

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

DISCLAIMER

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](#).

THE DIAMOND SUTRA SEMINAR

Held at: Tuscany, November 1982.

Present: Ven. Sangharakshita

Dharmacharies; Jinavamsa, Amog-vira, Chakupala,

Shantiprabha, Vessantara, Subhuti, Khemapala, Dhirananda, Khemavira, Gerry Corr.

S: Alright let's start at the beginning, let's go through the preface just quickly first, and then the introductory note, before going on to the text. (Jinavamsa) will you read through the whole of the first paragraph.

PREFACE

There was a time when wisdom was prized more highly than almost anything else, and it was no mean compliment when the Delphic oracle named Socrates as the wisest of all the Greeks. Nowadays most people will agree with Bertrand Russell 'that, although our age far ~ all previous ages in knowledge, there has been no correlative increase in wisdom'. At times it may even appear as though the rapid growth of scientific knowledge has been bought at the expense of much of the wisdom which our less well-instructed forefathers could draw upon. If literary documents are anything to go by, past ages had a better record than our own, and we have nothing to show that could rival the ancient wisdom literature of Greece and 'India.

S: Mmmm.. any comment on this? (long pause) In what sort of sense does Conze seem to be using the word wisdom and the expression 'wisdom literature... do you think it's clear? What about his general remarks about wisdom, is wisdom less prized than it was in former times? Has it in fact been swamped, not to say superseded

by knowledge, or in any case what is wisdom? Is he using it as a

sort of skillful means to draw the reader into his subject? Does

any generally accepted meaning attach itself to the expression

'wisdom literature'?

Shantiprabha: It seems to me -that wisdom is something which comes as a completely different line of thinking, of thought, it's not really based on anything which has gone before.

S: Mm .. mm .. well for instance, what is the wisdom literature -of Greece?

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Gerry: Trying to dig into the nature of mind

S: No, give examples of the wisdom.

Gerry: Oh sorry.

Subhuti: Presumably you must be talking about the philosophical literature for instance, plato.

Is he talking about Plato? S: k ~alking about P ato, Is he talking about Aristot le? They're not usually refered to as wisdom literature.

Subhuti: No. The statement that wisdom was prized more highly than almost anything else seems rather sweeping.

S: Mm .. It seems to me, to cut the discussion short, I don't want to spend too much time on the preface, that Conze ... er ... possibly as a sort of skillful means, is using the word wisdom in quite an ambiguous way. First of all there's the sense with wisdom as a sort of mature understanding of life, with wisdom literature in this sense is the literature emb o dving

proverbs and wise sayings, expressing both someone's quite mature, their quite deep mature experience of life as guidance to younger people and future generations. This is wisdom literature. Isn't this literature just sometimes called Gnostic literature? ... wise sayings. For instance among the Greeks there's the Elegies of Theognis which would be regarded as wisdom literature, some of them at least. On the other hand wisdom has the meaning of something transcendental, something with a definitely higher spiritual source. Wisdom literature in this sense is for instance represented in the Old Testament, especially in the Apocrypha by the wisdom of Solomon though there again this shades off into the wisdom in the other sense. For instance the Proverbs in the Bible, ecclesiastically these are referred to as

wisdom literature, but that sort of shades off into the wisdom of Solomon, which is wisdom in a higher sense... er ... but even these

sort of ... wisdom in this sense, wisdom literature in this sense, whether

or folklore, has got very little in common with the Indian wisdom literature if by wisdom literature one means the Perfection of Wisdom texts which are completely transcendental, do you see what I mean? So really Conze is using the term in a quite ambiguous sort of way, if he's using it to cover the wisdom literature of Greece, the

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wisdom literature of Israel, the wisdom literature of India... I mean

mean there is a wisdom literature in India apart from the more or less

Śūtra, as embodied in the Hindu (Grandśāstra) a well known collection of short stories and sayings. There's a lot of that sort of material written in Sanskrit. But it may be that Conze is doing this deliberately as a sort of skillful means to get people interested in this much more transcendental sort of wisdom. Do you see what I mean? Well if you take it literally it's almost nonsense.

Vāssana: What did the Greek mean by Sophian?

S: Well Sophian means wisdom - er - but it doesn't, well I don't think as far as I've read, that this comes into use until quite late. I don't think it's used in this sort of way in the 'classical' period. It's very much a Gnostic term. The Gnostics used it quite extensively.

V~ss~a: It originally meant skill, in a craft sense.

S: (Long pause) So no need to linger on that. Would someone like to read the next paragraph.

