

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](#).

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Q4~. You certainly wouldn't say that it was a pretty thunderstorm. Do you see what I mean?

Dhirananda: The sanskrit word or Pali word 'Subha', does that have exclusively the meaning of beauty, or does it also...?

S.: No that is much more beauty.. .pur ,eauty No 't connote S', anything like the sublimeL. There 5 somethingait like it in the

various Ragas connected with music. There is the (vebhara) which is the terrible, that is a bit like the sublime. For instance among artists, Michaelangelo is said to be celebrated for his sublimity. His figures are sublime more often than they are beautiful. I mean, even where one would think that perhaps beauty was more appropriate

he's introduced sublimity.

Perhaps one could think in terms of the Tibetan Book of the Dead. There's the peaceful deities as beautiful and the wrathful ones as sublime. That might make the whole thing, the distinction more accessible. (Pause) And also one could say that it is one of the signs that on~~~ay taken this teaching or understood this teaching not merely intel~~lectually, that it move one emotionally - even that one sheds tears in the way that Subhuti did. I think in the songs of Milarepa or the life of Milarepa, there's quite a lot of tear-shedding, isn't there? In Tibetan Buddhism generally, perhaps, the Tibetans are relatively free with their tears.

Dhirananada: In the Par;~nirvan?1~~~a~~ it's said that when the Buddha passes away, the monks were,Larahants)were crying.... (S.: Then?) Subhuti was crying in th~s scripture (unclear)

S.: So? But it's a different thing, it's a different situation, isn't

it? (Dhirananda: Yes, it is.) Because what is happening at the time of the Par-nirvana is simply that the Buddha's physical body is beginning to be removed, beginning to disappear. The arahants presumably did not feel any separation from the Buddha thereby. Only those who were relatively unenlightened felt any separation, any loss. I mean, the general sort of Hinayana or Theravada view of the arahant is that the arahant is sort of impassive, incapable of emotion. That doesn't seem to be the Mahayana view though, judging by this passage. In any case he's moved by something beyond arahantship, yea? That's why he's moved. There's a revelation of something even more sublime than the Nirvana that he so far, has presumably attained. It's as though he stood on a sort of peak and he thought that was

14~ the highest peak of all, but then the mist clears and he looks up and there's another peak still towering above him, of course, so he's moved by the sublimity of the spectacle* You may also remember if you've read it that towards the end of the story here is

the story of the Bodhisattva who is weeping. Do you remember that? Has anyone read it? Oh dear! Sada is 'always', pashandha means weeping, greatly weeping. It's the ever-weeping Bodhisattva. And what's he weeping for? It's because he's moved by the Dharma. So Subhuti is only an arahant so he just sheds a few tears but his Sada 4aru-ita is a Bodhisattva so he goes on weeping all the time. Anyway, let's go on to 14d.

14 d. The Lord said: So it is, Subhuti. Most wonderfully blest will be those beings who, on hearing this Sutra, will not tremble, nor be frightened, or terrified. And why? The Tathagata has taught this as the highest (parama-) perfection (paramiUa). And what the Tathagata teaches as the highest perfection, that also the innumerable (aparima-na) Blessed Buddhas do teach. Therefore is it called the 'highest perfection'. I don't

So how does this differ, I mean one isn't frightened or terrified well, one isn't simply terrified well, one isn't seeing it as? So how does this differ, I mean one isn't seeing it as? So how does this differ, I mean one isn't seeing it as?

Voices: Threatening.

S.: Simply threatening, simply destructive of oneself. It's just as with the wrathful Buddhas, if you yourself are not in a very skilful state of mind you see them merely as

wrathful, merely as threatening. But if you are in a more positive frame of mind you see them as awe-inspiring, as wonderful, sublime, heroic, impressive and very inspiring, huh?

There's the story about Turner the painter. Turner often depicted in his paintings sea scenes including thunder storms, and apparently he used to get himself taken out in a boat during a thunderstorm and have himself lashed to the mast to make notes on his sketch

pad. No doubt there would be danger of being drowned on that sort of occasion, so one could have merely been overwhelmed by fear but Turner was not overwhelmed with fear. I've just been impressed and inspired by the sublimity of the scene. So that is the difference. If you are merely concerned about your own destruction then the sublime appears as the destructive, the threatening, but if you are not concerned about your own destruction, you can rise above that, then you can experience the sublime as sublime, you can experience it as inspiring.

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own So if you are over-preoccupied with the safety of your own existence, your own continual existence as you are, then teachings like that of the Diamond Sutra will merely terrify you out of your wits, if you manage to understand them that is. I mean sometimes you are too stupid to understand them, just as some people are so stupid so that even if there is a thunderstorm at sea they are not afraid because they haven't got enough imagination even to think what might happen; or blind faith in the ship or the ship's captain.

