

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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This transcript has not been checked by Sangharakshita, and may contain mistakes and mishearings. Checked and reprinted copies of all seminars will be available as part of the [Complete Works Project](#).

S'. Conze says in the last of the introductory sentences:

'The cryptic sentences which follow are meant to stress the all-pervading greatness of the Dharmabody.'

Well that is not really very obvious is it? Perhaps he is just trying to make some sort of sense, establish some kind of connection?

_____ He also says at the end of the second piece, that" the whole passage loses its point in translation~~as if it was quite clear in the original.

S: Well it isn't. It is no more obscure in the translation~ there is no play upon words. 'The whole passage loses its point in translation' - even though Conze is himself the translator I think one can dispute that.

Sg~~u~i Isn't this a theme that is touched on by other Buddhists writers. I seem to remember Shantideva talking about a _____ even if you had a _____ I can't remember it very well _____ if you had ailatma the size of Mount Sumeru you'd still be empty - something like that.

S: Ah, no, no, no. You are thinking of Nagarjuna who says even if you have a view of self, not an actual self, a view of self as high as Mount Sumeru. No, that is different. But as I said, the idea does seem extraordinary, the concept itself of anyone having a body as big as Mount Sumeru. One wonders why

that was brought in because it doesn't clarify the thought,, or form

any part of an argument at all. It's like saying, 'Well, the

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S: body's made up, your being is made up of five Skandhas, even if you were as big as a house, you'd still be made _____ of five Skandas" Well, it enlarges the point a little but not really very much. And there's still the connection here.

Gut~: Maybe it's making the point that, it's saying that, the Dharmabody can be considered to be covering the whole ~niverse, but even if you had a body that covered the vniverse it would still be a non-existence, it still wouldn't compare to the Dharmabody. Maybe it's saying that?

S: Well actually it doesn't mention the Dharmabody in the text. That ma~be implied but there doesn't seem to be any definite connection. Maybe the general principle, general point is whatsoever you identify yourself with, however big it is, even if you identify yourself with the whole ~niverse, regarding that as yourself, in the way that some forms of the Vedanta do - still that personal existence is a no-existence. Do you see what I mean? I mean, there is some, it may contain some reference to this line of thinking. The Buddhist view is that this does not belong to me, this is not myself, but the Vedantic view is rather to try to extend or expand the self as much as possible, which is a quite legitimate procedure up to a point. You regard all beings as yourself, all bodies as your body. In a way the whole world is your body,

the whole Universe is your body, - you identify yourself with it in this way. Perhaps, this particular passage is hinting that even if you do that, even if your body is very large indeed, even if your body is a Cosmic body, even if it's as large as Sumeru, still that personal existence is a no-existence. Perhaps it is directed against what we may call sort of cosmic pantheism or something of

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S: that sort. Do you see what I'm getting at? This is the only

way in which apparently one can get some kind of sense or establish some kind of connection. The meaning of the passage is clear but the connection with the Dharmabody which seems to be quite obvious to Conze, doesn't seem so obvious judging from the text itself, not much@o the~point, doesn't seem to be much ~ point, unless one looks at it in the way in which I've suggested.

S~~~~'.What exactly do you mean by cosmic pantheism?

S: Well, I referred to the Vedanta. In one form of Vedanta at least the(~~r~ Vendanta tends to expand consciousness to the extent that, one identifies oneself with everything in the universe, with the whole of existence,-that becomes as it were, one's self or one's body. This is a stra;~ of thought in the Upanishands:whatever you see, that is yourself. So therefore you identify yourself with the universe. 'Within' you identify yourself with, you identify your atma with the brahman and 'without' you identify the whole of the

Universe with your own body - the whole of the universe becomes your own body. But if one wants to look at it in that way, well the Buddha's point would be, however great your personal existence might be, it will still be no-existence. It will still be essentially Sunyata and that point of course the Vedanta doesn't see, doesn't think.

Pause.

Whether you have a body six feet tall, or whether you have a body as large as Mount Sumeru or whether you have a cosmic body or whether the whole Universe is your body, it doesn't make any essential difference. It's all essentially, I mean that personal

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S: existence, however small or however large, is still a no- existence, according to the Buddha.

