

General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

Hidden Treasure

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team

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S: (unclear) Well, what does this suggest? Why should such a state of affairs come about? Why should some people be so concerned to keep up a respectable appearance that they lead, in the end sometimes, virtually a double life; a life which other people are allowed to see or that people of their own social circle are allowed to see, and another life which they are not allowed to see?

Aryamitra: They're sort of caught up in a restricted group, aren't they?

S: Yes.

Aryamitra: With particular group values.

Ratnaketu: They don't have, sort of individual confidence in themselves - it's got to be related to other people.

S: But it must also be recognised that in some societies it's very difficult not to live up to appearances because, sometimes, the penalties for doing a comparatively innocent thing are so terrible. I remember last year I read a novel by Anthony Trollope. It was quite a well written novel, nothing special about it, but, from a social point of view, it was quite interesting. Much of the story - the greater part of the story - revolved upon the fact that a young woman, a perfectly respectable young woman, had been seen talking to a perfectly respectable young man in a field somewhere, just for a few minutes, and that endangered her reputation in this small town where she lived. In other words, if you live in a small town like that, and if you were a young woman well, in a sense you had to keep up appearances. You couldn't afford to be actually seen talking to a young man even for a few minutes. It might spoil your chances of marriage and so on. Do you see what I mean? So it's quite easy for us to talk in terms of well defying society and not bothering about appearances. It's not as easy as that sometimes. The pressure of society is very great, very terrible and, if you clash with society, if you challenge society's values, society many destroy you. It's not a small thing that you're up against. So I shouldn't take it lightly and maybe shouldn't ridicule too easily people who are concerned with keeping up at least a certain kind of appearance. Do you see what I mean? (pause) Because most human beings desperately want or desperately need to belong to a group. It's almost a psychological necessity; they're not individuals so they dare not challenge the values of the group. Do you see what I mean? They dare not - whatever they may privately feel or think about them, however much they may conflict with their own needs, their own emotions, their own desires, their own instincts, they don't dare to challenge the patterns of the group. Because, where else have they to go?

Aryamitra: Maybe that's why, say, minority groups - for want of another word - they do form a group of their own. Think of, say, Gay Liberation who are sometimes a bit fanatical or so forth, it's because they have to belong, you know, to another group.

S: If you're own group, so to speak, won't accept you, well, you either have to remain on your own - which hardly anybody can do - or you have to find some other group, or some other people who are similar to yourself and form a sort of group within the group with them. Create a sub-culture with them as, for instance, black people sometimes do. (pause)

Prasannasiddhi: Or even the FWBO...

S: But that is rather different because that's a case of, you know, one creates a spiritual community within the group. But one can even understand people creating a group within a group because the larger group does not satisfy their genuine needs. What is unfortunate though, something in a rather different category, is people keep up appearances in a silly, trivial sort of way. (pause) When you read, for instance, that people

pretend to go away on holiday so that the neighbours won't think that they haven't got enough money to go abroad, or something like that, they just go around the corner, not very far away, and stay with some relations and pretend that they've been away on holiday - one reads of things like that happening - because they'll be looked down upon if people think they haven't been away on holiday like everyone else.

Aryamitra: it is odd, isn't it. It would be so simple to say, you know, I couldn't afford a holiday. (pause)

S: But anyway, 'The eight worldly dharmas and a respectable appearance'. Do they put the heart at ease, even if you've got it? Does it really put one's heart at ease to keep up with the Jones'? (pause)

And, 'the jealousies of bad neighbours, - do they put the heart at ease?' They very clearly don't. It's as though the text suggests that if you live in the world having bad neighbours who are jealous of you is almost inevitable. 'The jealousies of bad neighbours, - do they put the heart at ease?', as if you're bound to have them, you can't get away from them (unclear) Maybe this is not strictly true, but if one does have bad neighbours, if they are jealous, well certainly then they don't put one's heart at ease. (long pause)

And then, 'The evil thoughts of unharmonious companions, - do they put the heart at ease?' It's as though he's saying, well, if your companions are not harmonious, if they have evil thoughts and if they don't put the heart at ease, what's the use of having such companions. (pause)

Aryamitra: I didn't always realise what it's like in the world, so to speak, when you talk about neighbours. I do know a lot of friends who've had really terrible lives because of their neighbours. Yet we don't really experience that at all if we live in the communities.

S: Yes, a bad neighbour can really make your life a misery. Someone who's very noisy, or always fighting and quarrelling, gives you sour looks every time he sees you, bangs on the wall unnecessarily, or plays a musical instrument loudly, or turns up his radio or record player, parks his car outside your gate. Bad neighbours can do all sorts of things; lets his dog scratch up your plants. (pause) It must be very difficult to live in the world. (long pause)

The, 'Mistaken views of bad pupils, - do they put the heart at ease?' I suppose one could look at this from the point of view both of the teacher and the bad pupils themselves. Mistaken views certainly don't put the heart at ease. (long pause)

The owl concludes by saying 'Each one seeks his own peace, - but rarely does he find it.' It may be on account of all these unpleasant experiences that come, or one is even bound to encounter in this world. (pause)

Well, let's go onto what the partridge says.

Khemananda: "Thereupon the partridge rose, made his salutations and said: *spros bral yin, spros bral yin*, which means, *it must fail you, it must fail you.*
"When you dwell in this samsaric world, happiness must fail you.
When no longer you are active, wealth must fail you.
In bad company your yearning for friendship must fail you.
When you have evil thoughts, your salvation must fail you.
With those possessed by hate, your compassion must fail you.
Caught in the rush of life, your ability to meditate must fail you.
With the impious your faith must fail you.

If the supreme Dharma does not guide you, everything you do must fail you.""

S: So, 'When you dwell in this samsaric world, happiness must fail you'. Presumably, this means that if you seek for it in worldly things. It is possible to live happily in the samsaric world, but only if one is not dependent for one's happiness on worldly things. The Buddha lived happily and his disciples lived happily - as the Dhammapada says. (pause)

'When no longer you are active, wealth must fail you.' What does this imply? If one says that one is no longer active, then this suggests that you have been active. So why should you cease to be active?

Buddhapalita: Old age.

S: Old age probably, yes. Perhaps (unclear) businesses are so short (unclear) they can no longer support you in your old age, maybe your children even won't - if you have any - no social security, no pension, nothing of that sort. So, 'when no longer you are active, wealth must fail you'; you may end up a beggar.

And then, 'In bad company, your yearning for friendship must fail you'. What does this mean? (pause) Bad company presumably means bad friends. So if you are associating constantly with bad company, with people who are not good friends, with people who are bad friends, you eventually give up the idea of being able to find any friends altogether. You may despair of friendship, your yearning for friendship must fail you - you'll think that it just is impossible, one can't find real friends in this world. You can't find anybody, can't believe anybody, can't get close to anybody, can't communicate with anybody. This is one of the reasons that, perhaps, one should avoid bad company. If one has too much of it one loses one's faith in the possibility of friendship. You may become cynical, or hardened, or bitter.

Prasannasiddhi: It's as if the ideas of friendship just sort of leave your mind and you're not even aware that such a thing can exist.

S: Because you have never encountered it, you never experience it - experience only bad company, bad friends. People who don't care at all for you, people who aren't sincere, who don't think in terms of genuine friendship.

Ratnaketu: You find that, I've experienced that, that people refuse to believe that you, living in your own community, that you're enjoying it, that it's good fun. Maybe they've been in some of the bigger communities which they've found awful, they haven't liked. So they've sort of been put right off the idea of a (unclear).

S: Or they've been let down by so called friends in the ordinary way. Maybe a so-called friend has borrowed money from them and never returned it and just cut off the connection. So, one becomes disillusioned then.

Prasannasiddhi: That's one thing coming across the Friends. You suddenly discover that you can actually be happy, just sort of looking at it in a quite ordinary way. You can actually find happiness, the sort of things you discover, you seem to sort of discover a whole way of life which is actually, you know, has happiness as its basis, which you previously didn't have any idea that it could possibly sort of exist.

S: So it's as though in general, the whole world is bad company. So if you're part of the world too much, or for too long, then any yearning for friendship that you might originally have had just fails you. You just can't believe in it any more, can't believe in the possibility. (pause)

And then, in the same way, 'When you have evil thoughts, your salvation must fail you.' When you have many unskillful thoughts, your salvation or your emancipation - the goal of your spiritual development - that must fail you, and that's pretty obvious, isn't it.

Well, the next one is perhaps more interesting. 'With those possessed by hate, your compassion must fail you.' You may be quite kindly by nature, you may even have developed compassion in the distinctively Buddhist sense, and you may believe in that and you may want to develop. You may want to be compassionate and Bodhisattva-like. But it's very difficult if you're dealing with people who are possessed by hate, people who are very antagonistic, people who are out to harm you, even people who are out to destroy you, injure you for no apparent reason. It's very difficult to maintain your compassion in the face of your experience of people of that kind. (pause) I don't know whether anybody has any experience of this. I certainly have had. people can be very, so difficult sometimes, sometimes deliberately difficult, deliberately malicious and seem to get a kick out of just creating trouble. I must say, I've experienced much more of this in India than I have in England. Oh yes, very much more.

Aryamitra: Would that be because you were starting something new, but you did start something new in England.

S: I'm not quite sure why it was. Perhaps I was, in a sense, better known there or, you know, more vulnerable. I was more the target of such feelings. That might have been something, but I'm not sure.

Aryamitra: What sort of thing - did people just get in your way or...?