In fact, those who want to learn about wisdom, must of necessity draw on the tradition of the fairly remote past. For centuries almost everyone has been silent on the subject.- Philosophers, of whom some 'love of wisdom' might be expected, have increasingly turned to the critical examination of knowledge, and are largely engaged in active disparagement of all that once passed for 'wisdom'. Nor has the effect of scientific and technical progress been any more propitious. What, indeed,

could be more 'scientific' than the pursuit of wisdom-with its concern for the meaning of life, with its search for ends, purposes' and values worthy of being pursued, with its desire to penetrate beyond the appearance of things to their true reality? In a world occupied with the manipulation of sense-data the contemplation of suprasensory essences seems an almost - grotesque undertaking. Contemporary religious movements are equally unhelpful. Intent on extreme simplification. they take pride in discarding the intellectual content of religion. Whether we look to Billy Graham and Moral Rearmament, or, farther East, to Krishnamurti and the Shin-shu of Japan, the demands made on our intellect and comprehension are reduced to a minimum.

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S: Is this comprehensible ... if you want to learn of wisdom we have, of necessity to draw on the tradition of the fairly remote II

past. For centuries almost everyone has been silent on the subject.

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Can you think of any exceptions? Anyone who hasn't been silent on the subject.

Gerry: Possibly Nietzsche.

S: Mm possibly Nietzsche.

Gerry: I was thinking of 'Zarathustra'.

S: It's not quite wisdom in the sense that Conze seems to be using it. Maybe one could think of the French writers of maxims ... I mean Hopenh-vt's essays on the wisdom of life. Dr. Johnson's essays to do with wisdom and many of Emerson's 5 essays. They resemble wisdom in the sense in which Conze is using it. (Long pause) The philosophers have increasingly turned to the critical examination of knowledge, that is to say to epistemology, in what makes knowledge possible. A great deal of twentieth century philosophy is concerned with this question. They're very disparaging of 'wisdom', and science hasn't had a very good record either. And as for contemporary religious movements, they don't take intellectual questions ... don't take the intellectual content of religion very seriously. You could hardly call Billy Graham a religious thinker or 'wise man'! (laughter)

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S: It was founded by (Fr~~Buckam?) wasn't it. It was a very big, very well known movement. It seems to have completely collapsed. Quite a lot of people were involved in it. It was also called the 'Oxford Movement', 'The Oxford Group'. Nothing to do with the nineteenth century Oxford movement of course.

V ssantra: Was that twentieth century?

S: Oh yes. Dr Fro~Lwas an American and I think he had five moral absolutes. I forget what they were. Absolute truth, absolute purity

and so on. A bit like the Buddhist practice of Sila except they were absolute. And he believed in inner guidance. Mahatma Gandhi was quite into it I think because he believed that this led to inner-voice, and being guided by that ... and Krishnamurti ... well he isn't exactly an intellectual ... well in a sense he is, but not a

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wise man in the traditional sense. And the Shin , that is of course, an extreme form of ~tvoVo~~ Buddhism but I wouldn't altogether agree that there's no intellectual content. Though certainly in its popular form it doesn't~, but the demands made on our intellect comprehensionally are reduced to a minimum.

In this paragraph Conze seems to upgrade his definition of 'Wisdom' a little bit by implication, 'meaning of life'

.mm... 'Search for ends, purposes and values worthy of being pursued. With its desire to penetrate beyond the appearance of things to their true reality'. (Long pause) Alright, go on to the next paragraph.

By Contrast, two thousand years ago both the Mediterranean - and India went through a particularly creative period, which saw the Hebrews writing about Chochma, the Gnostics about Sophia, and the Buddhists about Prajā-paramita, or 'perfection of wisdom'. In spite of many differences caused by the social and cultural background, the wisdom tradition at that time achieved a fair degree of universality, and its Indian form was distinguished more by its uncompromising sublimity and other-worldliness, than by the peculiarity of its tenets. The works of Plotinus and Dionysius Areopagita, and even the *Academica* of Cicero, show that some of the specific teachings of the Prajā-paramita were once quite familiar to the West.

S: There's quite a few statements here that could be disputed. But I think we had better not get lost in historical discussion. But Conze seems to shift again t~eaning of wisdom a little bit. He says1 "two thousand years ago both the Mediterranean and India went through a particularly creative period1 which saw the Hebrews writing about Chochma" -especially the wisdom of Solomonr... which does roughly belong to this period. I think its usually dated about 200 BC- 'e Gnostics about Sophia -Conze does seem to believe, he's written about this in an article, that there is some sort of parallel between Gnosticism and the () of the Prajnaparamita. I really doubt ... I think this whole question of parallel between Sophia and Prajna has to be examined much more carefully. Sophia was for the Gnostic.. was as much a cosmological concept as a concept connected with wisdom in the strict