You don't solve the problem of self merely by expanding yourself. Pause.

Su~: Have you not suggested that the Brahmaviharas are almost

identical with this? You suggested that the Brahmaviharas are a sort of path. Is it something along these lines?

In a way, yes. Because there is the question of expansion, not just expansion of feeling as with the 'r-w-a-t-haras but the expansion of being, expansion of the area, so to speak, with which you identify yourself or which you regard as yourself.

It doesn't mean that Conze's 5 comments

'this is myself. It is that which is regarded as belonging to a self, the existence round a self, the sum total of all that seems to be built round a self.'

However extensive that which is built around a self, it is still built around itself - whether it, as large as Mount Sumeru or as extensive as the universe itself. There's still a limitation if one doesn't regard this personal existence as no-

existence i.e. as not ultimate. Because there is the 'logic' of the passage that even huge existence is huge because

it was a no-existence, and that was a separate point that runs all through the text, not just through this particular passage. Pause.

Voice.. It seems that quite often a word is repeated twice. Is that a

literary convention or a definite

S: Ah 'Personal existence, personal existence' this is a sort of -idiom. We find it in Pall too. It's the way people habitually speak. It is also for emphasis. For instance when the Buddha describes his original Enlightenment experience, according to the Pall scriptures, he says, 'coming to be, coming to be, when I saw that everything comes into existence,' and 'passing away, passing away.' It is repeated here, apparently -for the sake of emphasis. Perhaps it connects up with what we were saying yesterday about there being no capital letters in the . you don't have printing conventions, well how are you going to emphasise, you have to emphasise by the words themselves, by repetition. You can't underline 'otc~u you don't have that device, especially if you have an oral tradition anyway.

-Pause.

When Conze connects this particular passage with the Dharmabody he may of course be the Indian connection. Even so the connection does seem somewhat arbitrary. Alright, let's pass on to 3e.

3e. The merit derived from Perfect Wisdom - The four major sections of the Sutra conclude each with a few remarks on the merit which forms the basis of the spiritual achievements discussed, and which is traced back to the teachings of this Sutra. Chapters ii and 12 in this way correspond to chapter 8.

11. The Lord asked: What do you think, Subhuti, if there were as many Ganges rivers as there are grains of sand in the large river Ganges, would the grains of sand in them be many? Subhuti replied: Those Ganges rivers would indeed be many, much more so the grains of sand in them. The Lord said: This is what I announce to you, Subhuti, this is what I make known to you, if some woman or man had filled with the seven precious things as many

world systems as there are grains of sand in those Ganges rivers, and would give them as a gift to the Tathagatas, Arhats, fully Enlightened Ones-what do you think, Subhuti, would that woman or man on the strength of that beget a great heap of merit?-Subhuti replied: Great, 9 Lord, great 0 Well-Gone, would that heap of merit be, immeasurable and incalculable.-The Lord said: But if a son or daughter of good family had taken from this discourse on dharma but one stanza of four lines, and were to demonstrate and illuminate it to others,

- the-n~the~Y w6i~i~d~o~th~sfr~n~gth of that~beget a still -

~t. greater heap of merit; Immeasurable and incalculable. ~ C ~ 12. Moreover, Subhuti, that spot of earth where one has

taken from this discourse on dharma but one stanza of four lines, taught or illumined it, that spot of earth will be a veritable shrine for the whole world with its gods, men and Asuras. What then should we say of those who will bear in mind this discourse on dharma in its entirety, who will recite, study, and illuminate it in full detail for others! Most wonderfully blest, Subhuti, they will be! And on that spot of earth, Subhuti, either the Teacher dwells, or a sage representing him.