S: Yes, or for no apparent reason just try to put a spoke in your wheel, as it were. They seem to get pleasure out of doing this, maybe it gives them a feeling of self-importance. Usually such people can't do anything positive or creative. They can't achieve anything so they get a certain amount of pleasure out of trying to stop you achieving anything. (pause)

Ratnaketu: I've experienced that a bit with policemen and traffic wardens. I remember Prasannasiddhi and I once, when we went to visit once the Rigpa Centre and on the way we just got, this traffic officer just took about half an hour, just... We didn't have anything, we'd just parked this van, we hadn't actually done anything wrong at all, and he just spent half an hour checking this and checking that, wanting to take down endless details. It was just like he didn't have anything better to do. He just wanted to hassle us.

S: You can see sometimes from the expressions on their faces that some traffic wardens really enjoy their work. (laughter) Their hearts seem to be in it! That's very strange. I don't think it's just that they feel they're fulfilling a civic duty. (laughter) It's almost as if they were the sort of person who was never able to afford a car. (laughter) Though one does sometimes feel that the way they sort of walk around almost preta like looking for people. But it is said that this sort of temptation is one that a Bodhisattva would particularly beware of, because he might just be tempted to give up his Bodhisattva vow thinking, well these sentient beings, they're so difficult, so tiresome, they're so stupid, they are possessed by hate and they are so unnecessary without any reason at all. One just can't do anything with them, you know, better lead a quiet life. Sometimes they may be tempted to think in this way. So with those possessed by hate, your compassion must fail. So you ought to be very careful what you take on, very careful about the sort of people you mix with, even the sort of people you try to help. They may be too much for you, their negativity may be too much for your positivity. Negativity can sometimes be very powerful, it can be a very powerful driving force. Sometimes neurotic people seem to have a weird kind of energy that can absolutely wear you down quite quickly. (pause)

Prasannasiddhi: You've got to protect yourself from that.

S: You do, yes, otherwise you just find yourself feeling like boxing their ears and telling them not to be so stupid. (pause) Sometimes it's not just people possessed by hate, but possessed by negative fears of various kinds. I remember a woman who used to be associated with the Friends some years ago. She always complained no one went to see her, she never made any attempt to go and see anyone else, and sometimes she complained to me very bitterly that no one ever went to see her. So I said, well, why don't you go and see somebody? So she said, Oh, I can't. So I said, why can't you? Well, because nobody ever comes to see me! (laughter) Well, you could go and see someone couldn't you? Well no, I don't think I could. Well why not? Well nobody ever comes to see me. Sometimes I used to feel like just giving her a slap. (laughter) It seemed so ridiculous and foolish and stupid. Maybe I should have done - she dropped out after a while. So it's not only one's compassion that must fail but your patience also. But one's compassion should never fail. But maybe one shouldn't be too patient in a sense - do you see what I'm getting at? You shouldn't put up with too much, don't put up with things which you ought not, really ought not to be expected to put up with. Other people have to take some responsibility for themselves and their own state of mind. They can't sort of put it onto you, or unload it onto you indefinitely. If they are having a bit of difficulty, you can help them or listen to them, but they've got to be prepared to pull themselves together after a while if they possibly can. Do you see what I mean? You're not obliged to go on being patient for ever and ever. It's not good for you and it's not good for them.

Aryamitra: I mean could it possibly be compassion to slap them around the face?

S: Well, it could be, it could be. But then I think you've got to be quite sure that you are in a genuinely Bodhisattva-like state of mind and it's not just irritation or impatience; that you genuinely do see and feel that that would be the best thing that you could do. Sometimes it happens that even if you do get irritated and give them a slap, actually - from a psychological point of view - it does turn out to be the best thing you could have done both for their sake and for your own. But the sort of situation I'm thinking of say, when I say don't put up with too much, don't be too patient, is, for instance, in a community. If someone persistently, for instance, leaves the bathroom tap running, or persistently doesn't wash up his cup, saucer and plate after breakfast or whatever, well the rest of the community should not be indefinitely patient and put up with that. They should bring those things to his notice and insist that he just does what everybody else does, acts as a responsible community member otherwise he will have to leave. So you shouldn't be patient in such a way that it encourages other people in unskilful habits. And, in the long run, it's also a source of irritation to you, or a source of disharmony in the community. (pause)

Sometimes people think that if you're a supposedly spiritual person you must be infinitely patient, put up with any nonsense that they want to unload on to you. Well that isn't really true. I've heard of cases where people living in the world have had to tolerate some quite outrageous behaviour from other people, but if they show at least some reluctance to tolerate this or a bit of impatience that other person turns round and says, 'Oh, I thought you were supposed to be a Buddhist.'

Aryamitra: ... thought there's supposed to be compassion, have compassion. Then you really feel like hitting them!

S: They're simply taking advantage of you. You shouldn't allow people to do that. (pause)

'Caught in the rush of life, your ability to meditate must fail you.' What do you think of that one? (pause) Observe the language quite carefully; 'Caught in the rush of life'...'your ability to meditate may fail you'.

Silabhadra: You get so absorbed in so many worldly things that there's no chance of settling the mind.

S: You're actually caught, you're trapped - not just in life, in worldly life, the rush of it, the hurry of it, the flurry, bustle of it. You're not even given time to think, time to reflect, perhaps.

Prasannasiddhi: This sort of suggests, this, I think perviously in the text about being exposed to the world, you know, when you aren't in a position to handle it...

S: Maybe there are some people who could maintain their ability to meditate and not lose it, even if they were caught up in the rush of life, or appeared to be. But one just has to estimate ones own strength. When one feels that one's ability to meditate is going to fail one, if one is caught up in the rush of life, you mustn't - if you can possibly help it - allow yourself to be caught up in it in that way.

Amoghacitta: We see that happen to us in communities as well. We spend a day cooking or going off to work. It's easy for that to creep into the meditation itself.

S: Yes. Well, some people find themselves planning menus when they should be meditating. (pause) Well, maybe there's no need to elaborate on that. No doubt everyone present could write his own personal commentary on that. (pause)

'With the impious, your faith must fail you.' What's that all about? Those who are not pious. I don't think it means impious in the conventional sense, but those who have no faith, those who have no spiritual faith, no faith in any higher spiritual reality, no faith, even, perhaps, in a genuinely ethical life. If you associate much with such people, your faith must fail you. It's like in the case of bad company your yearning for friendship will fail you. If you're always associating with people who have no faith, who don't believe in spiritual values, whose attitude towards life is cynical and materialistic, you cannot but be affected by that. In the long run, if you associate only with such people your own faith, however genuine to begin with, will fail you.

Prasannasiddhi: It's sort of like whoever is around you is affecting you.

S: Yes, against your will even.

Silaratna: You talk about turning a blind eye to something, but you can't really turn a blind eye to... it's going to come through to you anyway. (pause)

Prasannasiddhi: So you've got to surround yourself with friends which can affect you in a good way.

S: You'll find that people are very good in the group situation, at sort of tacitly assuming - or pretending to assume - that you share their views and their attitudes. For instance, it might help to give you a concrete example. Maybe you'd go along to a relation's house for a meal, and maybe they know you're a vegetarian but they don't want to accept the fact. So they'll deliberately, maybe, just prepare meat and then when the time comes to sit down they'll say perhaps, 'Well, I know you don't usually take meat, but I know that being a Buddhist you're so broad minded you won't mind taking it just on this occasion.' Do you see what I mean? So then, what can one say? One either has to be a little rude or a little impolite, apparently, or just go along with it.

Aryamitra: Having known that you are vegetarian.

S: I can't say I've personally had this experience with relations, but people that I know have. This is just one example.

Aryamitra: I'm sure you can eat a little.

S: So a little won't infringe whatever vow you might have taken.

Khemananda: Or you have the gravy or something, you'd accept that. Trying look for some leeway (unclear) to provoke or...

S: And another area in which people do this sort of thing is the area of social life or social ideals and politics; assuming that you believe in universal equality, assuming that you believe in the equality of the sexes and so on. Assuming that you believe that all black people are oppressed, or all women are oppressed, etc, etc. Do you see what I mean? It's very difficult not to sort of go along with the ideas and the attitudes of the people that you're with, not because they sort of openly proclaim them necessarily but they are taken for granted, and they expect you to take them for granted. They're sort of assumed in every conversation. You're not permitted to sort of question those assumptions. You're expected to conduct any conversation, or any exchange of communication on the basis of those assumptions. This is what makes it so difficult to escape, very often, the influence of the people with whom one associates. (pause) If you associate, say, with Left Wing people you are expected to assume, or it is assumed that you assume that say, all police are pigs, etc, etc. That there isn't such a thing as an honest copper, all coppers are bent - and so on. So, 'With the impious, your faith must fail you'; it's not that they're trying to convert you, or de-convert you. Their language, their discussions, their communication is based on a certain assumption which you cannot refuse to share without appearing to create a breach in your solidarity with them, even imperil the possibility of communication itself.

Aryamitra: It's very difficult to know it's happened sometimes.

S: Yes, you can feel yourself being drawn in or forced into a certain pattern without quite realising what is happening. (pause) Or, for instance, you go and see some friends and they say, 'shall we go down to the pub?'. Well, it's assumed that you would probably like to go down to the pub. You're not asked would you like to go down, it's sort of assumed that you probably would. That's apparently something that's not open to discussion. Or, if you say, 'well, no, I don't think I'd like to go', then they might say, or they might think, 'Oh, you're not very sociable.' And, of course, you don't want to be thought unsociable.