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sense. 'In spite of many differences caused by the social

and cultural background, the wisdom tradition at that time achieved a fair degree of universality'. I think that's quite disputable. A fair degree of universality1 in any case you've0~\ot the ~&~rr~ ~T~land anyway that doesn't seem very universal anyway. 'And its Indian form was distinguished more by its uncompromising sublimity and otherworldliness than by the peculiarity of its tenets The works of Proclus', Proclus was a late neo-platonic writer. 'and Dionysius Areopagita, he was an alleged1fr~ Christian writer influenced by neo-platonism, who left a number of works which are regarded as a sort of

of a certain trend of Western Mysticism; his book on mystical theology, divine names (indistinct) celestial ~~~~~'and so on. 'And even the *Academica* of Cicero' which leaves (2 words indis.) of scepticism as far as I remember, 'show that some of the specific teachings of the Prajnaparamita were once quite familiar'. I think this is all a bit of an exercise in skillful means, trying to tie in this strange Indian tradition with something a bit more familiar and nearer home. I won't say it can't be taken seriously, but the whole question needs much more critical examination. (Long pause) We can't give it that now. Anyway he hurries on to the Prajnaparamita literature itself where he's no doubt on firmer ground

The Prāna-paramita literature consists of thirty-eight different books, composed in India between 100 B.C. and A.D. 600. The judgement of thirty generations of Buddhists in China, Japan, Tibet and Mongolia has singled out two of these as the holiest of the holy—the Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra, both perhaps of about the fourth century of our era. The first is known in Sanskrit as the Vajracchedī Prajāpāramitā, the 'Perfection of Wisdom which cuts like a thunderbolt'. The second sets out to formulate the very 'heart', 'core' or 'essence' of perfect wisdom, and is as diligently studied in the Zen monasteries of Japan as in the lamaseries of Tibet. The authors of these works were well aware that language is ill-suited to expressing the insights of a wisdom which aims at no less than the total extinction of self. For, to quote Plotinus, 'how shall a man behold this ineffable Beauty which remains within, and proceeds not without where the profane may view it?' Never-

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- - - theless, the Sages of old have thought it worthwhile while to attempt the impossible, and some good will perhaps come from making their work available to the distracted world of today. Commentaries are not a particularly rewarding form of literature, being neither easy to write nor pleasant to read. But ready intelligibility does not go well with depth of thought, and these texts require a great deal of explanation, which I have supplied from the traditional Indian commentaries. All the terms have been explained, and most of the arguments. What I have left - unexplained, seemed to me either obvious or unintelligible.

S: That's fairly straightforward, isn't it? () except this point 'The judgement of thirty generations of Buddhists in China, Japan, Tibet and Mongolia has singled out these two'. That is to say the Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra as the holiest of the holy. I don't know so much whether to attribute this to judgement. I think their depth, their size was convenient for recitation, there was also that fact. I think if it was a question of judgement the 'perfection of Wisdom in 8000 lines' would be singled out. That is considered the text of the perfection of wisdom. It's certainly much richer than the other two. Plotinus, who he quotes, is of course i-L~~~\&o~~cA<t~ e~~0~~f~~~ I don't know to what extent the Vajracchedika is studied now in the Zen monasteries of Japan, to some extent perhaps, as for the lamaseries of Tibet, well, they're studying Marx (?) it would seem. So that leaves us (4 or 5 words indis.)

Vessantara: Some parts ... short extracts from the Diamond Sutra (3 or 4 words indis.) things like the bouquet of records or some parts of the Diamond Sutra are used say in the () and can be studied in that way.

S: Yes, yes (3 or 4 words indis.) and of course the koans and so on. (Long pause) So lets carry on.

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The greater part of this book has first appeared in the pages of the Mtwe Way, the journal of the London Buddhist -Society. I am grateful to Mrs M. H. Robins, the editor, for first - - having printed these articles, and now allowing me to reprint -them. The work on these translations and commentaries has occupied me for more than twenty years, and in the course of - - this time I have had many useful suggestions from friends and -fellow-workers. I particularly want - to acknowledge ti~e help qf Professor F. W. Thomas, Dr E. J. Thomas, Professor T. Burrow, Professor G. Tucci, Miss I. B. Homer, Mr Christmas Hwnphreys, Dr Eichhorn, Dr F. G. Brook and Mr T. Perkins. I also thank Miss Pat Wilkinson for the skill and devotion with which she has drawn the mantra on the eight-petalled lotus on page 103, which is based on a ninth~entury model from Genral Asia.

S: Msn. I remember reading (S or 6 words indis.) this book rather, when it did appear in the Middle Way in the forties. This was quite a long time ago now. It's not easy to read, a bit closely printed, problems () in these days.

Subhuti: Was his the first translation into English?

S: Oh no, by no means, there was Max Mullers, there was Gen~w'e11~ (?~. There were several, there were quite a number of translations. Max Muller's was from the Sanskrit. Alright, let's go straight into the last paragraph.

For the Heart S"tra I have given The original Sanskrit text, as it emerges from a comparative study of the extant manuscripts, - twenty~ne in number.

-S: I think these have all survived in or mostly survived in Japan. The first ones were discovered in Japan in the Japanese temples. I doubt if any survived in India at all. If any others survived they probably survived in Tibet, in Central Tibet. Translated in central Asia but the first were definitely discovered in temples in Japan.