This is what I announce to you, etc.-a formula often used for formal pronouncements by a Buddha.-The saying about the shrine, caitya. is repeated in chapter i5c. It is taken o'ter from the Version in 8,000 lines (iii 5~): 'The place in which one takes up, bears in mind, preaches, studies, spreads, demonstrates, expounds, explains and repeats this Perfection of Wisdom, in it beings cannot be hurt by men or ghosts, nor can they be injured or overpowered by them, except as a punishment for their past deeds. Because this Perfection of Wisdom makes the spot of earth where it is, into a true shrine for bein~, worthy of being worshipped and adored-into a shelter for beings who come to it, a refuge, a place of rest, and final relief. This is another advantage which Perfect Wisdom confers even here and now'. According to B. C. Law, caitya is the most general name for any sanctuary, and it may refer to a Stupa, a mAa~ra, an assembly hall, a tree, a memorial stone, a holy relic or object, or even an image. A shrine is a sacred place set apart, and it should be honoured with gifts of flowers, and so on. In past ages these shrines were something to reckon with. Respect for them assured the prosperity of nations, and they were inviolate sanctuaries for people in fear for their lives.-The Teacher is the Buddha. A Sage, guru. is a spiritual preceptor.

S'. Is there any new idea introduced in these two chapters?

~u\~ The idea of the shrine, that this spot of earth should be a shrine.

S: Yes. The idea of the shrine. 'That spot of earth where one has taken from this discourse on harma but one stanza of four lines,

-° t~ught or illumined it. that snot of earth will be a veritable shrine for the whole world with its gods, men and Asuras.'

So what does one make of this no~'on?

Voice: Is it stressing the importance of the Perfection of Wisdom?

S: It's certainly stressing the importance of the Perfection of

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~o~.

S: Wisdom, but what about the way in which it is doing that? What is a shrine? Conze gives this sort of et~ological explanation. What he says is very true. Is there any sort of sense in which what you do, whether its teaching and illumining this particular text or anything else which is skilful. I mean is there any sort of actual effect on the place itself as such, by virtue of which it is transformed into a shrine? Or is it just a question of association? Is it just skilful means? This seems to be a very strong tendency in humanity isn't it, to venerate certain places as shrines. For instance even in~England, I think in most European countries, in America too, places where famous people have lived and worked, famous writers, famous poets, famous politicians, famous statesmen, painters, these are kept up at the national expense. They are national shrines. So is there any particular significance that their particular birthplace or place where they actually did work should be kept up, does some sort of mystic aura cling about it. Has something of them literally rubbed off onto their immediate surroundings so that in a way you are more closely in touch with them whe~ you visit that place, or is it just the association of ideas? Does the fact that the 'Perfection of Wisdom' has been expounded~~ake any difference to that place, even objectively, I mean in what sense does it become a shrine? The same thing applies to all the places where the Buddha lived and taught, obviously. Or if you, say, make a pilgrimage to Dr. Johnson's birthplace in Lichfield do you

actually get any closer to him? Does it make it more real to you? Is he objectively ~e~ent~ in a sense, there as he isn't say in certain other places.

_____ Well obviously it does by association becauseLknow he came from

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~qt\k(~.~. there, his writing desk is there.

S'. Yes, at least there is that.

Su'o~~~ You certainly feel as if you can get closer to him, but whether you can actually.

S: Yes, yes. Well you can envisage him more clearly because you can envisage his surroundings and I think a lot of people feel that going to India~ and seeing the places where the Buddha lived and taught, some of which are much the same as they were in the Buddha's day. Many of the sights and sounds which you can see and hear in India today are similar to those you could see and hear in the Buddha's own day. A lot has changed but a lot hasn't changed. In India when visiting the Buddhist Holy Places one does seem to get nearer to the Buddha as an historical personality, but k~ anything of the Buddha, so to speak, rubbed off onto those so that they're endowed with a sort of sanctity. I mean this is really the point here isn't it? Over and above the mere association of ideas.

_____ I can't see any theoretical reason why not, but I can't actually say that I _____ it.

S: Or is this simply what this passage simply what is called that is to say, a praise, a sort of hyper~o ~ical

praise which is not to be taken too literally.

