards to other things, In India, a monk is regarded as an ill omen by some people. He may be a very good monk, a very holy monk, but he represents a negation of worldly things and, from the worldly point of view, that's a bad thing, a bad sign - it's an ill omen.

Prasannasiddhi: I think it does mention in the bit at the end, the background, that the ill omened birds were....

S: Yes. Well one could say the ill omened birds are the birds of prey. So one could say, well, they're not very ethical. (pause)

But some of the other birds even live on living things. The peacock lives on snakes. Lots of birds live on little insects. Perhaps this point too one shouldn't press unduly. There are certain birds that are conventionally regarded in different cultures as warnings, as it were, that something unfortunate was going to happen. That may or not be connected with any particular feature in the birds themselves. For instance take the black cat. In the west, is a black cat regarded as a sign of good or bad luck?

Aryamitra: Good luck.

S: Well, the Nepalese regard it as a sign of bad luck. you see, it doesn't affect the nature of the cat.

Silaratna: Well, the black cat in the west has got associations with occultism and witchcraft.

S: It's a black cat crossing your path that is regarded as a sign of good luck. In the same way, to one of the Nepalese a black cat crossing your path is a sign of bad luck.

Prasannasiddhi: Actually, it is a sign of bad luck in the west too, actually.

S: A black cat? No, no, good luck. That's why you get black cats on greeting cards; black cats and bluebirds and swallows.

Prasannasiddhi: Well, a black cat where I came from was evil! (laughter)

S: Well, in witchcraft witches are often supposed to have black cats, but that's another kind of a situation. Generally, they are regarded as definitely a sign of good look. And, like horseshoes, you often seem on greeting cards black cats, pretty little black kittens on horseshoes, and robins. All these little creatures are regarded as signs of good luck. Anyway, it does differ from culture to culture to some extent. Alright, carry on then and read the next bit. It's quite a long one.

Amoghacitta: "From among them the Owlet rose, made his three salutations, bowed low and said: *sbu khan sbu khan*, which means, *are their hearts at ease?*"

'Those beings who dwell in this samsaric world, - are their hearts at ease?'

All beings with their sufferings, - are their hearts at ease?

Those suffering in hell, - are their hearts at ease?

The haughty with all their might, - are their hearts at ease?

Bad men ruling the earth, - are their hearts at ease?

Cheats with all their money, - are their hearts at ease?

The eight worldly dharmas and a respectable appearance, - do they put the heart at ease?

The jealousies of bad neighbours, - do they put the heart at ease?

The evil thoughts of unharmonious companions, - do they put the heart at ease?

Mistaken views of bad pupils, - do they put the heart at ease?

Each one seeks his own peace, - but rarely does he find it.'

S: An owlet is, of course, a baby owl. What do you think is meant by one's heart being 'at ease', that being the main theme here.

Aryamitra: The conscience.

S: It seems to suggest two things, a state of happiness and also a state in which the conscience is at rest.

Aryamitra: It does sometimes seem amazing that, say, people who maybe are up to all kinds of mischief and sometimes evil things can actually speak of (unclear) But I suppose there are lots of (unclear) and things about. I think it was Subhuti in a talk was saying a friend of his, I think it might have been his brother actually, was on tranquillisers. A Roman Catholic Priest.

S: Well, not exactly an evil character!

Aryamitra: No, no! (laughter)

Ratnaketu: Apparently, I was reading a book about dreams and it was talking about America, and the average person in America has nightmares. They don't have good, you know, enjoyable dreams. They just have fearful dreams all the time.

S: It does seem a lot of people do take tranquillisers in the west, sleeping pills and so on. I don't know what the percentage is in England. I assume (unclear) (pause)

But the whole section draws attention to the fact that people very rarely have their hearts at ease, particularly in the world. It's not just a state of happiness. Oh yes, they may be happy in a way, at least a bit joyful from time to time when things go right, when things go their way - but that is quite a different thing from having a 'heart at ease'. A sort of genuine experience of happiness, a clear conscience, an experience of content. That's a quite different thing.

Aryamitra: They're free from guilt.