Aryamitra: Yes, right. Very much so. (laughter)

S: You like to be thought of as the life and soul of whatever party you may be going (to). But groups are very good at, the people who belong to groups are very good at bring to bear these sort of subtle pressures. In so-called religious discussion, yes, I've experienced it in this area that people assume, say a Christian assumes that, well, a Buddhist must believe in God in some form or other. So, for instance he says, 'What does Buddhism teach about God?'; so you say, 'well, there's no God in Buddhism'. 'Oh no! That can't be. Every religion teaches the existence of God in some form or other so what does Buddhism say? Maybe you don't use quite the same word...' (laughter) We're quite tolerant, we're quite willing to accept that but, 'You must believe in God in some form?' It isn't just materialism you know!.. (laughter) And in this way they try to bring pressure to bear on you to conduct the discussion on their terms. You're not allowed to conduct it or even to answer their questions on your terms. Again, this is a subtle group pressure. So one is exposed to this actually all the time.

Silabhadra: Most of this seemed to be based on, like, a fear that the other person can be doing something different to the way you are, or could be different to what you are.

S: For instance, when you are just working for somebody, working with other people, and maybe you're sent with another man to buy something. You're given some money and he says, 'OK

let's... we can get it for such and such, let's say it cost so much more, split the difference.' He assumes that that's the way you do things. And maybe he's saying it in quite a friendly sort of way - what are you going to say? Are you going to say, 'Well no, that would be actually stealing'? Because I mean, if you were to suggest that to him he'd be quite indignant; 'Are you calling me a thief?' 'I'm not a thief'. This is just the way you do things, this is just the custom. He thinks upon it in that sort of way... , well you can't be a mate of his if you're going to have all those sorts of fancy ideas. He'll probably think you're plain stupid, not making a few extra bob in that way. Everybody does it, it must be alright, you're entitled to it.

Ratnaketu: Especially when it's some sort of international concern, or the government, you're doing it to...everybody does it.

S: Especially to the government - it's strictly in accord with your socialist principles! (laughter)

Silaratna: That's the sort of perks of the job, actually.

S: Well, then it summarises by saying, 'If the supreme Dharma does not guide you, everything you do must fail you.' Fail in the ultimate sense; fail in any truly meaningful sense. (pause)

Ratnaketu: The whole thing seems to be saying, think about who you associate with, what you associate with.

S: I think one of the worst diseases you can pick up from other people is cynicism. I think this is really bad, really terrible, to be absolutely discouraged. It's totally anti-spiritual. It's very difficult not to join in, not to chip in, if the general tone of conversation in the group is cynical. It's very difficult not to be affected by it. One's much better off just leaving, just withdrawing, going to another room, going out, leaving that particular place. (pause)

S: Anyway, is there anything more about the partridges speech? Alright then, let's pass on to the Hoopoe's speech.

Silabhadra: "Then rose the Hoopoe who made his triple salutation and exclaimed, *mi 'ju kha tsha, mi 'ju kha tsha*, which means, *avoid it, for it burns the mouth; avoid it for it burns the mouth!*"

"The wealth which swindlers amass through their deceit, - avoid it for it burns the mouth!"

The wealth which robbers have snatched in raids, - avoid it for it burns the mouth!

Auspicious food refused to some great meditator by the master of a house, - avoid it for it burns the mouth!

The riches of the gullible fleeced by rogues, - avoid them for they burn the mouth!

The share of food withheld from the deceased at funeral repasts, - avoid it for it burns the mouth!

All these world systems, - avoid them for they burn the mouth!

Under a glaring sun in a cloudless sky

Ephemeral aggregates, stuff of illusion,

Fed on foods which burn the mouth!"

S: The expression 'burning the mouth', it's a quite concrete one , it expresses suffering. Also perhaps it's related to the question of thirst or craving, craving, the second of the Four Noble Truths is Tanha in Pali or Trsna in Sanskrit, which means literally thirst. So it's an account of one's thirst for worldly-things, one's craving for worldly things that one experiences in the long

run pain and suffering; or one burns the mouth.

So, 'The wealth which swindlers amass through their deceit, - avoid it, for it burns the mouth.' If you amass wealth in this way sooner or later you must suffer for it. It also means perhaps, don't benefit from that wealth, don't share in that wealth, don't profit from that wealth. Don't share in anybody's ill-gotten gains because you will share, to some extent at least, the evil karma which was produced when those ill-gotten gains were accumulated, and you too will have to suffer in the long run. It could be looked at in that way. (pause)

'The wealth which robbers have snatched in raids, - avoid it for it burns the mouth'. Don't benefit even indirectly from things which have been got by unskilful means. (pause) It is suggested that one should avoid the action itself because it would burn the mouth, but also avoid sharing in the short-term advantages of those evil deeds. That seems to be the meaning as far as one can make out.

Ratnaketu: For us, in a way, it can be that we don't support people and organisations who act unskilfully.

S: Yes.

Ratnaketu: You might find out that the type of, for instance, the biscuits you buy are made by a company that manufactures nuclear weapons as well, or something like that. (unclear)

S: Of course, if one applied that principle very rigorously you might end up finding that you could buy in fact very little because in the capitalist world where different interests are so closely interwoven are so interlocked, it's not easy to separate them. So as you go into *Woolworths* to buy a screwdriver, well, just look at all the interests that *Woolworths* has or is involved with in different parts of the world, and so on.

Aryamitra: I didn't know that. What interests are they?

S: Well, all these big international companies have got a range of interests, a whole sort of portfolio of... they're not going to invest in just one or two things. They do all sorts of things. You know, all sorts of countries, they've diversified their holdings for the sake of greater security - as well as profits.

Buddhapalita: That's apparently one of the greatest problems in third world countries is that big international companies come down, exploit the labour and resources and put very little back into (unclear)

S: What about tea. I mean, does one know the conditions under which tea is picked in India and in China and Ceylon? Does one know what are the wages that are being paid to the labourers, the coolies, who do the actual picking? This is the basic operation after all. Does one know?

Silaratna: There seems to be a lot to be said on that angle then for sort of like making your own things if you can. I mean, if you... obviously your time and allowances is a consideration.

S: Or at least avoiding luxuries. (pause) I mean, there aren't any longer - in England anyway - sweat shops but there used to be only a hundred years ago where people made garments for instance under very dreadful conditions; working long, long hours and being paid very, very little. Match workers were another case. The famous Annie Besant was involved in the famous match-girls' strike of the 1880's or even earlier. I don't know anybody's ever heard about that? You've all heard of Bryant and May matches? Well they had a big match factory in London or

somewhere and the matches were made by girls who were grossly underpaid and overworked and Annie Besant, who was then a socialist worker organised them into a union, organised a strike, they struck for higher wages. it was a very famous case because it was well known that those girls were really exploited, but everybody bought matches and didn't bother very much about where they came from and under what conditions they were made. That was the famous match-girls' strike. (pause)

Amoghacitta: I'm not quite clear about the difference between these two verses. I can't see the difference myself.

S: Is there not a difference between a swindler and a robber? How does a swindler operate and how does a robber operate? Is there no difference between amassing through deceit and snatching in raids?

S: One's sort of deceit and the other's violence.

S: Yes, right.

Silaratna: One, like the swindler could do something under the guise of a seemingly good cause.

S: I mean a swindler could be, outwardly, a very respectable person, a very respectable member of society. But what was an unusually respectable member of society? Not those who rob literally, or who literally snatch in raids, maybe that statement requires qualifications. What about the great train robbers? They seem to have been quite idealised by some people, don't they?

Ratnaketu: Become folk heroes.

S: Yes, sort of Robin Hood figures almost.

Aryamitra: Well, they were quite efficient thieves, I think there was very little violence.

Ratnaketu: But the thing is I think one of the reasons is because they became heroes because they escaped, not because they didn't use violence or anything like that, it's because, you know, they er...

S: They got the better of the authorities, they got the better of the police. So everybody with a sort of grudge against the authorities, a grudge against the police, feels a sort of sneaking or even an open admiration for such people, who beat the system and get away with it.

Ratnaketu: And almost everybody's got a grudge against the system.

S: And also the idea that suddenly coming into vast riches and leading a comfortable life in a foreign country, in the sunshine, plenty of wine, women and song, that appeals to quite a lot of people. They'd be quite glad to be in that particular situation, that particular position without bothering too much how they got into it.

Aryamitra: Apparently there was a lot of swindling going on.

S: Mmm (laughter) Well what is swindling?

Aryamitra: Well, yes, I suppose this is why there's probably, there could be more going on than actual...

S: Or tax evasion...

Aryamitra: Straight forward theft.

S: Well there's a difference between - what is it? - tax evasion, there's another term.

Voices: Tax avoidance.

S: Tax avoidance, yes, yes. Tax avoidance is - I hope I've got it the right way round - is simply finding a loophole which is actually there in the law, which will justify it, legally in exploiting, even though it clearly defeats the clear intention of that law. So companies employ special tax experts to help them find these loopholes which can be quite legitimately exploited. (pause) So are you a swindler when you avoid as distinct from evading? Does swindling merely consist in doing something which is illegal? Is it enough, really, that from an ethical point of view you should simply not break the law?

Ratnaketu: It's more the spirit of the law.

S: Because you may not even morally agree with the law or agree with the spirit of it. Then that raises the broader issue, what is your attitude as a responsible citizen towards a law or the observance of a law in which you do not genuinely believe on ethical grounds?

Ratnaketu: It's a bit like that in the co-ops, it's... because in the co-ops they are trying to find ways of paying less tax.

S: yes, quite legitimate ways.

Ratnaketu: Legitimate ways, but then you could say that that's going against the spirit of being a member of society in contributing to the pool of money which goes into fixing roads and things like this.

S: Yes.

Ratnaketu: But at the same time, you've got to, there's also...

S: At the same time, perhaps you ought to have an effective voice in the society which perhaps you don't feel that you have.

Ratnaketu: It's so complex.

S: It is. (pause)

Ratnaketu: I suppose in cases like that you can just stay within the law and act in the way in which you feel is right.