- Con~era ti~ons of exp~ense ha~e~ deterred us from doing the same for the Diamond Sutra, and I must refer the reader to my Rome edition which gives all the alternative readings. The English translation of the actual text of the Sutras is ~printed in bold

type. My own explanations use ordinary print, but the terms of the Sutras are repeated in -
bold type wherever they are being explained. Generally - speaking it would be
difficult to find anything as remote from the interests of the present day as the contents of this
book. This in itself may recommend it to some of those for whom it is intended.

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S: Dr Conze strikes this odd sort of note, what could you call it? Not exactly cynicism.

_____ : Slightly aggressive, isn't it?

S: Its sardonic. Its almost as though he's, well, very much on the defensive. I think this comes from some co~L~ (L#&u~\c#e~VLL

but we won't go into that. (Laughter). He was very conscious of his personal shortcomings as a Buddhist. Particular ly in certain directions. Anyway, (laughter). go through the introductory note.

Introdnc~ory No~~

The frans~nt~ of this Sutra is made from the Sanskrit text, and based on my Rome edition of the Vafra~odik£.1 The trans- lation here difers from the one printed there (r) in that it does not try to reproduce the -jarities of the Sanskrit syitar, - - and - a slightly more idiomatic English; and (~) that it -its the additions which various scrihes have after A. D. 500 now-id then ineerted into the text.

S: I take it everybody knows what is meant by syntax. Can someone give a definition... It's the order of the words in the sentence, because in some languages the adjective comes after the noun and in other languages the adjective precedes the noun and Conze says his translation doesn't try to reproduce th~peculiarities of the Sanskrit syntax, that is to say, with the special order of words in Sanskrit which often differs considerably (3 words indis.). He uses a slightly more idiomatic English and omits the additions which various scribes after AD 500 now and then inserted, because copying out the text some people may feel, well that bit's not quite clear or not quite comp'lete, so they just add on something, so one can tell (10 or so words indistinct). So he's dropped those later additions. But not many.

Subhuti: Are there any other translations of the Diamond Sutra which you think are useful?

S: Well this - translation for serious study. I think

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it's best to stick to translations from the-Sanskrit. There are several translations f~or~ the Chinese, but by the time you've gone from Sanskrit to Chinese, it's such a totally different language, and then from Chinese to English, again a totally different language, well a great deal of the meaning can be lost on the way. So I think you're much better off studying a translation direct from the Sanskrit, and Conze, I think, is quite literal especially if one reads his ~V~L translation. Alright let's go straight on.

Indian tradition -assumes that without a ~rn mc~~~~£~~~~a hoivy book is incomplete. In the case of the Diamond Sntra it is quite obvious that a bare translation cannot possibly convey its full meaning. To the casual reader it must present the disconcerting appearance of a jumble of disjointed pieces, and at first sight the transition from one chapter to the next is not at all obvious. An occasional aph6rism here and there may strike his intellect with the force of a thunderbolt, and further meditation may very well fan the initial spark into quite a sizeable flarne. But the meaning of the Sutra as a whole is bound to elude him, for it contains within itself only few and inconclusive clues to its logical sequence. Unless he has outside sources of information at his disposal, he will remain mystified, and soon turn to some- - thing else.

S: This whole question of the relation of commentary to text, as Conze points out; 'Indian tradition assumes that without a commentary a holy book is incomplete'. That's putting it rather strongly, but it is true, both in the Hindu tradition and }

in the (word unclear) tradition. Because a holy text or a Sutra

is obviously very deep in meaning, and the one might say that the commentary embodies the result of the reflections of generations of teachers and disciples on the text. Sometimes it happens of - course that the originator of a text, not in this case~Sutra so much, ~S a , the originat~~ of a text explains it to a disciple and then that disciple embodies those explanations in a commentary on the text. And there may be further reflections on his own commentary \b a disciple of his,~~4ff1sct~~~~b~~~~c~ In that way a whole commentarial tradition~go deeper and deeper into the meaning of the text. The danger is of course that - commentaries may, in some cases, become increasingly scholastic and just be preoccupied with the fine points of detail and lose sight of the meaning of the whole , and not really in the end get very deep.

What's the difference between a S'astra and a commentary?

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S.: A S astra is a work composed by a great Buddhist teacher as distinct from a Sutra. A Sutra is a discourse delivered by the Buddha. A s'astra is a sort of philosophical work, a work of exposition composed by a great Indian Buddhist philosopher. A s astra may be a quite independent

with some aspect of Buddhist teaching or digesting Buddhist teachings.

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For instance the Madhyamika- Karicas of Nagarjuna are a s astra, but

they could be regarded as being a commentary also, in the sense that they are firmly based on the perfection of wisdom literature. They don't comment on that literature line by line, but they clearly are based on it and derive from it. In the Tibetan Canon the Kanjur is a translation of the Sutras and the Tanjur is a translation of

the s astras. (long silence)

Alright, lets go straight on...

