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the great Bodhisattvas with the greatest teaching and the lesser people

with just a smaller so that when we're dealing with, say, Mitras or just regulars at classes, that we do n't sort of overwhelm them with some great weight of experience.

S.: Right. Yes, yes. Sometimes it can be a bit too much, mind you

don't scare them off or scare them away~~Th~~~::~~ to develop a degree S:

of receptivity to where they're at --degree of awareness of where they

are actually at. I mean I have heard from mitras that sometimes Order members leading beginners' meditation classes, say too much. They try to explain too much. They tell too many things, but that tends to confuse the new person. On some occasions apparently, they start talking about their own experiences on retreat and things like that. I mean with the good intention of sort of encouraging and inspiring, but it doesn't always work like that. The actual beginner needs a few very simple, plain, straight-forward instructions just about how to get into the meditation, and how to concentrate.

Voice: Do you think then that initial beginners' classes should simply r

be instruction into basic meditation and perhaps discussion about any

problems that people have actually had in their practice as opposed to combining say, instruction in meditation on with basic Buddhism courses?

S.: Well, I think you must be quite clear about what you're setting out to do. If you're actually taking simply a meditation class to which people have come along as a meditation class because they want to learn to meditate that is what you should stick to. If it is a meditation and Dharma course, all right, this is what people have come along for, - this is what you give them. But you must be clear in your own mind, in any case even when it is a

Dharma course, not give them, not feed them so much material because you enjoy talking about these things, that they become confused. Perhaps it is not easy to remember what it's like to have been a beginner or to put oneself in the person's position when everything is very new, very unfamiliar, very strange. So if they've just come along to learn meditation, well it's enough at first~ust to teach them the Mindfulness of breathing and take them through it very slowly, carefully and steadily, but not to start talking about all the different kinds of Buddhist meditation - these wonderful Tantric pract- ices (chuckels). Well that would just confuse them, make them feel, well this field of Buddhism is so vast that they haven't got a hope of being able to cover it. They might just as well give up. And don't forget

that people are very literal-minded. You might say to be encouraging:

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"Well even if you don't get much experience from the meditation, well, it could sort of come unexpectedly, might even happen when you're in the office". Then they might think, "Well suppose it happens in the office. Suppose I go into a trance when I'm in the office. What will I do? What will people think?" (Chuckles) Do you see what I mean?. people do take what you say quite literally sometimes. So be/~~~~~~l what you say. Too much can be just as harmful as too little. (Long Pause) Any further point?

S'a~~'iYt '~ I'm not quite clear why "stand'.~~progress.~control) ?~rk~~~lstand

S.: Well, yes. Conze explains, 'stands' as abiding: refers to the II

determination to reach enlightenment. Presumably that is remaining con

stant, remaining faithful to the original objective, the original goal. Being firmly established, though that, nonetheless, does seem to over- lap with "progress l~ to ~~:L steady growth in concentrationa'v'~wisdom because if he was steadily growing in concentration and wisdom, pre

sumably he establish~~~~be standing. Maybe would~at the same time

it's how should he establish himself? How should he become firmly established in his basic aspirations ~ where progress seems to refer more to specific practices, concentration and wisdom are mentioned. (Long pause) a. I I U And there is, of course, Subhuti says: So beflit, O Lord, and 'listened". That's quite important too. (Long Pause) I suppose people are familiar with this idea of Buddha-field or Buddha (chatha What about

you? What do you understand by Buddha-field? What is a Buddha- field?

Jinavamsa: Is it a sphere of influence?

S.: It is a sphere of influence. (Long Pause)

Shantiprabha: Traditionally could you only have one Buddha per world system? Could you have more than one Buddha?

S.: At a time. Yes. According to Theravada , according to the Hina- yana tradition generally, I think, this particular Kalpa is called the (Bhadra) Kalpa because ~ different times and different ages T'0

five Buddhas will appear. They will only appear though when the teaching of their predecessor has altogether disappeared. According to the Mahayana, though there are 1000 Buddhas in this (Bhadra) Kalpa, this auspicious era, but appearing at different times.