So it's quite a healthy sign in a way if one is terrified by the teaching of the Sutra because it shows one has understood it to some extent. (Pause), But if you are moved by it, as Subhuti was, well, so much the better because you've started to appreciate its greatness and sublimity. If Dharma appears to you as beautiful, then it means you have just risen to the level of a Buddha. (Laughter)

So you could say that to worldly people the Dharma appears terrifying, to Bodhisattvas it appears sublime and awe-inspiring and to Buddhas it appears beautiful, Hmm? (Pause) You could apply this even on a much lower level to the question of living in communities, especially men's communities. To the ordinary man in the street the idea of living in a men's community is just, well, frightening, terrifying even; maybe to a sort of regular friend or someone who has just become a mitra, who hasn't perhaps even left home, who has still got a job, well, to him maybe the idea of living in a men's community is rather awe-inspiring but at the same time it's a bit attractive, though he feels a bit afraid too, still. But to some one who is actually living in a men's community and has been there a long time, it's just beautiful, because he realizes from his own experience it's the best possible way to live.

Gerry: Or even the prospect of coming to 11 Convento for three months.

S.: Yes, that too. ~~~:~~be ~i~tle threatening. Yes, Indeed. But once you're here... k.
(Laughter) Well that's threatening in a different way for different reasons entirely.

There is a bit of a play on words~ here also that "The Tathagata has taught this as the~erasmta)per~ection (paramita). And what the Tathagata teaches as the highest perfection, that also the innumerable (~parimana) Blessed Buddhas do teach. Therefore is it called the 'highest perfection'." These are not very scientific ~mologies, but they do throw some light on the term 'paramita'

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~4~. In principle all Buddhas teach the same thing because they have

achieved or realized the same reality, the same truth, the same absolute, the same unconditioned. (Pause) Anyway, let's go on to 5c.:

30. s~ Pat~~~ and perfect inmr frad~m

14.. Moreover, Subhuti, the Tathagata's perfection of patience is really no perf~on. And why? Because, Subhuti, when the king of Kalinga cut my flesh from every limb, at that time I had no perception of a self, of a being, of a soul, or a person. And why? If, Subhuti, at that time I had had a perception of self, I would also have had a perception of firm-will at that time. And so, Subhuti had had a perception of a being, of a soul, or of a person. With my superknowledge I

recall that in the past I have for five hundred births led the life of a sage devoted to patience. Then also have I had no perception of a self, a being, a soul, or a person. Therefore then, Subhuti, the Bodhi-being, the great being, after he has got rid of all perceptions, should raise his thought to the utmost, right and perfect enlightenment. He should produce a thought which is unsupported by forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables, or mind-objects, unsupported by dharma, unsupported by non-dharma, unsupported by anything. And why? All supports have actually no support. It is for this reason that the Tathagata teaches: By an unsupported Bodhisattva should a gift be given, not by one who is supported by forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables, or mind-objects.

S.: Hmm. So a new subject has been introduced, a new paramita which is that of Ksanti paramita, and the Buddha is referring to an incident in a previous life when he says: "the King of Kalinga cut my flesh from every limb, at that time I had no perception of a self, of a being, or a soul, or a person. And why? If, Subhuti, at that time I had had a perception of self, I would have had a perception of ill-will at that time." So the Buddha goes on to speak, saying that there are two kinds of Ksanti, two kinds of patience. One being where you grit your teeth and just endure in a stoical sort of fashion. The other in which you are not in a sense conscious of anything being done to you by anybody. You've gone beyond the subject/object duality. You don't cherish the notion of a self or of a non-self or of the

other person, so therefore you don't think anybody anything is doing to you. There's no possibility of suffering, but there is no possibility of anger as a result of that suffering.

Subhuti: So in the first case you're backing your anger.

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S.: Yes. If you're not manifesting it, you're not acting in accordance with it, not acting upon it. It seems a very sort of lofty level indeed, doesn't it? One can imagine perhaps by some stretch of imagination the Bodhisattva practising dharma in this sort of way, but to that extent, is that extent? - it's quite difficult to conceive.

Subhuti: When you say in a sense, you're not conscious of anything being done to you by someone, I'm not quite sure what I want to ask but...

S.: You see somebody doing something but your mental attitude is not that "he is doing this to me!" Again this is quite difficult for us to conceive, isn't it? Especially under those sort of circumstances. It's difficult to even get a glimpse of it.

Subhuti: So it would just be a number of experiences, as it were, taking place and you couldn't identify with any particular...

S.: Well, perhaps, one could look at it in a slightly different way - a sort-of analogy, rather unsatisfactory, but perhaps a bit helpful, in the case of the mother and child. I mean the child might get angry with the mother, might hit the mother, but the mother doesn't really, well, there might be a bit of pain, but the mother doesn't think "Oh, he is hitting me" and become angry, very often. Do you see what I mean? Yes, the mother notices or knows that the child is hitting her, but at the same time there is a feeling of sort of oneness with the child. It's her own child, her own flesh and blood so to speak, so she doesn't feel that "he is hitting me" and consequently become angry, at least that is conceivable I think.

Shantiprabha: Sometimes, the opposite seems to occur. It's almost like the opposite, before a child is born when it's actually in the womb, the mother can perhaps get a lot of joy from feeling the baby kicking.