For the last 20 years the Diamond Sutra could be in European translations, and during all that time we have been without the means which would have enabled us to solve its riddles. All of a sudden the situation has changed, and we now approach the task of interpreting this Sutra with greater confidence than before. No longer need we rely on mere guess-work, or the fading and unsubstantiated memories of what we may have learned in former lives. The admirable enterprise and scholarship of Professor Tucci has now placed three authoritative Indian commentaries into our hands. Their authors Asanga, Vibandhu, and Kamalasila are reckoned among the best minds of Mahayana Buddhism. Their commentaries occupy the first 170 pages of the Minor Buddhist Texts, Part 1, which Professor Tucci has brought out in honour of the Buddha Jayanti.

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In addition, various sources of information have become available during the last thirty years. Some sections of the Diamond Sutra reproduce passages or ideas from the large Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, and for these we have the comments of Nagarjuna and Haribhadra. And a correct understanding of the technical terms can now be obtained either from the large Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras themselves, or from Madhyamika authors, like Candrakīrti and others.

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S: So we're just in a better position (3 or 4 words unclear)...1~' commentaries have been made available each drawing on these (2 or 3 words unclear) ... so in the translation. So anyway this needs a bit of revision. The Diamond Sutra could be read in European translation after 150 years. This is quite a thought that the Diamond Sutra has been known in the West for 150 years. So about -1830, say from the death of Blake or the death of Goethe, theDiamond Sutra has been known as long as that (9 or 10 words unclear)~SV~ML~Vt~%A&~V

Subhuti: ~ vv~%V ~o-v~ \oL~ ~~~completely incomprehensible, originally.

S.: There was this c~us<,fi~n about &harmas ana whatever senSe 'n which dharmas is used~this is not understood~ and that could add to the confusion. Not to speak of other confusions.

_____ Where did the first translations of the Diamond Sutra
come from? Where they from India?

S.: My su-spicion is~they were from the Chinese ~tv~\-'s is from the Chinese that's
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I've a feeling t~ Burn~translated the Diamond Sutra. I wouldn't be sure 0 ~that. I've also heard of a very early Russian translation and that might be the earliest, that must have been done from the Tibetan.

Amoghavajra: Which was the translation that you read?

S.: I read two. One was @L~M~\t~ ana the other was Max Muller's.

~vt~ at that there were others, I think... Lets

go on...

Eschewin~ all originality, my comments have aimed at carrying on the tradition of Buddhist exegesis which goes back to the great Buddhist universities in Northern India at the time of the Pala dynasty (A.D. 750-1150), and which hu been kept alive in Tibet for the last seven centuries. All that I myself have contributed is the English translation of the Sutra itself, as well as the patience to collect the relevant information from my predecessors, and to adapt it to the lananage and thought of today.

~o&cs~, S.: ftr~V~ 's~'\t~ ~ \ k anyway carry on...

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It~cann ot~~be~ th~~e purpDse of a commentary to convey directly to the reader the spiritual experiences which a Sutra describes. These only reveal themselves to persistent meditation. A commentary must be content to explain the words used. As such it has some preliminary usefulness, since without having under- stood even the words one could not easily know what to meditate about. Where we have to deal with highly condensed and extremely profound Buddhist texts, the meaning of the words can be investigated from four angles. For it is in four particulars that they differ from .what we are wont to read in the Dai4' Mail. They are: (i) Buddins~? t&h'nical te?n~, (2 in Sanskrit, (3) used by sages. (4) for the puspouse of spiritual

emancipation.

S.: Alright lets go into this then, read straight on...

i. As Buddhist technical terms their meaning is very largely determined by a tradition which has carefully defined its key terms in their mutual relationship. It has been the most important part of my task to work out the traditional significance of the terms used. When we have learned that, the Sutras become as familiar to us as her web to a spider, who knows all the connections, and runs up and down the threads with ease. Whether in addition we will also manage to catch some flies, is of course quite a different matter.

S.: Mmmm, Buddhist technical terms.

1,As Buddhist technical terms their meaning is very largely determined by a tradition which has carefully defined its key terms in their mutual relationship. " perhaps it's important to remember that that happened only gradually. Some terms became clearly defined only in the course of hundreds of years. If we go back to the Sutras themselves, if we go back, for instance, to the Pali suttas, we'll find quite a lot of terms being used in a non-technical manner. It is only gradually that they assumed the more technical sense, is determined.

So if we don't read this carefully we might get the impression that from the very

beginning the Buddha himself very carefully defined his terms before using them. That is not quite the case.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

S.: The definition and redefinition of terms is a process that is

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S. Cont~: going on all the time, but anyway it is Very important for to realize that the words used in these text are Buddhist technical

terms and you really have to understand what they mean in their different contexts. The dictionary won't help you very much, They are mentioned in the opening chapters of the 'Survey' where

(~udd~adasa) needs to know the meaning of terms like 'dharma' and 'samadhi', in the original. No one single English translation, no one single English word will help you very much, 'You get 'dharma' usually translate as 'Law' with a capital L but then one will read into 'Law' and therefore 'dharma' all the implications that the word 'Law' has in English, which is of course beside the point. Alright over to two...