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Voice: is that the next Buddha will appear and 43.

teachJ~e~ %&previous one has &LS~~~&. ~ut isn't it also said that Maitreya shall appear when Buddhism is once spread over the whole world?

S.: No, this is not said in any Buddhist text. But the theosophists and others have taken up this idea of Maitreya and sort of developed and interpreted it in their own way. For instance, Mrs. Bessant and the Theosophists announced Krishnamurti as Maitreya. There have been many Maitreyas in fact or people claiming to Maitreya - and she announced herself and (Leadbeater and Allan Dell) and various other people as their 12 Arahant disciples. Oh yes, there was an extraordinary fiasco almost, one might say. She really went a bit mad (Chuckles). That's when a lot of people left the Theosophical Society, including those people, those friends of mine, I mentioned the other evening. They started (united themselves) societies which would have nothing to do with all those developments. And you know, they were rather unhappy with the increasing influence of Hinduism and Christianity within the Theosophical Society. I mean their belief was that Theosophy in its origins was much closer to Buddhism, or that Madame Blavatsky had been much closer to Buddhism. Well, she did in fact take the Refuges and Precepts, that is undeniable. Took them publicly. She and Colonel Allcot would seem to have been the first Europeans publicly to take the Refuges and Precepts which they did in Ceylon. Whereas Mrs. Bessant first under the influence of Leadbeater then under the influence of someone called (Shaktyavati) had introduced more and more Hinduism and more of Christianity, more and more Hinduism into the Theosophical Society - into the Theosophical Movement. (Leadbeater) developed a more esoteric

Christianity - Catholic Church - etc. But

quite a few Theosophists weren't happy with it. But yes, Krishnamurti was the one those recognized as, if not claiming to be - Maitreya Buddha. But the Buddhist tradition is that he will come only when the teaching of Gautama the Buddha or traces of that teaching have altogether disappeared.

Not that he will come on the crest of a great wave of Buddhist

revival. But a Buddha in that sense, by very definition appears when there is no Buddhism - because by definition he is one who rediscovers the Path at a time when all knowledge of it has been lost. That is what I call his sort of cosmic function or his historical function. You can be enlightened without being a Buddha in the sense that you can be enlightened, spiritually enlightened but without performing that particular cosmic or historical function.

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Shantiprabha: Is it actually possible to have a pure Buddha-field or am I just taking the terms too literally and if so, how does it, how can a pure Buddha-field actually become impure?

S.: I don't remember it ever being said anywhere that a pure Buddha-field becomes impure, though of course, there are instances apparently of impure Buddha-fields becoming pure. But Buddha-fields become pure by

~aspiration, it would seem, of the Buddha who presides over them as in the case of Amitabha ~v' Sukhavati. Q~~ ~as this sort of belief-

which is strange from a modern point of view as someone being able very A

by force of sheer creative imagination, actually to sort of call a whole world or rather a whole universe into existence which other beings can actually perceive and experience, can be reborn into . It's a quite staggering sort of conception if you take it literally. Not so difficult if one sort of takes it metaphorically. For instance if you read the works of Dickens, you enter into his world. You read the Sutras of Buddhism, you enter into the world of the Buddha. But the Mahayana Sutras don't mean the idea of a Pure Land, a pure Buddha-field to be taken in this sense. They believe that it exists as concretely and literally as this Earth itself exists, as this human world itself exists. How justified that is is something that we can't go into now. It certainly represents a sort of ideal realm and no doubt we ought to try to make our present impure Buddha-field as pure as we can - hence the new society~ it ties up very much with that. (Long Pause) So, any other point on what we have done today?

Shantiprabha: Is Subhuti an Arahant in this Sutra?

S.: Presumably.

Subhuti: Definitely, indeed!

S.: Is it stated later? (Subhuti: Oh, yes, yea (Laughter) Oh well, then there's no doubt about it!