S: Free from guilt, free from any degree of worry, any degree of care, any emotional disturbance. So the owlet is, in a way, saying, well if your heart isn't at ease, well what is the use, what is the value of the things that you're doing? Those beings who dwell in this samsaric world - are their hearts at ease? Are their hearts at ease despite all the activities in which they're involved? Despite having a human body, despite having wealth and possessions, despite having a family, despite having children. Are their hearts at ease? I mean, that's the main thing! So have they achieved that, do they experience that? 'All beings with their sufferings, - are their hearts at ease? Those

suffering in hell, - are their hearts at ease?, the haughty with all their might, - are their hearts at ease?' Think of people who are in positions of political power, think of people in the Kremlin, think of the people in the White House and Pentagon, even think of people at number ten Downing Street - are their hearts at ease, could one say? Especially in those countries where their government is liable to be overthrown at any moment almost by force and some other Government installed in its place. I was reading, not so long ago, a book in which there was an account of the way in which one of the recent presidents of Pakistan was deposed. Apparently he woke up in the middle of the night in bed and there was a man standing over him with a gun. The man said, 'Come on get up, out', and he wasn't even given time to dress; he was just bundled outside, shoved into a car, driven off to the airport and whisked off to another country and vanished. A new Government took over, a new president, a new dictator.

Ratnaketu: And he's still alive in this country?

S: I think so, I don't think he was shot. But he was relatively lucky. But according to this little account I read, he thought that his last moment had come and he, he thought they were just going to take him outside and shoot him. But they didn't.
(exclamations)

And also, the account said that he was taken out of bed, not even allowed to put any clothes on and, as he was a big fat man, he cut rather a comic figure in a way, in that state. So as he was bundled into the waiting car, the soldiers standing around were laughing at him. What a fall/fool, huh?

So, 'the haughty with all their might, - are their hearts at ease? Bad men ruling the earth, - are their hearts at ease? Cheats with all their money, - are their hearts at ease? The eight worldly dharmas and a respectable appearance, - do they put the heart at ease?'

The note tells us what the eight worldly dharmas are, the lokadharmas, they're a very well known list. Sometimes translated as the 'worldly winds', "The eight laukika dharmas which are: gain and loss, respect and contempt, good luck and bad luck, praise and blame". And usually instead of good luck it's pleasure and pain. But anyway, 'changing worldly conditions and a respectable appearance, - do they put the heart at ease?' What do you think is meant by a 'respectable appearance'?

Aryamitra: Dress?

Ratnaketu: It reminds me of someone, somebody in the middle of disaster trying to powder their face and trying to keep in all together.

S: But just being a respectable member of society, having a respectable appearance, having a certain position in society, being looked up to be people in your particular group, your particular social circle, your particular world. Do they put the heart at ease? Does that put the heart at ease? Does it give you any real satisfaction, any real content, any real happiness.

Prasannasiddhi: Sort of trying to be a good group member...

S: Yes, yes.

Prasannasiddhi: Dressing up to look good.

S: It's amazing the extent to which people try to keep up appearances, at least it is in England. At least in the middle classes and probably much beyond. Appearances are everything. You

know, I remember in this connection, a friend whom I might have mentioned before, the one who committed suicide, eventually he separated from his wife. But, even though he separated from his wife and was planning to get divorced, his parents wouldn't let him tell anybody - even the closest relations. They wanted to keep up the appearance of him still being on good terms with his wife because they didn't like to think that they had to admit that their son's marriage wasn't successful; it would somehow lower them in the eyes of the other relations or their neighbours. So every weekend this son had to go and see his parents as part, a sort of ritual. And they'd warn him about his aunt coming; don't say anything, don't let her know. In other words, don't let her know that you're separated from your wife. So auntie so-and-so would come and say, well how's the wife, how's she getting on, why isn't she here. And my friend would just have to say, well, she's O.K., fine, she's got a bit of a cold - she couldn't come. They hadn't been living together for two or three years! Yet the parents insisted that appearances were kept up in that way, yes. And again, when he did die, when he did commit suicide, his parents went along to the place where he had been living and they collected all his suits and things. Well, his mother insisted that everything must be wrapped up in brown paper before they carried it out to the car in case any neighbours saw what it was they were carrying out to the car. She insisted that everything had to be wrapped up in brown paper. And I saw this for myself, I was a witness to this.

Ratnaketu: That's really strange.

S: Yes. Appearances are everything to some people.

Khemananda: My sister was telling me recently that when I got involved in the Friends, my mother said to her, 'Oh, we needn't tell any of the relatives and friends that he's got involved in Buddhism. That's our business, we musn't tell them, we must keep it to ourselves.'

S: The shameful secret! Yes, the skeleton in the family cupboard. (laughter) Like having, you know, a relation who is in a lunatic asylum, you don't let people know. Or someone who is in prison.

Ratnaketu: Actually I remember, a really awful case of this was found New Zealand, there was two women, two very elderly women were found in a mental institute and research was made as to why they had been put in. And it was found out that they were actually quite normal, but when they were put in, they had illegitimate children and they were the daughters of some few very well-to-do families and to keep the family clean they made out that they were insane and put them inside, rather than having them have illegitimate children.

Amoghavajra: It's quite incredible what people will do. In the past a lot of young women who were in the asylums who were just in there they'd had illegitimate children,

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