2. Secondly. Sutras are ~~~teii~in Sanskm't, a high~hi~y~rational language, capable of great precision, and amenable to thorough grammatical analysis. Not all languages are equally suited to the adequate expression of abstract ideas. Little of these Sutras would, I

fear, survive their translation into cockney or the patois of U~ge. Literary English benefits to some extent from the influence of Latin-like Sanskrit a largely artificial - language. It is nevertheless occasionally very useful to also consult the Sanskrit original~ The meaning of Sanskrit words depends very largely on their verbal roots. When words with the same root are translated into English, the similarity of their derivation is sometimes unavoidably obscured, and the unity of the original argument destroyed.1

S.: So~utras are written in Sanskrit, a highly rational & capable "

of great precision, and amenable to thorough grammatical analysis.

He's referring of course to Palinean Sanskrit. It doesn't apply so much to Buddhist Sanskrit or, in other words it is not so much that Sanskrit is a highly rational language, but that a highly rational structure has been imposed upon it, you could almost say that. Se's referring to, you or may not know that there's a great difference between Vedick, the Sanskrit in which the Vedas were written and classical Sanskrit, the Sanskrit for which Paline, the great grammarian, laid down the rules or which he formed & -, regularised. But none- the less it's true that Sanskrit texts, & Buddhist Sanskrit texts to a lesser degree, are capable of great precision and amenable to thorough grammatical analysis. i~ you can get at the meaning via the grammar quite precisely~ which you can't always do with English. English sometimes eludes thorough grammatical analysis, I don't know whether that's worth going into. He makes the point that English has benefited from the introduction of Latin, from the influence

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S(ctd): of Latin. That is a inoot point that could be discussed, because the English grammar is modelled upon the Latin, so that sort of foreign structure has been almost imposed on the English language you could say.

Do you see what I mean ? But anyway, the fact that Sanskrit is amenable1 that classical Sanskrit is amenable to thorough-going grammatical

analysis) you can get at the mean'~that is the rational meaning much more thoroughly, be much more sure of it, than you can in the case of a language not amenable to that sort of analysis. Whether or not something else escapes you in the process, that is of course quite a good question.

_____ : You said Buddhist sanskrit differs from Palinean S~nskrit.

S: Yes.

_____ To what extent ?

S: It used to be thought that it was just bad Sanskrit, Sanskrit spoken by badly educated people, people who didn't know their Sanskrit and their Sanskrit grammar. I think it is now recognised that Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit as it is often called is just nearer to prokrit, than is Sanskrit. Prokrit being more as it were the language of the people, Prokrit meaning natural, Sanskrit meaning cultivated or polished. So it is not that Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit is bad Sanskrit ie. bad Cl~ssical Sanskrit, bad Palinean Sanskrit, it is just another kind of Sanskrit - you see what.~~it is richer. Its grammatical forms are more varied. It doesn't conform to the rules, that is to say the rules of Palinean grammar, so closely. It's a bit closer even to Vedic Sanskrit. So formerly Brahminical scholars, who used to dis~~rage Buddhist Sanskrit works, ah this is written by the uneducated Buddhist who didn't receive proper Sanskrit education. (pause) It is almost1 for instance 1someone like Addison disparaging Shakespeare for not writing proper English (laughter) do you see what I mean ?'(hat is a rather exaggerated example, but it is +it like that. It is true~ Shakespeare's English isn't as

neat and polished as Addisons, but ~\Aere is a great deal in Shakespeare k

that is missing in Addison. I mean Sh~speare uses double negative forms

which are now regarded as ungrammatical. They were not regarded as ungrammatical in his day. In a sense they are ungrammatical, but the meaning is perfectly clear. (pause) Not all languages are equally suitt~ to~adequate expression abstract ideas.1 That is ~it debat~~~ that one. The stateinent is true, but whe ther the Sutras, the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras are, concerned with abstract ideas in quite the way Conze seem~ to think, that is quite another question. That may emerge as we go through the text.

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S(ctd): 'Little of these Sutras would, I fear; survive their translation in into Cockney or ~atois of Lie'ge'. That is true enough, no doubt. Literary English benefits to some extent ~~~~the influence of Latin--like Sanskrit a largely artificial language'. hm, room for debate, but never mind. It is nevertheless occasionally very useful to also consult the Sanskrit original. The meaning of Sanskrit words depends very largely on their verbal roots, their roots in sort of primitive verbs. When words with the same root are translated into English, the similarity of their derivation is sometimes unavoidably obscured, and the unity of the original argument destroyed. Very often the sort of argument, the sort of play upon words, a play upon similar meanings. For example, if you translate ('nyama') as knowledge and prajna as wisdom you conceal the fact that they are both derived from the root 'Nya1,. In English knowledge and wisdom have no such etymological connection. But anyway, for instance

If you translate that into a supporter or bearer of or practitioner of the Dharma, you conceal the fact that the Dharma here is from the same root as the Dharma itself, both from the root meaning "to bear". All right lets go on then.