S.: Yes. Well, in a way she knows everything's going alright. But sometimes one can feel like this when one can see very clearly why somebody is doing something, maybe someone sawing the flesh from your bones is somewhat extreme, but sometimes someone might be behaving quite unreasonably and causing you a lot of trouble and inconvenience, but you can see why it's all happening.

So this knowledge, this fact that you can see why it's all

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~G. happening, and why he's in that state~ prevents you from really react

ing. Do you see what I mean? You don't think "Well, why is he doing this to me?" You can see the reason for it all, at least psycholog- ically. (Pause)

S this is \&santi as a paramita1 as distinct from the mundane 0

virtue, where you just turn the other cheek even though you'd like to

give the ot~er person a sock on the jaw.

And then the Buddha goes on to say of the Bodhisattva that he should produce an unsupported thought, ~~~~~'~~~~ supports have actually no support.U That can be better translated,' that which is supported has no sup~t: One of the basic teachings of the Perfection

of Wisdom. If you think about it, it's quite true, it's even quite roko'~~~~7 obviousL. if something is supported, if it depends upon being supported

by something else, then it isn't really supported because it i~ supp- orted by something outside itself, and that support can be at -any time taken away. So if that is your position, you certainly aren't supported. So that which is supported is unsupported. Real support

is absolute support; relative support is only relative support. so

~relative support is your absolute support ~~hat which is supported~

i.e. ;s relatively supported~is unsupported in~bsolute terms.

Subhuti: So an unsupported Bodhisattva is actually supported in an absolute sense.

S.: Yes, yes. I ~ne uses that terminology at all, yes. That's the only way to be supported, to be unsupported. (Pause) So, "He should produce a thought which is unsupported by forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables, or mind-objects etc", in other words, which is not derived by his ordinary sense experience, which is not even derived from his mental experience, not derived from his dualistic thinking, which is not derived from anything. One can only say which arises from deep within him, from the deepest possible level within him quite spontaneously. (Long Pause) Alright let's go on to Sd.

5d. The ernst~ and no~xistence of beings

14f. And further, Subhuti, it is for the weal of all beings that a Bodhisattva should give gifts in this manner. And why? This perception of a being¹ Subhuti, that is just a non~perception. Those all-beings of whom the Tathagata has spoken, they are indeed no~beings. And why? Because the Tathagata speaks in accordance with reality, speaks the truth, speaks of what is, not otherwise. A Tathagata does not speak falsely.

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S.: Hmm. This in a way echoes a passage or passages in the 1Pa4li~ scriptures.

Subhuti: Which ones were you thinking of?

S.: I was just trying to think of the precise wording. There's one that somewhat slips my memory, but there's another one.. ah... ~here the Buddha says words to the effect that: he uses ordinary language. He speaks ,that is to say, in terms of I and you, but he is not misle~d by it. ~f course again there is that passage in the Lankavatara Sutra where(said from the night of his enlightenment to the night of his par; nirvana the Buddha had not uttered a single word, because no word that could be uttered could do justice to Reality. So in reality the Buddha had not said anything, - that is another way of looking at it. But in one

way or another the point is that the Buddha does speak from a higher standpoint, he does give expression to his inner state of enlightenment. He does speak out of his experience of reality. So everything that he says, if one takes the real meaning of it, is in accordance with Reality. He speaks the truth; speaks of what is, not otherwise; does not speak falsely. But nonetheless there is a sort of corollary or rider in the section immediately following, so just read 5e.

5.. Tnit~ and Falsehood

14. But nevertheless, Subhuti, with regard to that ditarma which the Tath~ga~~ta has fully known and demonstrated, on account of that there is neither truth nor fraud.

S.: In other words one must~t apply one's dualistic notions of truth to the fact that the Buddha speaks the truth. He doesn't speak the truth as opposed to falsehood, he speaks in terms of ultimate reality which is beyond truth and falsehood in the dualistic _se~se.\~ ~ ~&n~~w~~ ~~~~j~~ "",~~ ~\L~~ \o~awQ~~4

— ~~~A~&\~ \v~~,v~ v~~~~ Y p- ~
 ~ ~

(L- Mt~~Wc4 YiL) ~ cUS~~k~~ Y~~ ~ ~ -c~~~ (~cLAAA~~) Anyway, go on with the remainder of that

section: - - - In darkn~ss a man could not see anything. Just so should be viewed a Bodhisattva who has fallen among things, and who, fallen among things, renounces a gift. A nian with eyes would, when the night becomes ll~ht and the sun has arisen~ see manifold forms. Just so should be viewed a Bodhisattva who has not fallen among - things, and who, without having fallen among things, renounces a gift.

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S.: Here the Buddha is contra~ng two ways of practising ~ana. One co-joined with

Prajnaparamita, the other not co-joined. The first is blind, the second alone truly seeing. So a Bodhisattva who - gives something, thinking that there is a real thing that he gives, that he himself who gives is a real thing, and the person to whom he gives is a real thing, he is fallen among things, he is in darkness, he is blind, he is spiritually blind, blind to the Perfection of Wisdom. But not so is one who does not act in that way. The point that has already been made has been repeated.