S: Whereas if at least you don't transgress the law, well, you're free to operate in other ways, according to your own ideas. But if you transgress the law, well that may prevent you from doing anything, especially if you are put away in prison. (pause)

Anyway, then, 'Auspicious food refused to some great meditator by the master of a house, - avoid it, for it burns the mouth!' The situation envisaged perhaps is rather like that which one encounters sometimes in the Songs of Milarepa, when Milarepa or one of his disciples goes begging from door to door. So food which you have refused to someone like that well, will just burn your own mouth so to speak, will be a source of suffering to you and a source of suffering to anybody who, knowing that you deprived the great meditator of it, himself benefited or

profited from it. In the long run it will burn his mouth too.

Amoghavajra: There's one of the stories of Milarepa when Rechungpa and he go to an old woman's house and ask for food and the woman abuses them and they go back the next morning and the woman's lying dead. (unclear)

S: And, 'The riches of the gullible, fleeced by rogues, - avoid them for they burn the mouth!' This is a bit similar to the first one, wealth which swindlers amass through deceit. To some degree, because you can deceive even very clever people, but here it is the gullible who are fleeced by rogues, stripped of all their possessions by rogues who cheat them. So one should not do this oneself, one should not be that sort of rogue, not should one benefit even indirectly from that sort of roguery.

Aryamitra: I remember when I was at school, I was working in Woolworths on Saturdays and somebody came in to try and do the fiver thing, where he says he gave you a fiver and he didn't and I knew there was something up so I just closed the till and locked it and called the supervisor. And anyway, a long argument happened, said it was and, you know, we counted the till and everything. Apparently it wasn't, so this was O.K. so he went away. But I think it was less than half an hour later that he was back in the shop in different clothes possibly doing the same thing or whatever but I felt quite threatened because, you know, I could easily have said 'oh well' and given him the change.

S: And it would have looked as if you had been dipping your hand into the till, or you would have had to make up the loss. (pause) It does certainly give one a strange sort of feeling when you are in contact with people like that who are trying to cheat or deceive.

Silabhadra: There was someone in the restaurant we used to have come in every other day always trying to claim she had things that.. really she had a lot more in little boxes, and we just knew her everytime, and it's like there's a little game going on each time at the till, and she knew that she'd lost but couldn't actually say anything. (unclear)

S: Well, I was remembering incidents from my own experience some years ago, this was in Bombay, that was a time when I was finishing the writing of the Survey, and I wrote chapter four, the last part, in Bombay when I was with a friend with whom I was staying. Anyway, what happened was this. I'd had this typed by somebody and I'd collected it, that is, this chapter four. And I was with this friend with whom I was staying and on the way back from collecting the typing, we went into a restaurant or cafe for just a cup of tea or a cup of coffee. I put this big envelope with the typing beside me, but while we were having the coffee it disappeared and was nowhere to be found. So it looked as though someone had taken it. Anyway, about two days later someone called at the house saying that a friend of his had found this envelope and he wouldn't say where or how - a friend had found it and, well, to cut a long story short, he sort of intimated or suggested that if we could help this friend with a few rupees just for his trouble, we could get this back. Do you see what I mean. So then I got this very strange kind of feeling that this chap, clearly he was the man who had stolen it without our seeing it in the cafe, and my address was on it or my friend's address was on it, so he'd traced it to the house and pretended it was a friend of his who had found it. But actually he was just a thief trying to profit by his crime. So I said, 'oh well, don't bother your friend if it's too much trouble, because I've got a copy, it's not all that valuable that one.' So his face fell. (laughter) So, after that we sort of probed a bit more and said, 'How did your friend pick up this?' So then he started to become a bit uneasy and I said, 'Well, it seems a bit odd, maybe we'd just better go along to the police station to make sure, why don't you come with us?' - not that the typescript is important, seems there's something a bit odd here.' So he made some excuses that he was busy etc, etc, and promised he'd bring the typescript the

next day, which he did. And I think we gave him ten rupees.

Ratnaketu: He did? That's quite good of him.

S: Well, he got scared we would get the police onto him so he restored it. But I remember this strange feeling, being in contact with someone in that sort of way, it is a very odd feeling indeed; there's something quite sinister about it all. I mean, maybe just stealing a manuscript doesn't seem a great crime, he probably wasn't a great criminal. But there was something very strange in the whole situation, very sort of - one can't say evil element, but a very strange, odd, uncomfortable, uneasy sort of element. (murmurs of agreement) Anyway, that was my experience. I haven't often had dealings with people, except with people who are straightforwardly rogues and are openly trying to cheat you - and that's quite clear (laughter) like most Indian shopkeepers (laughter). (pause)

So, 'The share of food withheld from the deceased at funeral repasts, - avoid it for it burns the mouth!' There's a note here referring to Tibetan customs. Conze says, "literally "of those who are neither whitish nor yellow, the portion of the food reserved from the deceased, do not take it up-etc. This is rather puzzling. Ser-skya can also mean 'tawny brown'. H. Meyer has the following note: "It is usual in Tibet to arrange funeral repasts. A portion of the food, destined for the deceased, is burnt in order to appease his hunger and thirst. It is a great sin not to perform this rite. 'Those who are neither grey nor yellow' are surely those who have failed in their duties towards the dead."Then Conze adds, 'There is some probability in this, but further research is required.' If you are so mean as to withhold food from the dead - your own dead relations presumably - you burn your mouth, anybody who takes or shares in that food which should have been given to the dead, it'll burn their mouth too. I think the general meaning is quite clear.

'All these world systems, - avoid them for they burn the mouth!' Well, that suggests that you and your greed and your craving and your thirst are trying to swallow up all the world systems. You're trying to cram them all into your belly, so to speak. Well, they'll burn the mouth, so avoid them. In the long run the whole of samsaric existence is painful, so avoid it. It reminds me a bit of the Indian myth about Rahu, the demon with a great head, very tiny body - in fact, no body at all, just a tail who tries to swallow the moon. So it's as though the verse envisages the human being as having this insatiable greed and craving, who'd like to swallow the whole world, to swallow, as it were, all the world systems; but he's to avoid them because they burn the mouth.

Prasannasiddhi: I find that a little kind of, in relation to this business about the conditioned and the unconditioned which we were speaking of yesterday and how the world was actually a part of reality, in a way, so to say 'avoid them!', you know....

S: Well, it's 'avoid them!' because you don't see them as reflecting reality. You see the conditioned just as the conditioned in the ordinary, mundane sort of way. So as long as you see on these sorts of terms then the result will be suffering.

Ratnaketu: So the start of the path is heading towards Reality Principle, it's even a bit one sided, really.

S: Yes, yes. It is said that, I don't think it's a Buddhist saying maybe just a general Indian saying, that if you're careful enough you can actually lick the honey off the edge of a razor blade. But if you sort of go about it blindly and greedily you just cut your tongue because you're so eager for the honey that you ignore the razor blade. But if you're very careful and clever and mindful and skilful you can actually lick the honey off the razor without actually cutting your tongue. Do you see what I mean? So perhaps it's a little bit like that. That's why I sometimes say that it's really only the spiritual person who can really enjoy life; that the worldly minded person very often is so eager to enjoy life, his craving for enjoyment is so strong, that the actual craving itself gets in

the way of the actual enjoyment because he goes about it so clumsily and unmindfully. Do you see what I mean? So it's only when you've reached a certain level of detachment or a certain deeper level of mindfulness that you can even, in a way, begin to enjoy worldly things properly. Before that you are in such a rush, you know, to enjoy them, you just get in your own way, you spoil things for yourself, you can't wait, you can't wait until the right moment sometimes. Just like a greedy child in a sweet shop. Maybe most of us have passed the greedy child in the sweet shop stage, but actually we enjoy the sweets much better when you're more mature, more deliberate in your choice, and so on. (long pause)

Anyway, then he generalises. 'Under a glaring sun in a cloudless sky, Ephemeral aggregates, stuff of illusions, Fed on foods which burn the mouth!' It's as though the whole of samsaric existence, the whole of conditioned existence, is a process of this kind. It's sort of aggregates heaping on themselves and burning their own mouth in the process. (pause) It's a bit like the three animals: the pig, the cock, and the snake at the centre of the Wheel of Life, chasing round after each other and biting one another's tails; each one biting the tail of the one in front. (long pause)

Amoghacitta: Can you say a bit more about that verse?

S: Well, one can sort of paraphrase it. The 'ephemeral aggregates' are the five skandhas which are the basis of the illusions that we develop, the illusions of subject and object, and so on. And these are both food and that which feeds upon the food. Because when you crave, what do you crave? You crave something conditioned. Well that conditioned thing is itself craving something else, so there is a sort of vicious circle almost, in which that which craves is itself craved, that which eats is itself eaten. This is the general idea or the general picture. It's more like a serpent trying to swallow its own tail.

Ratnaketu: So the conditioned is continually reinforcing the conditioned.

S: Yes, it's feeding upon itself and strengthening itself by feeding on itself, so that it can feed on itself. (long pause)

Alright then, the cuckoo's speech again. Would you like to read right through whole of the cuckoo's speech, through to the end?

Prasannasiddhi: "Then the cuckoo, the Great Bird, rose again and said:
"Now will I teach unto you a Dharma deep but comprehensible to
each and every one. Listen with reverence and undistracted
minds!"
Then he continued:
"Alas, the flowers last year so beautiful, - next year to be
destroyed by frost;
So too will disappear this transient interlude, a mere illusion.
The rainbow, so beautiful in all its hues, fades away to
nothingness;
So too will disappear these festive robes, for all their finery.
However clear the voice and strong its echo, it cannot last;
so, too, the mighty of this earth for all their greatness.
Those who visit fairs and markets soon disperse again;
so too our families, friends and companions, for all their number.
Honey stored by bees for them alone can serve no other;
so too material wealth for all its abundance.
The business of the world is but a game for children.
Though body and speech be smashed to dust, their aftermath goes
on.