'Moreover, Subhuti, that spot of earth where one has taken from

this discourse on dharma but one stanza of four lines, taught or

illuminated it, that spot of earth will be a veritable shrine for

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S: the whole world with its gods, men and Asuras. What then should we say of those who will bear in mind this discourse on dharma in its entirety, who will recite, study, and illuminate it in full detail for others! Most wonderfully blest, Subhuti, they will be! And on that spot of earth, Subhuti, either the Teacher dwells, or a sage representing him.'

These are very, very strong words indeed, aren't they?

Subhuti I suppose you get some experience of it with a shrine room don't you, because a shrine room builds up an atmosphere. There definitely does seem to be something objective that people. ...

S: Yes, yes. Certainly that people can perceive who don't know anything about what you've been doing there, no understanding at all, maybe don't even know that you've been doing anything there perhaps. Well I don't know whether last year I felt any difference in the atmosphere. It could be simply that the very paraphernalia of the shrine helped create that atmosphere - you take them away - does the atmosphere remain? O~~ think that it did, but perhaps yo~~& ~~VL~t.~ sensitiv~ to perceive that. One knows that places do have atmosphere of various kinds.

b~r~v'~v~~ ov~~ ~ ~that~say~a famous

person or a holy person actually chooses a place~like the

Buddha chose the tree, because it is such a it has these

qualities.