Subhuti: It's quite an interesting expression, isn't it 'fallen among things '

S.: Yes. It's almost like the Biblical "fallen among thieves

II q'

Subhuti: I was thinking of the Gnostics... fallen into the world.

~ Yes, yes. We haven't got the Sanskrit text, otherwise we could see how closely that reproduced the original. I imagine it does. It sounds like a Sanskrit idiom, "fallen among things". Fallen is ('patita?').

Shantiprabha: Is there any significance in the term, 'renouncing I.

a gift?'. Up to date, it's been giving a gift that's been used.

S.: H . You are giving up something, he gives away something, renounces it. I don't know whether there is any significance, or whether it's just a variation for the sake of a variation. To renounce something means you give it for good, you, give up any claim that you have on it.

Subhuti: It's connected with ksanti. (S.: In what way?)

Renunciation is in a sense an aspect of ksanti?

S.: (You are) renouncing one's own body, one's (atmabhava?). Also 'S: the comparison "A man with eyes would, when the night be

comes light and the sun has arisen, see manifold forms. Just so should be viewed a Bodhisattva. So here the language is the language of vision and sight with regard to the Perfection of Wisdom. (Pause)

Go on to 14h, that contains a new point which we could go into, before we close.:

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5j The Merit acquired, its pres~ositions and restdt: Q149.

14h. Furthermore, Subhuti, those sons and daughters of good family who will take up this discourse on Dharma, will bear it in mind, recite, study, and illuminate it in full detail for others, they have been known, Subhuti, by the Tathagata with his Buddha-cognition, they have been seen, Subhuti, by the Tathagata with his Buddha-eye, they have been fully known by the Tathagata. All these beings, Subhuti, will beget and acquire an immeasurable and incalculable heap of merit.

S.: So what's the new theme here. I think it's a new theme. I don't think we've come across this.

Shantiprabha: Recitation study and illumination.

I think before he's only talked about - just demonstrating it to others, just repeating it. Now there seems to be an emphasis on actually remembering it and looking at it quite closely, understanding it

S.: That's true, but I wasn't thinking of that. But that is a variation on a theme we've had before, or a development of it.

Amoghavira: Well, the fact that those who recite then study it will be seen by the Tathagata.

S.: Yes. So what does that mean? What does it mean to be seen by the Buddha - by his Buddha-eye? Was it not seen before? Was nobody else seen by the Buddha? Even with his Buddha eye, how's Buddha-cognition? Why only those who take up this discourse on the Dharma? What does that signify?

Subhuti: This did actually come up before, didn't it?

S.: Oh, has it?

Subhuti: Yes. The idea then was that... Conze translated it as 'assisted' by the Buddha, and we talked about then being in contact with the Buddha.

S.: That's true. Yes. But being seen by the Buddha.

Gerry: Recognized?

S.: Recognized, yes. . but g6i~g into it a little more deeply, what does it sort of imply? That you are seen by the Buddha? Because

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QSO. presumably you have been seen by the Buddha before? Let me give you

an analogy. Supposing there were two people: supposing one of them is looking at the other. Let's say A and B. A is looking at B, but B is not looking at A, so what happens when B does look at A~ ~o some extent in the same way as A was looking at B?

Subhuti: Communication takes place.

S.: Yes. So isn't it a bit like that~whereas before the Buddha was looking at Subhuti, but Subhuti was not fully looking at the Buddha. But when Subhuti looks at the Buddha, then the Buddha can look at Subhuti, yes? (Subhuti: Yes.Y So the Buddha looking at you, is an aspect of your looking at the Buddha. Do you see what I mean? And therefore, you see the Buddha when you ~e the Dharma, presumably. So the Buddha sees you when your Dharma-eye opens. I mean, in a sense, he can only see you with his Buddha-eye because he is a Buddha. He can't re~lly close his Buddha-eye~ ;t~ always there---but when the Dharma eye open in you then you really look at the Buddha, and when you look at the Buddha, the Buddha looks at you, hmm?

So there is a much more direct communication between you than when the Buddha was simply looking at you, and you were at best looking at

some thought or idea or even image of the Buddha, but not at the 'it' - Buddha himself. Now you are looking at the Buddha, so now he can

really look at you. Hmm? So that means in a way, there is a duality but there is also the beginning of a non-duality.

So one could say that this is another aspect of going for refuge. Do you see what I mean? I mean one has spoken in terms of going for refuge; one has spoken in terms of entering the Stream; one has spoken in terms of the Dharma eye opening, one has spoken in terms of going forth, - these are all different aspects of. ...

(End of Tape 12)

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Q. S.: ... all different aspects of one and the same basic spiritual

experience. Could one not also speak in terms of another aspect - being seen by the Buddha? Of course, another one I haven't mentioned or didn't mention before, I've given a lecture on in the past, which is the 'avriti'; according to the Lankavatara, the turning about. This is an aspect of the same thing.