Forsake this world, - for all its imposture, all illusion.
Treasure, O all assembled birds, the Dharma all supreme, the
greatest benefactor!
In the end will the body lose its health.
Well is it ere this to have reached the true goal of living.
In the end will all accumulated wealth be consumed;
Well is it, while it lasted, to have given alms.
In the end will bonds of families and friends be cut;
Well is it now to break off all attachments.
In the end will fall this castle with its walls;
Well is it to remain content in solitary homelessness.
Reliance on the chieftain only ends in heavy labour;
Well is it then to follow some holy Lama.
In this world all achievements must end in ruin;
Well is it then to turn away from false desires.
The supreme Dharma, - that is the source of lasting merit now
and in the future;
It is well to teach it here below.
The Three Treasures, - these are the everlasting refuge, now and
in the future;
It is well to beseech them here below.
Afflicted by love, beings try to quench their thirst from the waters
of an alluring mirage.
How much better to meditate!
Renounce therefore this samsaric world, and treasure the
supreme Dharma!

The Great Bird then continued:

"Now that you have achieved a certain knowledge of the Dharma,
and arrived at a belief in the law of karma, let each of you
herewith make a promise!"

And he went on to say:

"Exert yourselves in the bright acts of merit, and shun dark acts
of evil. Let all now firmly promise some improvement!"

S: Anything in there that requires comment or explanation? Once again, the cuckoo is strongly emphasising the fact or the truth of the law of impermanence. It's something that seems to be the main message, the fundamental message of the whole text; the realisation of impermanence leading to detachment.

Aryamitra: Something just came to my mind. It's in the line where it says, 'Reliance on a chieftain only leads to heavy labour; well is it then to follow some holy Lama' I just wondered whether the actual monasteries themselves had any trouble with chieftains and tribes and so forth? Were they sort of, were the monasteries a sort of alternative to living in this sort of, sort of feudal system?

S: To some extent they were, but again to some extent - at least on a certain level, up to a certain point - they were part of that feudal system. I use the word feudal in quite a loose sense. I mean, for instance, it says 'reliance on a chieftain only ends in heavy labour'. Well, you serve a chieftain, you're one of these retainers and you work for him and he looks after you, but in the end you may just find yourself doing heavy labour for him all the time; carting stones and cutting down trees, building his castle. Although supposedly you are his follower, he's supposedly protecting you, you're just working very hard for him. So then it says, 'Well is it then to follow some holy lama'.

Well, if you're going to have to work for someone then it's better to work for a holy lama because then there'll be some merit in it, perhaps some spiritual gain, some spiritual significance. I remember in this connection - this is a little off the track, but not particularly - some of my Tibetan friends who were monks or ex-monks and who lived in monasteries and also worked for well-to-do lay-people, they said that it was a rather a well known sort of fact, even a well known saying almost in Tibet, that if you possibly could it was best to work for a monk. It was the happiest and easiest kind of life, even if you're a layman and you were looking for a service. If you wanted to work as a servant somewhere the best kind of master was a monk, the kindest and most easy going. The next best was the bachelor, a layman who was a bachelor. the worst kind of person to work for was a married man, because his wife would always try to get as much work out of you as she possibly could. (laughter) This is what they regularly said, and what was believed in Tibet. That's why I used to have plenty of Tibetan refugees come and want to work for me, because they believed that, well, monks were the best masters, that they treated you more kindly, they looked after you, didn't make you work so hard. So one has to bear this background in mind too. If you're going to have to work for somebody, rather than work for a chieftain and just do heavy labour, it's better to work for a lama because not only will you be working - and thereby maintaining yourself - you'd get some contact with the Dharma too, some spiritual benefit. You might sort of translate this into our own terms and say, well, if you've got to work, you might as well work in a co-op. It's much the same thing. Why do, as it were, heavy labour in the world?

You might just as well work for a co-op. You might work just as hard or nearly as hard but look at all the spiritual benefits. You might have to work, of course, even harder. (laughter) But again, look at all the spiritual benefits. (laughter)

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Prasannasiddhi: The people who worked for you, did you pay them, or ...

S: Ah, this brings us onto another point. The Tibetans have got two systems; one is that the master pays the wages, the other he doesn't give any wages, he just gives occasional pocket-money. But he's responsible for not only feeding but clothing the servant, and I've discovered that Tibetans will invariably prefer the second system. They'd much rather work for you without definite wages, they prefer that. If you give them the choice they'd definitely select that because then they've got nothing to worry about. They're part of the family, you do all the worrying (laughter) then at holiday time, festival time, you buy them new clothes, give them a bit of pocket money, they get their food everyday, that's all they want, then they're happy. Whereas if you give them wages, they've got to think themselves, well so much for this, or I've got to save for that. No, they definitely prefer the live-in system, and you provide them with everything, give them a bit of pocket-money when you feel like it. So that's what I generally used to do. They were quite happy with that.

Silaratna: It's interesting from the point of the co-ops also, they're acting in certain areas, you know, moving towards, perhaps well, perhaps it would be better to pay wages to people.

S: I think that's probably a bit of a pity. I used to find these Tibetans whom I had working for me in this way were quite considerate. I mean, they sometimes knew my affairs better than I knew them myself but if they knew I didn't have the money, they always seemed to know, they wouldn't ask me for anything. But if they knew I'd received money, they always seemed to know that (laughter) They'd come and say, 'I need a new shirt', or, 'could I have money to go to the bazaar', something of that sort or give them money to go to the Saturday afternoon cinema (laughter). They never used to ask for cinema money because they knew I didn't approve of the cinema; they'd ask for money because they were going to the bazaar but I'd always know what they wanted it for. (laughter)

Silaratna: These people - they used to actually sort of like, in some respects they were your pupils as well?

S: Yes, they'd regard themselves as being sort of pupils. Yes, the Tibetans have actually got a sort of special term for such people, they're called disciple-servants. They'd work around the house and they'd cook or they'd clean, but they'd pick up some Dharma knowledge at the same time.

Aryamitra: Did you develop friendships?

S: Well some of them were very good people, one especially who became a manager. I really relied upon him quite a lot. He'd worked for different monks and lamas since he was about sixteen. He was then about twenty-eight had he'd been a fighting monk.

Prasannasiddhi: A fighting monk?

S: Yes, there's a special class of monk called fighting monk. What do they call them? 'Dupa' or something like that. Anyway, I heard all about the fighting monks from him. He was firmly convinced that fighting monks were the best monks, the only real monks were the fighting monks he believed. (laughter) Yes, because he said the fighting monks live very simply, they were supposed to live simply. Officially, they were only sramaneras, they were novices, and each one had his little cell and his little bed, and his little shrine and, of course, their clothes. That was all they were supposed to have and you can see photographs of these fighting monks in all books about Tibet. They wear their hair long and they comb it all over one side of their face. And they wear the ordinary monastic dress, but hitched up very high so that the robe just covers the knee and then they have big sticks and things like that. And then, especially in those areas where there's not much law and order, they're supposed to defend the monastery. It was these fighting monks who mainly resisted the Chinese, but again they are novice monks. If it so happens in the fighting that they kill anybody, then they have to leave the order, they have to give up being fighting monks, or they can be fighting lay-people, but they can't be these sort of fighting monks. So I asked him how they used to spend their time. Well, they also shared in the sort of religious activities of the monastery, daily chanting, puja and all that sort of thing, but they spent a lot of their time exercising, making themselves strong and throwing big, heavy stones. That was one of their favourite occupations, I think, how far they could throw those big, heavy stones. Their fighting was a bit primitive. (laughter) They were very sincere according to this monk, Lobsang, his name way. According to Lobsang they were very sincere, they observed the rules very strictly and led very simple lives etc., etc., but he said they were the real monks and not so much the others.

Silaratna: Were they like the disciplinarians as well in the monastery?

S: No, no they were not. That's a separate category.

Ratnaketu: So they had to try and defend a monastery without killing anybody.

S: Yes, well I won't say they tried not to kill anybody, but if it so happened that they did kill someone, I think they would have avoided it, if they could, then they had to leave. There are quite a few other things I could say about the fighting monks, though perhaps I'd better not say anything about them now, though they are quite an interesting category and, yes, I did hear quite a bit about them from him. He was very reliable this Lobsang. He was with me for several years. I tried to bring him to England but the Indian police played some hanky-panky, wouldn't give him his exit permit from Kalimpong so even though I got him his passport and visa and everything he couldn't take it up. he was very, very useful. So eventually he went back to his old master, that is Rechung Rimpoche, from whom I had taken him. He'd been his manager for several years, so

he came to me with very good recommendations. He was quite intelligent, quite reliable and he'd been in monasteries and with monks of various kinds since he was sixteen. Quite a strong, well-built, sturdy, rather taciturn sort of chap - didn't say much but quite a good manager. He was always going to and fro between myself and Dhardo Rimpoche with messages. He knew quite a lot about Tibetan Buddhist customs and how lamas have to be received and entertained and how big a seat somebody had to have. He knew all of those sort of things quite well.

Aryamitra: So I suppose our equivalent to the Tibetan fighting monks are our karate practitioners? (laughter)

S: Well, I'm not so sure about that.

Prasannasiddhi: Why aren't you so sure about that? (laughter)

S: They don't seem quite so simple. (laughter) Anyway, that's a digression.

Amoghacitta: This line that says, 'Honey stored by bees, for them alone can serve no other, so too material wealth for all its abundance', doesn't make any sense to me.