S: Yes thuc is ~o.

~~~:Have you felt any strong connections with rupas that you've come

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Voice across?

S'. In what way?

Voice; Well rupas which have been used for long periods of meditation for quite long periods of time. I wondered whether you'd directly perceived any difference between different rupas.

so~of

S.. There is the point that some rupas seem to be almostkalive. I

remember that when I was living on my own out at Highgate in the very early days of the Friends, I had two rupas which I'd brought from India: one of the Buddha Shakyamuni and one of Avalokitesvara, the four-armed Avalokitesvara, and I just kept them in my study-cum-sittin~oom. I often used to feel that they were two people as it were sitting there.

You've been in that room haven't you? Do you remember? There was a bookcase, 7~ig heavy bookcase at the back of the room and there were these two images on the thing and when I was sitting and working there especially I would quite literally feel that there were t5w0tLteopli l~½'tting there, not that they were~two

inanimate images, but there were actually two people sitting there. I can't say that I personally worshipped these images a lot, but perhaps they have been worshipped quite a lot in the past. I had that feeling very strongly. But there was another experience I had with a friend's image in Bombay that I've mentioned som#imes, some of you must have heard: a friend o~mine

whom perkaps I met on my last visit, a quite elderly lady who became a Buddhist, she had several Buddha images, and one in particular she had on the window sill - the inside sill - a little greenstone image, some sort of

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S.. semitranslucent. Anyway when I went to see her one day in Bombay this was about 20 odd years ago, she was quite excited and as soon as I arrived she asked me to take my seat in a low armchair

just opposite this image so that this image was on the sill- ftu~cL ~O~~ ~ just abov~ whereC~a~~pala ;3 sitting,~perhaps a little nearer,-

and also the window looked out over the Iranian Sea

and she just asked me to sit there and see if T could see anything, so I sat and looked for a while and then I saw around the image a sort of green halo - not a circular halo - but the

figure became edged with a band of green light of the same shape as the image itself, and as I watched this gradually expanded.

It was vivid green, I've always liked fluorescent lighting, and bright green and it gradually filled the entire room. So she was asking me, 'Can you see anything, can you see anything?' So I told her. She said, 'Yes that's what I saw, the servants saw it too and they were quite scared' because they were not Christians. Well after a while it just faded. Of course -S-

I started seeing it I looked from side to side to see if there was any reflection, or whether there was light coming from sky, but no. It was clearly as though the whole thing had been lit up with fluorescent lighting very strongly. There was nothing delicate or subtle about it. It was crude. So how is one to explain that? The only possible explanation I suppose is that someone must have worshipped it for a long time. It was endowed so to speak with someone's personal magnetism. So a few, a few experiences of that sort I've had.

(Pause)

Of course the Orthodox Hindu idea and the Vajrayana Buddhist idea of images is that once they're established they're endowed with life. I've mentioned this in my memoirs haven't I?

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S: There is what we call a (O'-V'A-6 ~ a life-

establishing ceremony. Sometimes it coincides with the painting in of the eyes of an image, but the image is supposed to be brought to life. Popular Indian belief, this is non-Buddhistic, describes some images as particularly (or awake, that is to say, particularly lively, as centres of some kind of energy.

It's understandable that an object upon which many people's thoughts have been focused should become sort of alive. I think I've mentioned before the story told in

Bk-kkhu Saratna-one of my old friends- that when he went to Burma with the relics of Saraputra and on one occasion he and the other monks and several thousand people present saw the relics actually circling round inside their little glass capsule and he himself attributed it to the force of thoughts of all the people present. He didn't regard it as anything supernatural. I don't think he thought anything much of it at all. So it does seem that any sort of concentrated mental activity can have physical effects and therefore why not,

the effect on the surroundings where the activity takes place. Maybe the effect doesn't last for ever, perhaps only for a short period but perhaps there is some effect. But even then - can there be such a thing as a transcendental effect?

That is another question isn't it? Is there any perceptual difference between [a very powerful mundane effect like that, say, produced by someone in the dhyanas and a transcendental effect, something produced by a transcendental element? -As would seem to

be suggested here. Can the transcendental produce effects in that sort of way. Well, I  
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the human organism presumably. Conze has mentioned that earlier

on hasn't he. Where he says:- 'In this way the unconditioned

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S: seems to become a kind of condition, the essentially inactive seems to do  
something, and that which is nowhere seems to become localised in a definite individual'.

One could also say that the whole thing is a sort of skilful

means, I mean the Buddha is aware that caityas and shrines are

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greatly venerated. They become focus~s, focal points of

national piety. So he is, as it were, trying to direct some of that piety in a refined but  
sublimated form towards the

Dharma itself. In the Pali scriptures many caityas are

mentioned. There seems to be an especially large number of them

in the &V'c'v~~ country in ~~