So it seems as though one is discovering more and more different aspects of going for refuge. So another here is that you become seen by the Buddha with his Buddha-eye, which is a very strange experience. The Buddha is seeing you all the time, is looking at you all the time and you are looking at the Buddha. It's just like in the case of those eyes, you know, painted on the sides of the

stupas), of those stupas in Nepal. If you look at them you find they are looking at you. (Laughter) But why do we say a sort of duality, but at the same time, a sort of non-duality?

_____ Because there's you and the Buddha, but because of communication there's a link between you...

Ltss. S.: Yes. You're much closer. The division between you is 1/2. You are not one with the Buddha, because after all, he is looking at you and you are looking at him, but you are looking at each other. In a way, he sees his self reflected in you, because if you look at another person in the eyes, you can see your image reflected in the pupils of their eyes, don't you, so

you are in them and they are in you.

So when the Buddha looks at you he sees himself reflected in you, and when you look at the Buddha you see yourself reflected in the Buddha. So there's duality, but at the same time there's non-duality. You are moving in the direction of non-duality. Not that non-duality excludes duality- one mustn't forget that.

So here's another aspect of Going for Refuge one could say. That one becomes seen by the Buddha with his Buddha-eye. It does seem that the Going for Refuge is including more and more of Buddhism, doesn't it? I was thinking, this is quite incidental and by the way, let me say it so that it can be jotted down and then someday something may be done about it. It wouldn't be a bad idea to have a series of talks, a symposium, maybe spread over two days, on the different aspects of Going for Refuge. We've now got at least seven of them - say with one person speaking on Going for Refuge itself, another speaking of the opening of the Dharma-eye, another speaking of Going Forth, and so on. That would be quite a good symposium, wouldn't it? (mumbled agreement) You could have different order members speaking on each aspect. (Long Pause) Any way lets do one more little section:

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_____ -1 So. And if, Subhuti, a

woman or man should renounce in the morning all their belongings as many times as there are grains of sand in the river Ganges, and if they should do likewise at noon and in the evening, and if in this way they should renounce all their belongings for many hundreds of thousands of millions of millions of aeons; and someone else, on hearing this discourse on Dharma, Would not reject it; then the latter would on the strength of that beget a - greater heap of merit, immeasurable and incalculable. What then should we say of him who, after writing it, would learn it, bear it in mind, recite, study and illuminate it in full detail for others? 4L. S.: So, "on hearing this discourse would not reject it", well, the

demands are becoming less and less and the merit becoming more and more. So why is the merit of not rejecting this Dharma so great?

Voice: Because of the possibilities it opens up for you.

S.: Because of the possibilities - well, it's not rejecting. It's as though the temptation to reject

it is so great, because it is so threatening. So if you manage to resist that temptation well, already that is a great achievement; you've done a great thing simply not to reject the teaching. I mean, here not to reject it is tantamount to accepting it one might say. If you get as far as not rejecting it, well, you're very very close indeed to accepting it to say the least.

Is there any further point arising out of this, or anything else we have done this morning? We seem to have got on quite well without Dr. Conze's help, (Laughter) notwithstanding

I've got a bit confused about the basic usefulness of the Sutra. It's like at times we've said it doesn't seem to be relevant to the West, especially to people who don't have highly developed intellects, but at other times we've said it would be good for people to learn it off by heart and meditate on this sort of Perfect Wisdom, and I can't quite reconcile the two.

S.: Well, I think its very utility is in its inutility. It is relevant because it is so irrelevant. (Laughter) That is to say I think one needs to occupy oneself sometimes with something that has got no bearing whatever on one's immediate concerns, and no doubt the Perfection of Wisdom fulfils that admirably. I think we shouldn't be over... well, on a certain level we have to, but again on another level we should not be over-concerned with what is relevant to me, interesting to me, applicable to my situation, in the West, living in Bethnal Green. Do you see what I mean?

_____ I'm just trying to work out if it's relevant to my spiritual

development here and now. Q~~.

S.: I think there needs to be some element which is not relevant to one's spiritual development at all.. because only then will one sort of transcend conditions. It must be gloriously irrelevant, and then it will be sort of most relevant of all, you know, in a deeper or higher sense. I think actually people do enjoy things like this, partly for this reason; their sheer irrelevance . There's not a word about co-ops~ not a word about centres, not a word about communities (~laughter) not a word about practising meditation (Laughter). You can just have a complete rest from these things. Sometimes you'd like to have #omplete rest from some of these things however good they may be. On the other hand, you may have a complete rest on, one might say, to som~ extent a very much higher level. You are still concerned with the Dharma, but you're not concerned with any of the things that you usually think of as constituting the Dharma. So you don't get a chance to sort of settle down in them, to rest in them. This is quite a refreshing change. Here's something that's completely irrelevant - a bit like nonsense poetry, a bit like Lewis Carroll or Edward Lear with characters taken to a very much higher plane. I won't go as far-as Christmas Humphreys and ~ay that 'Alice in Wonder land' is a Zen scripture or anything like that, but there's a sort of anal- ogy if you see what I mean?