~ala: Just one point, taking~p the point you were saying earlier about the difference between an enlightened being~and a Buddha having a cosmic universal significance. Is that to say that in periods leading immediately before the emergence of the Buddha there aren't enlightened people as such because that would indicate that (Dharma) the teaching was still in existence in as much as it was embodied in enlightened beings, or is it that because of their incapacity or unwillingness to teach - to open the way-that it is to all intents and purposes

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practically dead? ws.

S.: Tradition doesn't seem to exclude the possibility of PratyekaBuddhas existing in these sort of intermediate periods, but certainly there is v'o trace left of the Dharma of the previous Buddha. That is to say, there is no-one ~nlightened as a result of following his teaching. Also even the knowledge of the doctrine on ~~ intellectual level has disappeared~ and even the relics of the Buddha have disappeared. That would seem not to preclude the possibility of there being around Pratyekabuddhas who had attained Enlightenment by their own efforts, therefore, not as a result of the teaching of that previous Buddha in the full sense, but who of course, did not teach. I don't know that that is explicitly stated but that would seem to be the position. So the new Buddha, so to speak, has to make what amounts to an entirely new effort, a new approach, make a new discovery. But the whol~ subject of Pratyekabuddhas is
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Perhaps the concept (comes) a little too seriously you know, from a Spiritual point of view. (Pause) Let's leave it there then.

(End of Tape 2)

The Diamond Sutra.

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Chapter 2. Page 24.

2.' THE BODHISATTVA S CAREER

Chapters 3 to 5 now deal with the career of a Bodhisattva, its beginning, middle and end. That career begins with the 'Vow', which expresses his-vow to win enlightenment, not only for himself, but in the intention of benefiting others (chapter 3). This is followed by the practice of the six perfections, which extends over many aeons (chapter 4) The last stage of a Bodhisattva's journey is finally reached with the attainment of dharmakaya (chapter 5)

24. The Vow of a Bodhisattva

Chapter 3 describes, the Vow of the Bodhisattva from four points of view: (i) As vast-in so far as it refers to 'all beings'; (2) as supreme-because it leads beings to the supreme goal, to perfect Nirvana; (3) objectively as absolute-'in reality no being exists'; (4) subjectively as unperverted-unmarred by false views about self, beings, and so on. This chapter is taken

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from the large Prajnaparamita, and the earlier version can be consulted in 55 no. 87.

3. The Lord said: Here, Subhuti, someone who has set out in the vehicle of a Bodhisattva should produce a thought in this manner: 'As many beings as there are In the universe of beings, comprehended under the term "beings"egg-born, born from a- womb, moisture-born, or miraculously born; with or without form; with perception, without perception, and with neither perception nor non-perception,~as far as any conceivable form of being is conceived: all these must lead to Nirvana, into that Realm of Nirvana which leaves nothing behind. And -° yet, although innumerable beings have thus been led to Nirvana, no being at all has been led to Nirvana.' And why? If in a Bodhisattva the notion of a 'being' should - - take place, he could not be called ~a 'Bodhi-being'. 'And why? He is not to be called a Bodhi-being, in which the notion of a self or of a being should take place, or the notion of a living soul or of a person.'

-The-phrase should produce a thought sounds rather clumsy in English. The Sanskrit, i.e. cittant ~tpatdayitavyam. alludes to the technical term cillotpada, the 'thought of enlightenment', which marks the beginning of a Bodhisattva's career. The traditional classification of living beings is a threefold one:

(a) By their mode of conception four kinds of organisms are distinguished: (1) Those hatched from eggs; (2) those born from a womb; (3) those generated from - warm humidity, such as worms, insects and butterflies; (4) those who a~re'~miraculously born, and appear all at once, without concep-tion or -embryonic growth, with all their limbs fully grown from"~;the --ye:"" start. Miraculous or apparitional birth is the lot of~gods. i~nfe~rnal beings. beings in the intermediary world, and ~ever~returners. This - - class is said to be much more numerous than the others.