The Buddha seems to have spent many pleasant hours here~amongst them. Conze is  
perfectly right when he says:-

'A shrine is a sacred place set apart, and it should be honoured with gifts o~ flowers, and so  
on. In past ages these shrines were something to reckon with. Respect for them assured the  
prosperity of nations, and they were inviolate sanctuaries for people in fear their lives.'

In medieval England, of course, there were three great national shrines, that of Thomas a  
Becket at Canterbury and Our Lady of Walsingham at Walsingham in North Norfolk and  
Glastonbury with its holy thorn down in Somerset.

People went on pilgrimages, as we know from 'The Canterbury Tales'~to all these places.  
There's something of that sort now in visiting houses associated with great writers and so on.  
Some people visit the graves of the War dead. The war memorials - it's all the same kind of  
thinking. In Westminster Abbey there's even Poet's Corner isn't there? So perhaps the  
Buddha is trying to harness some of this popular devotion in the interests of the Dharma itself

to the cause

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S: of the Dharma. But, all that apart, there's no doubt that the Buddha is stressing very powerfully, the importance and significance and value of this sort of teaching. That it is so holy, as it were, that something of its holiness apparently rubs off, even on to the place where even a little of it is taught.

Cw~cL ~a~~~

\_\_\_\_\_ It does seem a very valuable k doesn't it. We have going on a pilgrimage~which is going to these

Vt~~: What sort of shrines would they have been at()Y&~~ali~ (~u' ~ Buddha'~ ti ~c'r'~~t').

S.. Well Conze says, Conze quotes B.C. Law who is an Indian

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authoriy on the subject: According to B.C. Law, caitya is a

most general name for any sanctuary. It may refer to a stupa, a ~ihara, an assembly hall, a tree, a memorial stone, a holy relic or 0¼k~, Or~even an image. Literally caitya means something. ?h~eep~d up, perhaps it was originally no more than a little heap of stones to which some sort of sacredness was attached. I mean someo~~~~ seenisto have been putting up little caityas all around '11 Convento' - I don't know what the villagers will make of them - they'll probably think there's some kind of magic going on.

In India today you often see stones at the foot- of a tree - The Banyan Tree. I mean some trees are considered especially

sacred in India, not only the 6?et~~~~ ~ree, the tree under which the Buddha was Enlightened, but the Banyan Tree and a tree

called the, what is it? The Tree sacred to Shiva, the Bell Tree. There are five sacred trees in L altogether.

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S: the Q? LSV~~~ ---\~~ 'S W~~~~~l and a couple of others. So often one finds on the outskirts of ~ village one or more of these trees, sometimes five of them planted as a group and some stones sometimes roughly shaped like a(wor&~\~~ at the foot, and then they'd be annointed with things, and people would come and offer flowers. There's just a vague feeling of some kind of sacredness attached to that tree or those trees, but nothing very

explicit, nothing very clear, it's all quite vague and almost instinctive, although very much a part of local life, of village life. Sometimes it's formulated that there is sometimes some kind of spirit or devata living in the tree, but

more often than not it isn't even as formulated as that.

'~ ~er kr~L There's a sort of jmana attaching to that tree. It's set apart.

Pause. ~~~~~' evt~

An~wa~, ~}~'~~~~'\ It does~raise the question of whether a particular spot should be invested with particular, with special sanctity or whether from a spiritual point of view one should regard all places as equally sacred. Can the sacred really be delimited in that way~ from a purely spiritual point of view leaving aside culture and all that?

\_\_\_\_ I suppose from an ultimate point of view, - no it can't be, but if a particular spot had particularly strong associations for you that could be helpful to you in your development?

S: Yes, provided it didn't only work there. For instance, you might be greatly inspired by sitting in Buddhagaya, to observe the five precepts while you were there - even meditate a little, but its not that those things should be associated only with that particular spot, or otherwise it becomes as it is for many

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S; so-called Christians, Christianity is associated only with church, with particular hours that they spend in ~hurch. You remember that when the Buddha was discussing the conditions of (? ~~~~ab stability, he made the point, when he was speaking -to the C'. V~~\~~~~ that they should keep up the offerings at their shrines, at their caityas. It's almost like saying they should respect their own traditions and culture. Supposing

for instance, thinking of England again, supposing no-one ever bothered anymore about Keats' house in Hampstead, or Dr. Johnston's birthplace in Lichfield. What would that signify?

Lack of appreciation of what could be gained from this.

S: Well, lack of appreciation of English Literature itself, ou~& I mean English Literature was on the decline, not only itself

on the decline but people weren't appreciating it very much. So it would be a symptom of cultural decline generally, national decline possibly. So keep up your shrines Pause.

It is no doubt significant that in India today many of the old Buddhist sites have been restored and are being visited again. The interest is not just archeological.

Pause.

(Very much a living tradition

\_\_\_\_\_ Is that a fairly modern tendency - that the old sites are being renovated?

S.: Well I suppose so, because you've got to have old sites to begin with, you've got to have old sites that have fallen into ruin,

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S: for one reason or another. In ancient times you didn't have that, you might have had ancient sites but~~ didn't have ancient sites that had fallen into ruins unless it was the result of some invasion or something of that sort. So in a sense it is a modern phenomenon.