It's alright to t)c?LCt Buddhism to appeal to one where one is, here and now, but where is here and :iqhere is now? or when is now, I should have said. Is one only a conditioned being? (long pause) In some ways it's quite refreshing to hav~ something which in a way you understand but which in another way you don't understand at all. Perhaps an exclusive diet of Perfection of Wisdom wouldn't do one any good, but a touch of it is I ~~~ink, very useful. It's just like salt, you can't you know eat a meal of s~lt ~(laughter) ~ut without salt the meal is a bit tasteless. You could almost say that ene needs a little grain, or a few grains of Perfection of Wisdom in one's spir- itual diet all the time. It gives it a little flavour, the flavour of irrelevancy, otherwise it all becomes too relevant, or one takes it all too seriously, and one thinks too much in rerms of oneself as one at present is.

Voice: Is this flavour of irre~evancy rather like the 'taste of freedom'?

S.: ~es, quite. Perhaps I'll give a talk on that one day, on the flavour of irrelevancy~or perhaps somebody else will. (Pause)

Q~W After all those monks for all those hundre~s of years in monasteries

in Japan and Lamaseries in Tibet who werjcing the Diamond Sutra, they must have got something out of it.. or perhaps they didn't get anything out of it Maybe that was the point! (laughter) Perhaps they just recited it, perhaps they liked reciting it, lik~the sound of it even though they didn't understand it. I was just thinking that maybe all of those women who in the early days of the Friends declared that the Diamond Sutra was their favourite scripture might have had lurking at the back of their minds that famous saying that "diamonds are a girl's best friend". (Laughter) Diamonds in that sense are certainly not irrelevant. Or to speak of that other saying, "diamonds

are I suppose there is the point that if one repeats some- thing over and over again, the meaning of which one understands, but the purport of which one does not understand, let us say. If one repeats those words over and over again a sufficient n~er of times, long enough, then something of the purport in addition to the verbal meaning of the words will begin to dawn on one. But it may sometimes be difficult to explain the actual connection between that purport and what I've called the meaning.

S~~o~~-.What does the word purport mean? (Laughter)

S.: Well, I'm using the word 'purport' to avoid using the word 'meaning' again which would be ambiguous. The sort of general drift of the state- ment, let us say, the direction in which it is pointing above and be- yond whatever one can get out of the meaning of the words or the meaning of the sent~nce, or the meanin#f the statement as statement. It isn't difficult sometimes to get a~the meaning but to get at the pu'~-ort is difficult. I think one can only get at the purport by constantly bearing in mind the meaning; well, one of the ways of bearing in mind the meaning is by constantly reciting the words, as one does in some of the visualization practices (with) certain short verses which one repeats or recites over and over a~ain. (Pause)

Anyway, I think we have left Dr. Conze trotting along behind today. Perhaps we should leave it there. We've got two more sessions so we are getting on quite well. As far as I can see we will cert- ainly get through the text, so at leas4we'll have an overview of it.

_____ The difficulty with this, the second part~is not so

much with the individual passages but with relating them, is that the point? We don't seem to have had that much difficulty in...

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QSS. S.: It is somewhat more condensed than the first part. But the se-

quence of the sections, even the connection of the argument is not clear, perhaps it's not meant to be. What I think is that if the 'argument' (inverted commas) is inconsequential, why should one expect consecutiveness in the arrangement of the paragraphs? (agreement)

One might sort of attempt an image: one usually thinks of a book, say, as a linear thing, that the pages could be laid side by side, or in one long strip or scroll, and that is to say the page connects linearly with the next one. But supposing one was to imagine an arrangement of pages like the letters on a 'golf ball', in a typewriter, in such a way that every page could be read as continuous with the pages on each side. Do you see what I mean? That would mean, perhaps, really the Vajrachedaka is to be thought of in that sort of way, and it only seems confusing because convention compels us to put one page or one section after another, and say, only one other, - do you see what I mean? Whereas they should be arranged in a way, in relation to each other like the letters on a typewriter golf ball, so you could read them in a number of ways rather like dice - the different faces of a dice.

We mustn't forget there are conventions, linguistic and typographic conventions. We mustn't expect Reality to conform to those conventions. You could even work out how many sections there were, (how many 'a's' whether one could have a multifaceted figure on one could (engrave?) have one section of 128 facets (unclear). Then it could be read off

either as leading to the facet there or the facet there. Do you see what I mean? That might give one a more comprehensive view of the Perfection of Wisdom. I mean Conze seems to have assumed that there must be one correct linear arrangement of the sections of the text. Is that necessarily so in the case of a text like this?

My impression is that the tempo has gone, has been turned up. With the first one there is some thread of linear development you could hang onto...