3. ~ ere thi~~ni~in~g~?ea ch~es~~ a certai~n~~~level of pr~fundi~ty, we must go beyond even the traditional and the direct etymological to the ancestr~ meaning. This is attached to the Ind~European root, and comparative linguistics provides the clue to its ramifications. It may reveal many of the overtones of such words as ~nyata (see B 1301). Similarly, the full weight of a word like mantra is felt when kindred words derived from the root MN0 (i.e. ma, man or men) are considered. These point to an element of eager desire, of yearning and intensity of purpose, of wooing and courting (Greek mnaomai and Old High German *ninna), and to an excitement of mind which is far from cool rationality (ma~ia =

lunacy, and nL'Linontai, to rave). The man4is, or 'sooth-sayer', is also concerned with the more persistent and abiding trends of the mind (meno, ,naneo, m~m~, and so on). Wisdom will use terms always in such a way that the original meaning is revealed. And men were wise long before they became clever. This linguistic correlate of Jung's collective unconscious is surely worthy of greater attention than it usually receives. One of our greatest experts on linguistics, I. A. Riccaards, has in his Meaning of Meaning spoken of the wealth of meaning inherent in many words. 'No one who uses a dictionary-for other than orthographic reasons~~an have escaped the shock of discovering how very far ahead of us our words often are. How subtly they already record distinctions towards which our minds are still groping. If we could read this reflection of our minds aright, we might learn nearly as much about ourselves as we shall ever wish to know.'

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S: This is quite interesting, but there are quite a ~umber of assumptions here. Do you notice this ? Do you really know a word, or understand the meaning of a word as actually used more truly, by going back to its Indo-European roots ? Do you see what I mean ? For instnnc~ let us suppose for the sake of argument the Buddha uses the word mantra. W~ll do you necessarily understand what the Buddha meant by mantra more deeply by going back to the original Indo-European root of the term mantra ? it would suggest that the Buddha i~ using that word was aware of the Indo-European root and its meaning.

iS cyjs\~t~i~oi~ou~of parallel here, a sort of linguistic

parallel here with Jung's collective unconscious. But he is in a way on quite controversial ground, though that is not to say he is wrong, but perhaps he doesn't fully realise himself what he is actually saying. Perhaps he is unconsciously influenced by the Indian not to say Hindu view which is not necessarily the Buddhist view of the origins of language. ~or instance, English scholars in the Vedas speculated allot about this. Very very roughly speaking, these roots from which basic words were derived or clusters of words were derived, these verbal roots are supposed to represent some sort of pri~ °mitive, even primaeval intuition of the nature of existence which then becomes reflected in words. So this is based on a different sort of view of the origins of language, a different sort of view of the origins of Man. Conze says men were wise before they became clever. Well that is in line with that sort of idea. It is almost as though words originally had, words as used, originally had a very deep, very profound meaning which mankind gradually lost1 and wise men like the Buddha, it would seem to be suggested, used words in their original primaeval meaning. But I don't think one

can accept that without more thorough examination. It may well be so, but I think it needs much more careful looking into. Do you see the point ? What he says about words being ahead of us, so to speak, is not just that words themselves are ahead of us~ but other people have abused the meaning of those words and it is very often to look things up in the dictionary because we are very slack and lazy in our use of words. But I think he errs a little bit on the sort of rational side in a way.

_____ Sorry, what....?

S: Well earlier on he points out that Sanskrit being a highly rational language and the Sutras are written in this highly rational language, seems to because this language is so~c~\N\~u~t~orough~going gramm- atical analysis we can get nearer to the meaning. Well that is true up to a point,~u~'~ does suggest the meaning itself is rational,

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S(ctd): is amenable to the rational approach. One does find in Conze a great deal of surface clarity but a certain amount of confusion and ambiguity underneath that surface. Do you see what I mean ?

The first paragraph, the first sentence of this paragraph," where thinking reaches a certain level of profundity we must go beyond even the traditional and the direct etymological to the ancestral meaning". You see? " This is attached to the Indo-European root" This is very1 this is very ~interesting, but very questionable. ~id you notice this before reading this preface ? Have you thought about these things ?

Subhuti:He seems to have a tremendous almost yearning for the past, it comes out quite strongly again and again and again.

S: Perhaps he does go back all those years in time, as he would have been if he belonged to It would certainly have been very Mrs. Conze (laughter) I think we can agree that the occasional

reference to the Sanskrit t~x-t, to the Sanskrit word is very h.

evenkthe verbal root from which that word is derived. W~ need not nec

essarily subscribe to his theories about, " when thinking reaches a certain level of profundity we must go back to the ancestral meaning ". It would be very difficult perhaps to reconstruct that in any case, even though we know that many words are originally mentioned in different languages that are etymologically connected and that is interesting. Whether it is any thing more than interesting is entirely another question Otherwise we end up in a sort of wandering around in a sort of form of linguistic theosophy.