\_\_\_\_\_ I was wondering whether we could compare it to some specific event, like the Untouchables actually becoming Buddhists.

S: Well no. The restoration of the archeological sites, the sites associated with the life and work of the Buddha, that began long, long before, that began during the last century mainly with Sir John Marshall and Sir Alexander - General Sir Alexander (WCv&vv<\~~~ . That was one of the factors responsible for Indian Buddhist revival, those men were connected with Dhamma- pala~knew themL- they kn~w him or knew of him. It was all happening at ~~~~cL the same time. At the same time or a little while before that, the in~criptio~As- of Ashoka had been deciphered.

Pause.

At the time of the \_\_\_\_\_ people started

taking an interest in the remains of classical antiquity - Virgil's tomb was rediscovered, or what was believed to be Virgil's tomb.

Pause.

Anyway, let's go on. 4. The First Ending.

. THE FIRST ENDING

-The source of this merit is the 'discourse on dharma', which is now named. The Sutra in its first form probably finished at this point.

13a. Subhuti asked: What then, O Lord, is this discourse on dharma, and how should I bear It In mInd?-The Lord -repli~d This discourse on dharma, Subhuti, is called 'Wisdom which has

gone beyond', and as such should you bear it in mind!

It is noteworthy that the title of the 'Diamond Sutra' is here simply 'Perfection of Wisdom'. Kumarajiva, it is true, has 'Adamantine Perfection of Wisdom', but not so the Sanskrit.

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The second part of the Sutra presents the commentator with exceptional and so far insuperable difficulties. It is not impossible that one day someone may succeed in offering a satisfactory explanation. None has yet been found. Even Asanga, Vasubandhu and Kamala~Ila were often at a loss to account for the logical sequence behind the argument, and their comments are apt to be unconvincing, laboured and over-ingenious. My own commentary, based on their suggestions, was rewritten a number of times. Even in its final form it failed to ring true, and I must agree with my friends who pronounced it to be unhelpful, inconclusive, tedious, uninspiring and positively confusing. Far from adding to the understanding of the Sutra's spiritual message, this part of the commentary actually obscures it, though it might have some value for philologists concerned with the construction of the Sanskrit - sentences. Our bewilderments are perhaps due to invincible obtuseness. It is equally possible that they derive from the state of the text which has been transmitted to us. Far from representing a coherent whole, the second part of the Diamond Sutra may very well be no more than a chance medley of stray sayings. Scholars who are familiar with the conditions of literary composition in Buddhist India, and who have considered the frequent repetitions and violent transitions in this part of the

Sutra, are inclined to believe that reciters at various times - added a passage here or there, and that, what is more, the scribes at one time misplaced some of the palm leaves, and also added glosses from the margin into the text. In that case the sequence of the argument would be determined by a series of mechanical accidents, and I have been content with a bare translation of chapters 13 to 29, adding a few headlines to serve as tentative indications of the problems discussed, which are nearly always variations on the topics of the first part. Chapters 30 to 32 then again break new ground, and the commentary is therefore resumed when we come to them.

S. So what does one learn from all this?

~ktrp~&&: We should be careful(w~~~~~) st~~~~.

S.. Yes. Also that we can't take things too literally, because the teaching has come down in form to a great extent determined by the accidents of transmission. It's quite impossible one would have thought for the Buddhist to indulge in anything like

bib~liolatri. The Buddhists don't have just one simple, straightforward, easily identifiable sacred book as the Christians and even the Muslims have. In some ways the Muslims are very lucky, in the sense that things are made very easy

and simple for them. They've got one book, The Koran, the text of which is in a fair state of reliability, in fact it would

DS~2

~QO.

S: seem. There are some discussions and disputes, but you've got this simple and compact volume, no bigger than the New

Testament of the Bible and that's the Word of God. That's

all you've got. You've got all sorts of commentaries, you've got sayings of the prophet - thousands of them - but they're absolutely distinct, absolutely separate, the Koran stands alone and that's your final authority. Even Christians after a eeneries of stru~\%e~? '~ ~ ft° they settled down with an Old Testament consisting of so many books and a New Testament consisting of so many books, is it 64 altogether? Something like that and that's become more or less standard for the whole Christian world. All sorts of new sects arise, there are hundreds of sects but they all accept virtually the same Bible. So Christians are in a relatively easy position. Whatever difficulties they may encounter with regard to the higher criticism when it comes to considering the origins of a particular text and the development and so on. But look at the Buddhists, I mean they're even worse off in a way than the Hindus, the Hindus have at least got the four Vedas, together

with the Brahmasutras and the Bhagavadgita, they're the three main works even though rather popular ones, these are clearly regarded as revealed works. But the Buddhists have got a whole library of books which is in some ways a great - disadvantage because it takes time to study these things and it's sometimes quite confusing when you've got Pali Canon and Mahayana sutras and tantras and then what about the Songs of Milarepa - are they to be regarded as scriptures or not? This is all quite confusing. But there's one advantage at least that we have: we are in no danger of bibliolatriy, in no danger of book worship, in no danger of regarding the whole