S.: Yes, yes. There's even a more constructive derangement... with fewer compromises than before. . . Well, this is perhaps why (Hang Shan?) regarded section one as eliminating gross doubts and section two as eliminating subtle doubts. Perhaps he sensed a certain increase in

tempo as you've called it. Because were the sages and editors of old so obtuse that they couldn't see something that seems pretty obvious to us, you know, that part two is in a mess; is it in a mess? or is it we who are in a mess? even Dr. Conze who is in a mess? (pause) You know, if I find anybody sort of surrepti~iously

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QSG experimenting with multi-faceted figures, I shall know what they are

up to. (Laughter)

~~~~: If you wanted to learn the Diamond Sutra off by heart, is this a good one to go from?

S.: I think this would be the best. It is the closest to the original Sanskrit in idiomatic English... I think this probably would be the best~anslation to learn off by heart. It is clear, not that that helps very much. (Unclear) ... Alright, let's leave it there until tomorrow.

(Day 6)

S.: We got as far as 15~, I think. Would someone like to read 15b right down to 15c.

15b. Moreover, Subhuti, (1) unthinkable and (2) incom- parable is this discourse on Dharma. (3) The Tathagata has taught it for the weal of beings who have set out in the best, in the most excellent vehicle. Those who will take up this discourse on Dharma, bear it in mind, recite, study and illuminate it in full detail for others, the Tati~ag~ata has known em with~his Bu&dha~~c~&gni~tio~~~n~ the Tathagata has seen them with his Buddha-eye, the Tathagata has fully known them. All these beings, Subhuti, will be blest with an immeasurable heap of merit, they will be blest with a heap of merit unthinkable, incomparable, measuteless and ililmitable. All these beings, Subhuti, will carry along an equal share of enlightenment. And why? (4) Because it is not possible, Subhuti, that this discourse on Dharma could be heard by beings of inferior resolve, nor by such as have a self in view, a being, a soul, or a person. Nor can beings who have not taken the pledge of Bodhi-beings either hear this discourse on Dharma, or take it up, bear it in mind, recite or study It. That cannot be.

S.: So does any new idea emerge from this section?

&rr: (Unclear)... have to be a Bodhi-being to hear this discourse.

S.: No. That isn't what the Buddha says. The Buddha says  
you hear the discourse you are a Bodhi-being - at least I think that is the implication.

\_\_\_\_\_ The last sentence almost seem to be saying that if you haven't taken the Bodhisattva  
vow you won't hear the discourse.

S.: Yes. So if you do hear it, then it means you have infer

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that you must have taken the Bodhisattva Vow. So what is the idea implied here?

Presumably hearing this discourse on Dharma doesn't just mean hearing the words, you have to understand the meaning of it.

S.: But, as a more general sort of principle. It actually says "Because it is not possible, Subhuti, that this discourse could be heard by beings of inferior resolve. I mean if one takes it literally, well, if you haven't some sort of spiritual resolve, you don't even hear the discourse. It doesn't say actually anything about understanding it - it just actually does speak in terms of hearing it.

What seems to be the general principle underlying these lines? (Long Pause) What does in fact one find actually happening very often? (Long Pause) Well, the general principle that seems to be underlying all this, what in fact one does find happening is that, you are drawn to a teaching when you are ready for it. It is as though the teaching is moving toward you at the same time that you are moving towards the teaching. You may not know it. One often does find that you encounter a situation where you read a book just when you happen to need it and it seems an extraordinary coincidence sometimes, as though there was some sort of law at work, some sort of magnetic attraction on the spiritual plane. (Long Pause)

This verse, this section suggests that if you can come into contact with the 'Perfection of Wisdom' teaching, that means that you've got some affinity for it, otherwise you could not even have heard it, not even have listened to it or read it. (Long Pause)

What does it mean by "equal share of enlightenment"?

S.: "All these beings, Subhuti" that is to say, all those that the Buddha now presents before you because they have taken up this discourse, "all these beings, Subhuti, would carry along an equal

of enlightenment". Presumably they would all be equally advanced on the spiritual path, not that enlightenment would be literally divided among them, I imagine. The expression does seem rather odd, not to say clumsy, at least in English. They all partake equally in enlightenment, I suppose one could also say. (silence)

"Talking about a magnetic attraction on the spiritual plane between you and the teaching. - poetic image.

Sometimes I sort of feel as if it might be happening, but do you

have any more sort of models for what actually happens? Or how that

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works? What goes on?

QS~.

S.: Well, clearly it isn't a case of linear causality. It's as though there's a web of interrelationships, you know - I won't say transcending - but at least spanning both time and space. They constitute a sort of web, and you touch one part of the web and another corresponding part is affected. Do you see what I mean?

There is a response from another corresponding part.

\_\_\_\_\_ This equal share of enlightenment: why should they all carry along an equal share of enlightenment?

S.: You notice it says, "and why? Because it is not possible, Subhuti, that this discourse on Dharma could be heard by beings of inferior resolve", which seems rather inconsequential. It's as though these beings have all much the same spiritual status. They have all done the same things. They've all taken up the discourse, 'studied it', 'illuminated' it "in full detail for others."

They've all been seen by the Tathagata with his 'Buddha cognition', 'his Buddha-eye. The Tathagata fully knows them, they are all blessed "with an immeasurable heap of merit, measureless and illimitable" and it does seem that they are all much on the same spiritual plane, on the same level, that they carry along an equal share of enlightenment, they have a lot in common. It seems to me no more than that, though again, it is rather an odd way of putting the matter.