(b) According to whether they are material or immaterial.

(1) Matenal, with form, are all living beings, except those which are (2) immaterial, without form,~i.e. the highest classes of Gods, who correspond to the f~ur formless trances.

(c) According to whether they can, or cannot, perceive.

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(i) With perception, all organisms with sense~rgans. (2) With- out perception, a class of gods, or angels, living in one of the heavens which correspond to the fourth dhyana. (3) With neither perception nor non-perception, the very highest immaterial gods, corresponding to the fourth formless dhyana.

The Realm of Nirvana which leaves nothing behind, - literally: 'Nirvana without remainder, or substratum.' Buddhist - tradition distinguishes two kinds of Nirvana: (1) The Nirvana with substratum, which is attained when all defflements, such as greed, ignorance, etc., are given up. The Buddha reached that at the time of his enlightenment under the Bodhi-tree. But, since he still had a physical body and mental processes. there remained to him the 'substratum' of the five skandhas. This state gave way, at his death, to (2) the Nirvana without substratum. Even the five skandhas disappeared, and Nirvana alone remained. Candrakirti compares the 'Nirvana without substratum' to a city which, after all the criminal gangs in it have been executed, has now itself been razed to the ground.

S: Let's go through this- then. "Chapters 3 to 5", that is t~ say of the text, " now deal with the career of the Bodhisattva, it's beginning, middle and end." Though the word which Conze renders as career is caria. Career is not perhaps a very good equivalent, has perhaps the wr~ng connotation for us. Caria is from carity a verb ILteaning to walk or fare, so Caria is really a walking or course. Course would be better than career, the course of a

Bodhisattva. Anyone suggest: another equivalent~ There's course of practice. Also cariyā is 'practice' in Pali, 'conduct'.

(Pause) So that.. I

Career begins with the "Vow", which expresses his decision to win enlightenment, not only for himself, but in the intention of benefiting others (chapter 3). This is followed by the practice of the six perfections, which extends over many eons (chapter 4) The last stage of a Bodhisattva's journey is finally reached with the attainment of Buddhahood (chapter 5).

I've dealt with these three great stages in detail in The Three Jewels, you remember.

The vow of the Bodhisattva from four points of view: (1) As vast - in so far as it refers to 'all beings'; (2) as supreme - because it leads beings to a supreme goal to effect Nirvana; (3) objectively as absolute - in reality no being exists; (4) subjectively as unperverted - unmarred by false views about self, beings, and so on. This chapter is taken from the large Prāṇāparamitā, and the earlier version can be consulted in SS no. 87.

Then the text itself.

The Lord said: Here, Subhūti, someone who has set out in the vehicle of a Bodhisattva should produce a thought in this manner.

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Conze comments that the phrase 'should produce a thought' sounds rather clumsy in English. The Sanskrit *citta*

the technical term- *citta* - the thought of enlightenment That is literally the arising of the thought. One could translate it not as just 'produce the thought of enlightenment', like producing out of a conjurer's hat, as it were but really 'to make arise', to make arise the, the thought of enlightenment, or the thought in this manner.

As many beings as there are in the universe of beings, -comprehended under the term "beings" - egg-born, born from a womb, moisture-born, or miraculously born:

Again there's a comment on 'miraculously born'. I think the expression 'miraculously born' can be quite misleading, because again the word miraculous has all sorts of connotations for

people in the West. A miracle really represents the direct intervention of God into mundane affairs, suspending the operation of natural causes, so, this is a perfectly normal mode of birth. As Conze says, 'the class of those who are born miraculously is said to be much more numerous than the others'. So it isn't a question of miraculous birth, sometimes it's translated as 'apparitional birth', but again that suggests something insubstantial, something ghost-like, which clearly isn't the case - except perhaps with actual ghosts or, pretas. It's sometimes translated as spontaneous birth. Again it's not spontaneous in the sense of causeless. It really means that the being, as such, appears at a more advanced stage of development than is

normal in the case of those who are egg born or born from a womb, especially those who are egg-born.