S: Presumably it means that the honey stored by the bees, if they store it for themselves alone, is not of benefit to everybody else. In the same way, well, what's the use of having a material wealth, however abundantly, if you just keep it to yourself and don't share it with others, supposing if you're just selfish like the bees. The bees, in fact, may be robbed, or you may be robbed - that's another matter. But even if you're not robbed and you do keep it to yourself, what's the use. It's only benefitting you, it was meant, so to speak, to benefit all. (long pause)

Ratnaketu: "Afflicted by love beings trying to quench their thirst from the waters of an alluring mirage".

S: Well, that means, that refers to projection, psychological projection, doesn't it? The mirage is not really there. The mirage that you see in the desert, the mirage of the oasis is not really there. In the same way, in the case of another person, if you're infatuated with them and if you project you're trying to quench your thirst, you're trying to gain from the other person something that is not really there. Do you see what I mean? How much better to meditate, because meditation will put you in touch more with your own self, deeper levels of your own mind. Where you would locate, so to speak, that which you are projecting and come into contact with it yourself.

Here 'love' clearly in the sense of infatuation, in a sense of falling in love. Afflicted, you notice, by love. "Beings trying to quench their thirst from the waters of an alluring mirage." How much better to meditate. "Maybe these lines should be written up in letters of gold in every community. It's the cuckoo's comment on 'the relationship', so to speak, one could say.

Silaratna: Going back to the line, "Though body and speech be smashed to dust, their aftermath goes on. Would it be right to consider the aftermath as like the consequences of the action?"

S: No, the aftermath of body and speech in the form of that subtle but still changing element or consciousness; even, if you like, which survives bodily death, that lives on so to speak. Not as something static and unchanging, but as an ever continuing stream of consciousness. You could even say that the karma that you've set up, the karma formations that you've set up with your actions in body and speech, they live on. The death of the body isn't the end of everything. (long pause)

S: Then, after making his speech, the Great Bird then continued, 'Now that you have achieved a certain knowledge of the Dharma, and arrived at a belief in the law of karma, let each of you

herewith make a promise!" What does this suggest? What does this imply?

: Commitment?

S: In a way, yes, in the sense that, having arrived at a certain understanding, a certain knowledge of the Dharma in general and, in particular, having arrived at a belief in, or an understanding of the law of karma, having understood that they are themselves responsible for their own actions and that the consequences of one's actions, are inevitable, they see the necessity of deciding or forming a resolution not to behave in a certain way, or of behaving in a certain way. He suggests they strengthen that resolution by making a promise or a vow.

Ratnaketu: So making a concrete decision rather than just an abstract...

S: Yes, first of all you understand the general principle, especially in the case of the law of karma. You understand how it works, you understand your own responsibility, understand the inevitability of the consequences of what you yourself have done. So you see very clearly you ought to act in a certain way, you ought not to act in a certain other way. So to strengthen that you make an actual vow that you will do this, that you will not do that. So that you can strengthen not only your understanding but your practice. And he went on to say, 'exert yourselves in the bright acts of merit and shun the dark acts of evil. Let us now firmly promise some improvement.' It is not enough just to listen to what the cuckoo says, to agree with it and praise it; not enough to understand it or even not enough even to decide well, it would be a good thing to act upon, a good thing to practice; but how are you going to act upon it? How are you going to practice it? You must be very specific, make up your mind in a very definite sort of way what exactly are you going to do. What exactly are you not going to do, and formulate a vow or a promise and then stick to it. I mean around the FWBO a couple of years ago there was quite a lot of vow taking, but it seems to have petered out to some extent. I don't know why that should be, or maybe my impression is not correct, maybe people are giving less publicity to their vows.

Ratnaketu: I think people are a bit more careful about what they vow. A few years ago people were making vows which were almost impossible to keep at that time and not keeping them after a while. In my experience, a few people make more of a resolution than a vow.

Aryamitra: Maybe there was also a sort of a warning about taking vows which you might not be able to keep. But I remember I used to take quite a lot of vows and they were kept.

S: Well, why do you think people make vows which they're not able to keep, or, no let's not put it that way - why is it that people don't keep their vows?

Aryamitra: They don't take them seriously in the first place.

S: I think this is probably basically the reason. That taking them seriously in the first place means estimating their own strength. Understanding the sort of situation that they're likely to be in whether conducive to the keeping of their vow or not. In other words, it might not be advisable to make a vow of celibacy immediately before going on a mixed retreat. Of course on the other hand it might be a good thing to do; it depends on one's estimate of one's own strength.

Prasannasiddhi: Although if you thought you'd better not take a vow of celibacy before going on a mixed retreat well then you probably shouldn't be going there at all.

S: Yes, I think that might be true of quite a few of our friends. Maybe only people over 65 should go on mixed retreats! No, I correct that, only people over 80! (laughter) Just to make quite sure! (laughter) A vow or a promise implies that one is very clear in one's own mind. One is practical. One goes about things in, in a sense, a business-like sort of way.

Aryamitra: After reflecting on the speech precepts, I wanted to take a vow to stop talking for a year. I don't think it would have been very practical.

S: You'd be reduced to sign language, and you might find that rather frustrating. It might affect your temper. Mahatma Gandhi used to observe silence for one day every week. Monday was a silence day. He did it partly so he could conserve energy and get on with work that talking to people prevented him from doing. And I've noticed on retreats in the past, that when there was a silent day, for instance, things like washing-up and cooking got done much more quickly than usual which suggests that people, in a sense, waste time talking when they should be working.

Aryamitra: Or when they could be working.

S: Or when they could be working.

Ratnaketu: It does depend a lot. Sometimes their talking might not be a waste of time. It might take longer to do things...

S: That's true. I'm thinking of situations in which everyone is waiting for the programme to begin, but you can't begin because the washers-up haven't finished. This used to happen quite a lot on retreats in the old days. Sometimes lunch would be an hour late for instance, and washing-up would be an hour late. But this didn't happen, I noticed, when we had silent days.

Prasannasiddhi: It does seem that silence is extremely good to have sometimes. Perhaps in communities, they used to have breakfast in silence every morning, particularly the larger communities.

Aryamitra: It would be a good thing, but quite often, because I was thinking of doing that in Scotland, but the thing is usually your only communication with people that day quite often is at breakfast time because you go your separate ways until the evening. So quite often, there are practical reasons, (unclear) but I think it's a good idea if, say, you all are going off in the same direction. You can just as well speak at work or wherever. Yes, it seems a good idea. Do you want to introduce it into communities.

Silaratna: I think it's certainly good to have silence at least from when you get up to when you get to when you go and sit in the morning in a community. I mean you can perhaps talk after your meditation.

S: I mean, assuming you do have other contact with people during the day, I think silence at breakfast is a good thing inasmuch as breakfast usually follows immediately upon meditation. It does seem that quite a few people almost immediately dissipate what they've gained in the meditation by just idle chatter at breakfast time. It seems a pity.

Prasannasiddhi: It might just help to carry your meditation up to when you start work so you're sort of entering your work in a meditative state of mind rather than blowing it all at breakfast.

S: This is one of the things that's really surprised me from time to time over the last few years; some people seem to start talking or start chatting immediately they have come out of the shrine room door. It's sometimes as extreme as that and that's really astonishing because they have been sitting there quietly and apparently meditating, but the instant they're out of the door, with just one foot out of the door, then they start talking - and about quite trivial things that they need not really talk about at all. Although a little tongue is itching to be exercised, so it starts wagging almost immediately. Quite odd. I've seen it all over the world, not just in England. I've seen it in India, I've seen it in New Zealand even. (laughter)

Anyway, let's go on. Some prose to be read. Read up to the next time the Great Bird speaks.

Amoghavajra: "The King Vulture then promised not to kill another living being. The White Grouse, the heavenly bird, promised henceforth only to live in mountain ranges, never to descend into the valleys. The Goose promised to seek his food only from the waters and the swamps. The Indian Kestrel promised to spend but one hour a day on food. The pigeon promised to make his home in the hollow of a rock-cavern, and to respect the Stupas and the Shrines. The Lark, one of the smaller birds, promised to offer worship to the Three Treasures with melodious song. The Cock, the domestic bird, promised no more to violate the dawn. The Hoopoe promised to make the caves his winter home. And all the birds, both large and small, promised not to gather food above their daily needs.

Only the Raven and the Kite, from habitual avarice, would make no promises at all."

S: Mmmm, one of the significances of all these promises is that the King Vulture then promised not to kill another living being. Well, the vulture is a bird of prey so that promise or that vow would seem very appropriate in this case. 'And the white grouse, the heavenly bird promised henceforth to live only in mountain ranges, never to descend into the valleys.' Why not to descend into the valleys?

Silaratna: The valleys were all full of towns and villages, maybe...

S: There was danger in the valleys, it might get shot. There are several passages, several similes to that. What should I say, sort of parables in the Pali Scriptures where the Buddha says that just as the deer should not leave the higher mountain slopes, or should not come too far down into the plain, because they would be in danger of being shot at by human beings. In the same way, the monk should not come too far down, so to speak, into worldly affairs, because he is in danger of getting involved, in danger of being shot, as it were. He should keep, the Buddha says, to his proper range, his proper pasture. So this connects with what we were talking about the other day in connection with not exposing yourself. This is what the Buddha was saying in the case of the last, Don't expose yourself, don't expose yourself to temptations which you're not in a position to withstand. If you're a deer, don't descend into the valley if you can't run fast enough to get away. I think the parable is also related with the monkeys.

So, 'the White Grouse, the heavenly bird promised henceforth to live only in the mountain ranges, never to descend into the valleys', to live only where it was safe, only where it was appropriate to him, only where it would actually practice the dharma. That would be a good name for a community in the country, White Grouse Community.