And the reason of course, which is given is no reason at all - not logically speaking. Perhaps it is an encouraging thought that if one has encountered this Perfectio+ Wisdom teaching ~well, one could not even have encountered it if there hadn't been at least some glimmerings of spiritual life in one, hm?, to take it no further than that. (Long Silence)

I can understand what you're saying about it being a principle, but does he not go a bit far when he says that those" who have not taken the pledge of Bodhi-beings cannot hear this discourse on Dharma ~ 7

S. :Hmm. He's going quite far. So if one has full faith in the Sutra one has to conclude that the mere fact that one is able to hear it in this life means that he must have taken the Bodhisattva Vow in a previous life and that on account of that ~O~'v~~~b,2~~pu~h~ in contact with this teaching again in this life. (Loud laughter)

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2p59' Otherwise, there's so many thousands, so many millions of people in

the world, hundred~of millions, so many CV£M Buddhist countries, people%in even Mahayana Buddhist countries; there ar~nly a few thousand copies of

+his Sutra in circulation in one form or another. How is it that you should come in contact with it, huh? What mysterious affinity have you for the Sutra that has brought you actually in contact with it?

and be reading it and be studying it, huh?, etc. etc.

But does noe not find that some people do take to things immed- iately? very readily? They plunge right in as though in their natural element like the proverbial duc~taking to the water. Doesn't one find that? Other people, you just have to work on them so much and

so hard before they show even a glimmering of interest, but to others, it's as though it's already~quite familiar to them. One can't help wondering why. One does start wondering - well, could they not have had some contact with this kind of thing, this kind of teaching, this kind of ideal in a previous life?. Maybe they are coming back, as it were, to something they have known before, taking up the threads again. Sometimes one is tempted to believe this, or rather I should say sometimes one is tempted not. (Pause)

Why should ~ertai~eople be reading and studying an extraordinary text like this,

wh'~h apparently doesn't make any sense at all. (Laughter) (Unclear) ... baffling and bewildering. I noticed when looking, I couldn't help looking at the beginning of the study at the front, and I see that it was first published in 1958, and the second edition was 1975 which means that there was an interval of seventeen years. So it means that, well, there wasn't a very brisk demand, they probably didn't print more than 2000 copies at the most 3000, so that they were only selling at the rate of about 100 a year. Perhaps it is not surprising, eh? But I noticed also that this, that though there was a second edition in 1975, there's been a second impression in 1980. I don't know if that's due to the influence of the FWBO, but there certainly are quite a few copies around in the Movement. Perhaps a few more Bodhisattvas have been reborn in the interval, clamouring for their copies of the... (Loud lau~hter)~::~

can remember my 0~~ experienc~ reading this Sutra k I was

16,L I immediately felt that this was it. )/can't say that I felt familiar with~it in a way. I can't say that I had the feeling that

well, I 'vestudied this before', but I certainly had the strong feeling that the content of the Sutra was quite familiar to me - ~owsoever one might explain ~hat. Th certainly didn't seem anything strange

or outlandish , even though as far as I can remem

ber the translation wasn't a very adequate one, from the Chinese anyway?

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~GO. So that means one does/a sort of affinity with this teaching or that. I mean, whether that affinity is to be explained in terms of previous contact with that particular material or whether it is simply that there is a certain level within oneself, irrespective of the whole birth and rebirth process, which has an affinity with the~xt itself. It can't be just a matter of psychology or temperament because teach- ings like~his go far beyond that.

Voice: Is there any specific reason why you read it at 16?

S.: I just wanted to read as m~y Buddhist texts as I could. I was always on the lookout for

works on Buddhism, translations of Buddhist texts. I happened to come across this, I seem to remember picking it up second-hand - it might have been in Foyle's which at that time was only a second-hand book shop, it was very likely there. And then I must have read Max Muller's(?) translation of the Sanskrit and also there a translation from the Chinese(?)~ Arnold Price who was a friend of mine in those days. (Long Pause)

So perhaps it is a sobering thought that the mere fact that one has come into contact with the Dharma at all, the mere fact that one has come into contact with teachings like those of the Perfection of Wisdom, means~ not perhaps that one has reached a high stage of spiritual development but at least one has a certain spiritual capacity that at least the ground has been prepared to some extent, that one has a certain spiritual potential, not just~a potential in an abstract sense but even a sort of spiritual preparedness and readiness that should not be wasted and should not be thrown away. I mean having come so far it's a pity that one shouldn't complete the journey. You've actually got as far as hearing the Diamond Sutra. That's a very long way actually. Perhaps one shouldn't dwell too much on the fact that one is a beginner and one has all kinds of weaknesses and imper-

fections and one backslides very often. Perhaps one

should reflect~you know, that well, one in a sense has not done too badly, at least as far as contacts are concerned at least as far as opportunities are concerned and facilities are concerned. So you can't be in such a bad way after all. Perhaps you have got some of merit lurking in the background somewhere. You might even be a fallen incarnate lama reborn in the West. (Laughter) You might even be a backsliding Bodhisattva or a Runaway Arahant! (Laughter) But one doesn't know, so why not take the more optimistic view? (Laughter) The present birth~maybe an episode in an otherwise quite distinguished spiritual - - -