Do you have any idea what the original word was translated as "ir-ucu I

S: I was trying to think. - (v-aptika), which means 'just appearing', though spontaneous is nearer actually. But not spontaneous in the sense of being without previous cause. I mean as Conze says 'those who are miraculously born and appear all at once, without conception or embryonic growth, with all their limbs fully grown from the very start'. You can say that if you compare those who are egg-born with those who are womb-born, well clearly those who are womb-born start off their present existence at a more advanced stage than those who are egg-born, so clearly those

who are apparitionally born start off their existence at a more advanced stage still. They don't go through an interuterine period, they don't go through a period of conception, gestation and an infancy and childhood, they just appear fully born. So the word miraculous is quite misleading here. It's not that they're called into existence by some miracle of God. Maybe 'spontaneous',

even not exempt from possibilities of this sort of misunderstanding, is the best translation here. So:-

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with or without form: with perception, without perception and with neither perception or non-perception,- as far as any conceivable form of beings is conceived: all these must lead to Nirvana, into that realm of Nirvana which leaves nothing behind. And yet, although innumerable beings have thus been led to Nirvana, no being at all has been led to Nirvana.' And why? If in a Bodhisattva the notion - of a 'being' should take place, he could not be called a 'Bodhi-being'.

Being is in both cases 'Sattva'

'And Why? He is not to be called a Bodhi-being, in whom the notion of a self or of a being should take place, or the notion of a living soul or of a person.'

So the phrase 'should produce a thought' sounds rather clumsy in 'I

English. The traditional classification of living beings is a

three-fold one. This is not peculiar to Buddhism, it's a general Indian classification (6) According to whether they are material or immaterial. (')Material with form' are all living beings, except those who are immaterial without form. The highest classes of Gods, who correspond to the four formless trances, that is to say the four formless dhyanas. (~According to whether they can or cannot perceive (1) 'With perception' ~ all organisms with sense-organs. (2) 'Without perception?', a class of gods, or angels, living in one of the heavens which correspond to the fourth dhyana. (3) 'With neither perception nor non-perception, the very highest immaterial gods, corresponding to the fourth formless dhyana.

The Realm of Nirvana which leaves nothing behind', literally: 'Nirvana without remainder, or substratum.'

(~nu Palisasa)

Buddhist tradition distinguishes two kinds of Nirvana: (~) The Nirvana with substratum, which is attained when all defilements, such as greed, ignorance etc. are given up. The Buddha: reached that at the time of his enlightenment under the Bodhi-tree. But since he still had a physical body and mental processes, there remained to him the 'substratum' of the five skandhas. At his death to (2) the Nirvana without substratum. Even the five skandhas disappeared, and Nirvana alone remained. Candrakirti

the criminal ganas in it have been executed has now itself ~O. been razed to the ground.

A comparison which can perhaps be outwardly misunderstanding. Anyway, any query on that section. In a sense it seems quite straightforward.

_____ When Conze talks about spontaneously born beings as beings in the intermediary realm is that, is that untrardo?

S: That's the untrardo, there beings are supposed to appear spontaneously, equipped with their fully developed physical bodies, sense organs and so on. Well of course it is a subtle physical body and the organs are subtle sense organs. But they don't go through any period of growth or development, they appear fully formed.

(Pause)

~p'--(or~'. Just reading the translation the whole lot seems a bit clumsy, it doesn't seem very poetic. Is it that in the original Sanskrit, the Diamond Sutra is quite poetical?

S: No.

No. It's just quite...

S: If by poetical you mean that there are figures of speech and all that which have been left out of the translation, no that's certainly not the case.