'The Goose promised to seek his food only from the waters and the swamps.' I'm not sure of the significance of that promise, perhaps just some limitation on their food supply. 'The Indian Kestrel promised to spend but one hour a day on food.' He must have been a very greedy bird who was eating all the time. 'The Pigeon promised to make his home in the hollow of a rock cavern, and to respect the stupas and the shrines'. It seems as though the pigeons in India and Tibet were pretty much the same as they are in London. 'The Lark, one of the smaller birds, promised to offer worship to the Three Treasures with melodious song. The Cock, the domestic bird, promised no more to violate the dawn.' That is to say by crowing while people were still asleep. 'The Hoopoe promised to make the caves his winter home.' Apparently the Hoopoe is a very dirty bird and doesn't clean his nest - according to the notes. 'And all the birds, both large and small promised not to gather food above their daily needs.' That's an interesting point, not

to gather food above their daily needs. This is one of the rules for monks, for bhikkus. According to the Vinaya, that they should not store up food because, after all, in the early days, the monks lived on alms that they'd been begging. So the food was always there, they could always go and beg. So they shouldn't store up food from one day to the next, this was considered quite important.

Silaratna: I suppose that could have arisen from the fact that India is a hot country and food can go bad - you get sick.

S: Sure, yes.

Ratnaketu: Also, you could lose the respect of the lay people if they found out you've got a hoard of food.

S: Yes, yes.

Khemananda: It does take the significance out of the alms, going for alms. You could say to yourself, well, it doesn't really matter if I get anything because I've already got a bit back at home.

S: I knew so many people who were supposedly quite strict. They had cupboards with tins of biscuits and jars of jam and all the rest of it, but technically they were dependent on food that they begged each day.

Prasannasiddhi: It could sort of mean, or could actually involve spending more time chasing after food and things than you actually need to so you're building up a big store of food in time which could be devoted to meditation and other things, you know, spent just storing up food.

S: I think this is probably the preoccupation was the need for security with regard to the food, the need to be absolutely sure that you weren't going to be left without food. You want to make sure that you are not left without a bite by storing some just in case. I mean there's quite a lot of people that do that sort of thing, not only with food, but with other things. I remember that a friend of mine told me that he'd inherited money from two maiden aunts and when he went to take over the contents of the house in which they had lived all their lives practically, he found that they had apparently never thrown away a single cardboard box or a single piece of brown paper or a single piece of string. He said the rooms in the house, the attics in the house, were absolutely crammed with boxes full of little pieces of brown paper, little bits of string that they'd tied up into little balls, they'd always saved these things, just in case they might need them, they might come in handy. So I think one has to be aware of doing this just out of a feeling of insecurity, just out of a feeling of wanting to be very secure, as well as out of greed of course. I think this is what the Buddha was getting at when, so to speak, he prohibited monks from storing up food for the following day. No doubt there was a health hazard in doing that, but I think he was primarily concerned with counteracting any tendency towards greed, any tendency to find your security in food. So the birds both large and small promised not to gather food above their daily needs. It's a bit different in the case of meditating yogis who are living in a cave far from anywhere. They need sometimes to keep a store of food with them. Milarepa did this. That's rather different because by the time you've reached that stage, presumably you're not bothered by these things.

Tibetan families often have just a stock of barley flour and tea and they live on that. They get their water from the nearby brook or stream and they boil it up, they make tea, they mix the barley flour which is already roasted, with the tea and that's their nourishment. That's practically what they live on.

Ratnaketu: So for us in communities you could say don't accumulate more possessions than you

really need.

S: Yes, yes.

Aryamitra: We should maybe just live on, what's that stuff we have for breakfast? - cous cous.

Aryamitra: That seems amazing that they just live on roasted barley.

S: Well some do for some periods. It's not very digestible. It's not exactly to be recommended, I would say. But still, the principle is there, that one lives simply.

Ratnaketu: I've found a few times since I've been living in Sukhavati that we've gone a bit over the top, you know, with breakfast foods, with different kinds of cereals and varieties of jams and just got a bit more than what was actually needed, more than's even needed to be happy and pleasant.

S: I must admit, I do sometimes wonder about jam especially when I see people laying it on really thick. Sometimes there's more jam than there is bread and butter.

Ratnaketu: Well, what I was really shocked about was seeing a huge piece of toast with a big lot of peanut butter on it, and then a load of jam on top of that. (laughter) I thought it was disgusting.

Silaratna: That became a bit of a problem at Padmaloka.

Prasannasiddhi: It was probably a problem at a number of places.

S: Anyway, only the raven and the kite from habitual avarice would make no promises at all. That's as it were the other extreme. One extreme is when making vows not breaking them and the other extreme is not making any vows at all. Or rather, an unwillingness to give up anything or to give up any unskilful habit or unskilful practice. From habitual avarice they would make no promises at all. They just didn't want... they were so deeply engrained in their avarice or their avarice was so deeply engrained in them that they just didn't want to change and therefore they refused to make any promise.

Prasannasiddhi: Actually, I don't know if it is the other extreme from making vows and breaking them.

S: Well, what is an extreme? How does one decide what constitutes a.....

Prasannasiddhi: It would seem that the other extreme from making vows and breaking them would be to make more vows than is actually good for you rather than keep them all and end up sort of quivering.

S: That would seem to be rather hypothetical.

Prasannasiddhi: Well there are these girls who get very thin from....

S: Ah, anorexia. Well that isn't exactly a vow is it, that's a sort of unconscious compulsion. Yes there are some ladies definitely who might give up food quite deliberately for their figures to a greater extent than is good for them. That wouldn't be exactly be a vow because a vow suggests a religious motivation.

Ratnaketu: It also shows that you can get really close to the dharma, I mean it's the second meeting, without it really sinking in.

S: Mmmm. Their unskilful tendencies have become habitual. They're not only unable but unwilling.

Aryamitra: I think it would be the fact that people don't make so many vows now, could it be a reflection that the people who come along or the people in the Order are healthier, more integrated - something like that?

S: I don't think that's really got anything to do with it because if you're more healthy, more integrated especially, you'd be in a better position to keep a vow. I mean however healthy you are, however integrated in the ordinary sense, you've still got a long way to go, and a vow would presumably help you, and if you are sort of integrated, well since you are integrated and therefore better able to keep a vow, there's no sort of internal conflict, then surely you should be making more vows.

Prasannasiddhi: Could it have started up after work, or could they have died out when work started?

S: No, no. I think that the vows, as it were, became popular, I think - as far as my memory serves me - after people had already got into co-ops, I think. I think it was two to three years ago that vows, so to speak, were popular. They mainly related to celibacy, to giving up smoking and, on the positive side, to do something regularly, to meditate everyday, or to do a puja everyday, they're mostly vows of this sort.

Aryamitra: Well, this is what I was thinking. There aren't so many people who smoke anyway, well, actually I don't know. I just presume that people who meditate....

S: There's still quite a lot of people who smoke around the L.B.C., and I'm sometimes surprised at how many people do still smoke, even those people who have been Order members for some years who are still smoking. It is a source of surprise to me. It seems an unnecessary waste of money.

Silaratna: It's interesting that the raven and kite would make no promises. Back with the raven's first speech he says, 'When you are being true to your vows, help will come in the form of a happy (unclear)(Laughter)

S: Perhaps there's a moral there too. But in a sense, of course, everybody makes vows because in a way the Ten Precepts for order members are vows though they are rather general. But they are not so general that we are at a loss as to how to observe them.

Aryamitra: I suppose you could say vow to concentrate on a particular precept for the next month....

S: Yes.

Ratnaketu: I did that for most of this year and it was really helpful. Not on precepts, but I'd pick out certain things which I thought I needed to watch or develop and every week I decided that week I'd try to do it just for a week.

S: I've suggested in the past that people should maybe concentrate on one paramita per day for six days and then try to concentrate on...

Ratnaketu: Have a day off?!

S: No, to concentrate on all six together on the seventh! No days off. (laughter) But I think that the general point about vows is that it's not enough to let one's practice be so general that it ceases to be a practice. You need to do something very specific and concrete, like meditate every day, do something definite, do something concrete. It's not that you just think it's a good idea to meditate. Well you try and put that into practice, into action by actually meditating once or twice a day.

Silabhadra: Are vows best when they're made in front of other people and within the community?

S: Yes. I think in the case of a vow you do announce it to other members of your community just as a means of, well calling them to witness and strengthening the vow and also perhaps just putting them in the know of it so that they may cooperate with you in helping you to observe it. Don't, say, put temptation in the way. Maybe you take a vow that you'll never have seconds. So if you take that vow in front of members of the community then they'll know they shouldn't offer you seconds. Do you see what I mean. You put them in the picture. Or if you make a vow, say, that you'll get up at six-thirty every morning then they know that you want to get up at six-thirty and if they suspect that you might still be sleeping and they call you at that time to help you keep your vow. So that's the advantage of putting other members of the community into the picture. Anyway, would someone like to read the Great Bird's final speech in the conclusion, top of page forty-six?

Aryamitra: "Then the Great Bird spoke once again:

"Henceforth let this be your Dharma! O Tibetan birds, you who have prospered here in Tibet, join your songs in harmony with those of other birds!"

When he finished speaking the birds all rose with joy, danced awhile through the air and sang their songs.

"Happiness be yours and gladness too, - may you prosper", said the Great Bird, happy that he had come there. "Cuckoo, cuckoo", he sang, "The light shed by the Dharma of the birds brings me happiness. In joy and gladness leap and sway together in this graceful dance! Sing your songs and may you thrive!"