Subhuti: There actually seem to be quite strongly theosophical overtones to his writing. In that passage about universality and wisdom, that seems to be applied and that seems to come out here again.

S: Yes, yes, °but the theosophy usually (we usually go to wisdom literature or wisdom religion. I don't know the influence of Christmas Humphreys, who is still a staunch theosophist. Well these are all sorts of questions that we could go into at a suitable length. I think we had better resist the temptation now, it is something we can perhaps take up at some other time. It is just stopping us getting into the text itself with which we are mainly concerned. All right onto the last paragraph.

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And finally there is, of course (4) the spiritual meaning, which discloses itself not to erudition but to meditation. From a document like the Nicene Creed these Sutras, and particularly the Hridaya, differ in that every word refers to actual practices, and is actually verifiable by anyone who takes the trouble to do so. Spiritual discernment cannot, however, be conveyed by written instructions. It presupposes certain qualities of character, a certain direction of the will, and certain habits of behaviour. Where those are present, the intellectual information will come to life, and flare up into a blaze of light. Where they are not, boredom will result, and everything will appear too difficult. The reader will soon know which category he belongs to.

S: " the spiritual meaning, which discloses itself not to erudition but to meditation." That is true. In a document like the Nicene Creed these Sutras, and particularly the Hridaya, differ in that every word refers to actual practices. That is a bit of an exaggeration, but does Osho know the Nicene Creed ? Well it doesn't refer to anything that can be verified because it refers to dogmas, which are based on myths taken as historic facts.

Subhuti: The first words are " I believe..."

S: Yes. " Spiritual discernment cannot however be conveyed by written instructions" That

is rather sweeping. It does certainly presuppose "certain qualities of character, a certain direction of the will, and certain habits of behaviour". In other words our whole life must be aligned to what one is hoping for, what one is doing. " where those are present, the intellectual information will come to life and flare up, into a blaze of light ~ here they are not, boredom will result, and everything will appear too difficult. The reader will soon know which category he belongs to" (laughter) Sometimes he appears ~ it sardonic, tongue in

cheek doesn't he ? All through his writing this slightly unpleasant streak ~ S of the sardonic, & almost sort what shall I say, working against himself,

an undercurrent of almost bitterness. I think that is a cover up for his own frustration. I think in a way he's a frustrated man. Anyway any general points arising out of what we have done so far, which is basically a sort of tuning into the sutra and clearing the ground a bit. I take it everyone has actually read the volume before him. Anyone not read it ?

Voices: I haven't read it. (long pause)

S: Hm, (pause) Anyway we'll be able to go through it fairly thoroughly. We need to go through it at the rate of ten pages a day. We've gone through twenty so far, but they include a list of contents and so on

No doubt quite a bit of the material will require quite a bit of discussion ho

I think what we had better do is a stop and have our tea now, so that after

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S(ctd): we can go into the sutra and carry on without interruption right through until lunch time. Subhuti is going to be figuring very prominenti

(laughter)

I think what we'll do, we'll read through the text which is in the boldest type and Conze' S c0n~~ntS~ and then discuss the as a whole. In other words we'll read~after the introductory lines, the whole of Ia. and discuss that as a whole. Would some0n9 like to read ?

Homage to the Perfection of Wisdom, the Lovely, the Holy!

Prajna-paramita texts normally begin with an invocation to the Perfection of Wisdom, and a few words of explanation can be found on page 77. Then follows, as usually, a description of the - scene of the sermon:

~& 'S~rV~~A - S: He uses this unfortunate word 'sermon\.(- to go back to the

original meaning-isn't at all a bad meaning. It just means, meant to be a sort ofy'discourse or a passge of the scripture;but anyway we won't go into that now.

I. INTRODUCTION

ia. The Convocation of the Assemb(y

I. Thus have I heard at one time. The Lord dwelt at SravasCi, in the Jeta Grove, in the garden of Anitha- pindika, together with a large gathering of monks, con- sisting of 1,250

monks, and with many Bodhisattvas, great beings. Early in the morning the Lord dressed, put on his cloak, took his bowl, and entered the great city of Sravastī to collect alms. When he had eaten and returned from his round, the Lord put away his bowl and cloak, washed his feet, and sat down on the seat arranged for him, crossing his legs, holding his body upright, and mindfully fixing his attention in front of him. Then many monks approached to where the Lord was, saluted his feet with their heads, thrice walked round him to the right, and sat down on one side.

Thus have I heard at one time. This is the traditional opening of a Buddhist Sutra. The ~I~ who has 'heard' the Sutra, is understood to be Ananda, who, at a Council held soon after the Buddha's demise, recited all the texts he had heard in the course of his long attendance on the Buddha. In our case these words have more the character of a literary fiction, since the