(Long Pause)

_____ : What about the beings without perception? ' class of gods or angels living in one of the heavens which correspond

to the fourth dhyana' °£~what doe~~s that~.,~.~ -- -- -- I -

S:" 'Without perception~a class of gods or angels living in the heavens which corresponds to the fourth dhyana.' These are mentioned in the Pali scriptures. I don't remember much about them. They are translated sometimes as the unconscious gods.

— Yes

(pause.)

~s~.

_____ What 'ould that mean, unconscious? SI.

What could that mean unconscious god?

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S: Well it would mean presumably a god who was occupying a particular realm but who's attention was not directed towards the realm itself as an objectively existing thing. Just as in this world one might have a being who has a physical body and so on but who is absorbed in meditation and not conscious of the world in which at the same time, in a sense, he lives.

One assumes it is something of that sort. I can't remember reading any ac~u~ ~~~v'~~o~I~

o~ what an unconscious god is. Whether it's even, the term is asanya, which is 'not perceiving' so one assumes that is the same as unc~c,iuous but one is not completely certain of it. It's not perceiving perhaps rather than "conscious. (pause) Maybe its gods who don't take much notice of things. (chuckles) I mean these classifications are sort of traditional, not exclusively Buddhist. They are simply meant to exhaust the

term' beings'. content of the Simply to or em hasise the fact that the Bodhisattva is concerned with all beings of all kinds howsoever one may in fact classify them, the details don't matter.

~rr{ Ccr~: Are Buddhas considered to be living beings, do they come under these classifications?

S: Well living beings includes human beings

Corr Ah.

S: Th~~~fov~terms, cWthe end of the chapter'. ~~ the notion of a self or of a being should take place, or the notion of a living soul or of a person. "

So self is 'atma', being is 'sattva', living soul is 'liva' , person is 'pudgala?' so a human, human beings could be included under all of these.

(Long pause)

Subhuti: What does 'notion1 translate?

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S: I think it's (sanya). Yes we come to this in the next chapter. Notion is (sanya)'altered perception!

Subhuti: So notion of a being. What exactly is meant by notion?

S: Well to form a concept of a being.

Subhuti: Concept?

S: As a result of one's experience, as a result of one's encounter with so-called beings one forms the notion of an objectively existing, unchanging, identifiable, separate, self or being or living soul, or person. The notion is a wrong notion in as much as it doesn't correspond to the facts of the situation, whether in terms of 'dharmas' according to the Hinayana, or in terms of 'sunyata' according to the Mahayana. The notion of a being is simply your wrong interpretation of the facts of your own experience. You construe them in a particular wrong way.

V: If a Bodhisattva didn't have a notion of how would he actually go about leading them to Nirvana?

S: Well he doesn't. Because, er, one might say that that is what he appears to do, from the point of view of other people, but he himself doesn't do it in that way. One might for instance give an illustration on a much more ordinary level. Somebody might see another person helping others, and just being generally useful, thoughtful, doing things for other people, and they might think, "well they've got a definite, clear cut notion in their 'I

minds of being helpful and doing things for other people. But as

far as the actual person who's doing all these things is concerned they don't have any such notion at all. They just do things, it's just their nature to do so and they just do them spontaneously, do you see what I mean? So with the Bodhisattva on another level entirely, even in a quite different way, he sort of acts freely and spontaneously that he has a definite

notion of other people of helping them. it's just his nature to act in that particular way. Do you see what I'm getting at? This is only just a sort of feeble reflection of the thing itself, though perhaps it can give one some intimation of it. The Bodhisattva is free from self consciousness in the

less positive sense of the term. ~3.

— So the vow, as it were sinks to the very depths of his being, everything sort of comes, comes from the vow.

S: Yes, yes, it's a spontaneous expression of it. He's just living his life. He's just doing what is natural for him to do, doing what he likes to do, doing what he wants to do. From his point of view there is nothing special about it.

Vessantara: So in a way, when he's on that level there's no need of a vow.

S: In a sense there's no need for a vow, not in the sense in which people who have not taken the vow understand the vow.

V: Could you see the vow as just being, as being a starting point?