"May you prosper, may you prosper", he said, happy to be in that plentiful land. "Cuckoo, cuckoo", he sang, "I am happy because the essence of the Dharma of the Birds has enriched you. In joy and gladness leap and sway together in this graceful dance! Sing your songs and may you thrive!"

"Cu cu, ci ci", he said, glad that all these hosts of birds had come together, "Cuckoo, cuckoo", he sang, "I am happy because I could give you the Dharma of the Birds. In joy and gladness leap and sway together in this graceful dance! Sing your songs, and may you thrive! Sing your happy songs which carry far! Dance your greatly joyful dance! Now you have won your hearts' desire"

All the birds sang happy song, leapt up and danced with gladness, and wished each other good fortune and abounding joy. They then accompanied the Great Bird for one whole day and the Great Bird without mishap returned to India. On their way back the birds of Tibet slept altogether under a tree. The next day when the sun of Jambudvīpa rose, thrice they circled the tree where they had met, exchanged their hopes for another such joyful meeting, and each one, satisfied, returned on wings to his dwelling place.

Here ends
THE PRECIOUS GARLAND
OF THE DHARMA OF THE BIRDS

S: That seems a very appropriate conclusion. The birds all overjoyed and dancing together, presumably in the air. Anything that need further comment there?

Silaratna: That's quite a sort of a Milarepa-ish atmosphere.

S: All happy and joyful.

Amoghacitta: It's interesting that he says, if I read this right, let this be your Dharma. His final message, just join your songs in harmony with those of the other birds. Is that actually a correct interpretation?

S: No, I think that let this be the Dharma has referred to everything that has been said.

Amoghacitta: It's still his last advice though.

S: Yes.

Aryamitra: He doesn't say go away and meditate or anything like that. He does say go away and sing your songs to other birds, so it does seem more altruistic.

S: Well preach the Dharma to other birds. Presumably you're not able to do that unless you keep up your meditation. After all the Great Bird himself (unclear) he was meditating for that whole year wasn't he. Well twice he meditated for a whole year and then he preached the Dharma. So presumably he's suggesting that the other birds do likewise. Not that they simply go away and sing in harmony with other birds!

Aryamitra: No I didn't mean that. It's more the Bodhisattva Ideal rather than the Arahant.

S: Yes, except that one shouldn't forget that in a sense the Bodhisattva Ideal incorporates the Arahant Ideal.

Aryamitra: And he is happy, the Cuckoo's happy because the Dharma has enriched the other birds.

S: Yes. It's also interesting that on their way back the birds of Tibet slept altogether under a tree. The next day when the sun of Jambudvipa rose, thrice they circled the tree where they had met. So what does this suggest if you circumambulate something three times. It suggest great respect. So why should they circumambulate the tree where they had met? It doesn't say the tree where they heard the Dharma, the tree where they had met.

Aryamitra: Would it be for shelter?

S: No I wouldn't say that. That's part of it perhaps.

Ratnaketu: It's where they.....in a way it's like the community of birds.

S: Yes. It shows that they respected, that they valued being together and they were paying homage and tribute to the ideal of spiritual community. I take it rather in that way. They circled the tree, thrice they circled the tree where they had met, exchanged their hopes for another such

joyful meeting, and each one, satisfied, returned on wings to his dwelling place. They didn't seem to have the idea of setting up a spiritual community or continuing to live under that tree. Maybe that would be stretching the allegory too far.

Aryamitra: In a way it's a bit like the Order Convention.

Ratnaketu: Maybe that's the significance of join your songs in harmony with those of other birds, to value the spiritual community.

S: I hope all these little birds will join their songs in harmony with those of the other birds when they return to Jambudvipa! Or wherever they do return to.

Amoghacitta: I'm still thinking about why they circled the tree that they actually met under.

S: You circle something three times to show respect to it. So if you show respect to the tree where you have met, it suggests that you value greatly the very fact that you have met. You appreciate the whole idea of the spiritual community. This is what it suggest to me. Especially this is underlined by the fact that they exchanged their hopes for another such joyful meeting.

Ratnaketu: There was something we talked about yesterday which I just want to make sure I've grasped - it was about in the visualisation and we were talking about that sunyata mantra and how at that moment you recollect all the previous experiences in life.

S: It's not necessary that you consciously recollect but by the time you come to that point you should have accumulated a certain amount of experience of that kind and that mantra sort of recapitulates it or gives expression to it.

Ratnaketu: What I was thinking was, we were talking about in relation to this six element practice. Now what sort of experience in the Six element practice were you referring to?

S: Well you could say the Six Element Practice is a practice connected with the , from the Mahayana point of view, the Pudgala nairatmya, that is to say the insubstantiality of the self. Here, especially the physical body made up of the four gross elements is regarded as not belonging to, therefore not yourself, so this lessens or this decreases your sense of ego identity. Which is of course the very antithesis of sunyata. You realised that what you think of as yourself or your ego is not something solid and indestructible. It doesn't even belong to you. So the whole trend, the whole thrust of the Six Element practice is in the direction of the realisation of egolessness, which is of course a form of sunyata realisation. One can say further if one feels that to recite that mantra is not enough, one can for instance repeat the Heart Sutra.

Amoghacitta: Or the stanza at the end of the Diamond Sutra.

S: Yes I'm certain one could repeat that too. Anything that will sort of, maybe not give one a realisation of that kind, but at least put one into tune with that sort of way of thinking or that way of seeing things or that way of approaching things.

Prasannasiddhi: I was thinking about the kamaloka, the different levels of existence and whether or not the kamaloka was considered not good to be, or how the kamaloka was sort of looked upon in terms of whether it was good to be existing or to have existence on the kamaloka.

S: Well the human realm is part of the kamaloka, so to the extent that it's considered a good thing or auspicious thing to be born a human being, to that extent it's considered a good thing or an auspicious thing to be born into the kamaloka, at least into that subdivision of it. All six realms of existence apart from the realm of the gods is kamaloka. The gods are distributed, a few of

them in the kamaloka and others in the rupaloka and still others in the arupaloka.

Prasannasiddhi: It would seem one is sort of trying in meditation practices and things to get off the kamaloka and to get up into the others.

S: Well one's based so to speak on the kamaloka or in the kamaloka.

Amoghacitta: Are hungry ghosts and so on part of the kamaloka?

S: They're part of the kamaloka.

Amoghavajra: Do you think the lines from the Sukhavati Sutra would be as effective as things like this sunya type experience.

S: No that's a quite different sort of approach, one might say. No if one's thinking in terms of scriptures it would need to be something of the nature of the Perfection of Wisdom scriptures. Or some chapters of the Vimalakirti, something of that nature.

Amoghacitta: And that as it were provides the reality in terms of what we were talking about yesterday.

S: Yes, if one is thinking of reality, so to speak, in a way in a contradictory manner, as something one-sided, yes.

Amoghacitta: In a more intellectual thought sense.

S: Yes, but again very sort of provisionally.

Amoghacitta: Within that framework the practice itself represent beauty.

S: One could say that, yes. Not that you leave the sort of sunyata behind but you superimpose whatever you visualise upon the background of the sunyata, just as the figure exists against the background of the blue sky. Not that having repeated the mantra, well you've done the sunyata practice and you leave it behind. No, you sort of carry it with you.

Silaratna: Perhaps even in the Tara practice - this wasn't actually mentioned when we were going through it - do you think you could actually bring something like this in. It would seem to me to be quite sort of...Well like with the sunyata mantra or repeating say the Heart Sutra.

S: Well in a sense it's already brought in in another form inasmuch as when one so to speak visualises oneself as Tara the figure is as it were hollow. You are hollow, in other words you are sunyata. It has the same significance.

Silaratna: So you would start off with that as the basis for the visualisation.

S: Anyway that seems that is that. OK, at least we got through it. There's one thing I wanted to mention, that if one does lead a study group on this text there's one things one has to be careful of, one thing one has to avoid which people haven't always avoided in the past. That is that you take people through the text but then you just read out your notes. Some people have done this, some Order members in the past, and it isn't very sort of stimulating for the people in the study group. So even though you've got your own notes and you find them very helpful in understanding the text, don't just sort of read them out to your study group. Just draw on them in a spontaneous sort of way, if they seem appropriate. Don't sort of read out your notes regardless. People in the study group may want to raise other points which we haven't dealt with

on this occasion. So don't just feed them with your notes, even though your notes may help you to understand different aspects of the study material. So one needs to avoid that. I don't know if anyone's ever experienced anyone ever doing that but it isn't very stimulating I think. It's a different situation, so no doubt you can draw on your own notes.

Aryamitra: Prepare for the study from your notes.

S: But not sort of bring them undigested so to speak into that particular study group. Start as it were afresh just with the text and use your understanding of the text with the help of your notes to bring out the meaning of the text for the people that you're actually studying with, because it may be that on the original study group someone brought up some question which was just of interest to him, maybe not of general interest, or maybe someone else or maybe that whole study group, the new study group, wants to look at things in a different sort of way from a different point of view. So you have to allow them to do that.

Aryamitra: Do you foresee from this text any particular type of people that it would be good for.

S: It's difficult to say.

Aryamitra: You don't do study with beginners.

S: Well mitras ought to be able to take it.

Ratnaketu: If we were going to study this should we go through the whole thing or select some of this.

S: I think it would be best to go through the whole thing, but on the other hand if there are occasions when you've got a study session and you just want a short text, say for two hours of study you could well take one of the speeches of one of the birds. That would be quite useful just to do that, but if you could on some occasion or another do the whole text so much the better.

Voices: Thank you Bhante.

HERE ENDS

**THE PRECIOUS GARLAND OF THE DHARMA OF
THE BUDDHA'S LAW AMONG THE BIRDS SEMINAR, TUSCANY 1982**

KOO!! KOO!!