S: Well it is certainly a starting point, though it is a starting point that continues throughout the Bodhisattva's whole career, it's not something he leaves behind, in the way that a literal

starting point is left behind. It's a thread that runs through the whole of the career, through all the different stages.

V: But what I mean a starting point is that actually defines a Bodhisattva?

S: No, it's the arising of Bodhicitta which defines a Bodhisattva, and then the bodhicitta finds expression in the taking of the vow and in the practice of the 6 paramitas. I've explained all this in The Three Jewels. There's and there's (?v~~~~c'~~. The being represented by the vow and \~\~~~~as~a~~~~being represented by the practice of the 6 paramitas.

V: Does that mean his vow is spontaneous? He doesn't decide to vow, he just...

S: This brings up questions like those we encountered the other day, in connection with insight, when does insight

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become insight. Although in as much as he starts off as a non- Bodhisattva presumably he has to think quite consciously, quite deliberately about taking the vow. That's not to say that the actual taking of it is deliberate in that sort of way. He's sort of thinking about taking it, you might say, prepares the ground for its actual, its spontaneous arising.

V: The vow would be the natural expression of the arising of the Bodhicitta?

S: Yes, along with the determination to practise the 6 paramitas. But as I have said more than once, it becomes increasingly difficult to think of the arising of the Bodhicitta and the vow and so on as an individual act in the ordinary sense. I mean the Bodhisattva thinks in terms of all these beings, and if you take the expression 'all beings' literally, it seems to be taken literally, that's an awful lot of beings, beings of the past, the present and the future~ beings of the whole universe, beings of all kinds on all levels of all degrees, that's - a n awful lot of beings! So if you take a vow to lead all those beings to, to Nirvana, well you're taking on a tremendous responsibility, so I wonder whether it can really be regarded as an individual act or an individual responsibility. In any case you've got lots of Bodhisattvas, they're all engaged in the same task, so in a sense can they be regarded as separate? Otherwise it's as though one Bodhisattva gets in the way of another (chuckle), Stultifies the vow of another, because if you, as a Bodhisattva~vow to lead all beings to Nirvana, well how can you let you do i~ unless they're - not Bodhisattvas. So for it to be possible for any Bodhisattva to fulfil his vow, there cannot be any other Bodhisattvas, do you see what I mean? Because he is vowing that he will do it, so how can he do it if there are many others trying to do the same thing. So it does seem that the notion of a single Bodhisattva, taking on this whole responsibility on his own shoulders, is logically, at least, self contradictory. Do you see what I mean?

V: Isn't it taking it a little bit literally there?

S: Why shouldn't one not take it literally-4 it is expressed

7 55. in those terms. Doesn't ~ say that he vows to do this? It's a vow which is every serious matter. There's no, sort of interpreting a vow sort of, metaphorically - that's almost like explaining it away. If you take a solemn vow that you are going to lead all beings to enlightenment, that you are going to do this, then surely that is to be taken literally. You don't take the vow " I will collaborate with all Bodhisattvas, with other Bodhisattvas in leading all beings to ~nlightenment" That is not what you vow.

Vessantara: Well is i~ not like the private ordination when you're prepared if need be to go it alone, then you discover that there are other beings who'~e also committed them- selves and therefore you work with them.

S: But then this is

Vessantra: You're prepared to go it alone.

S: No, a Bodhisattva is on a much higher level presumably than an ordinary Upasaka(chuckle) so I think, one can't take the individual vow, therefore even the individual -Bodhisattva too literally. It's as though the Bodhisattva sees, well he doesn't even see, he tries to imagine, or the would.be Bodhisattva tries to see or to imagine, you know the totality of beings, and he sees~is total ity of beings as all in need of enlightenment. He sees quite clearly that, you know, this is the best thing for them, this is the best thing for everybody, that they should all gain enlightenment. So it is as if he sees this, this need of theirs for enlightenment, so clearly and feels it so strongly that he cannot but identify himself with it. He cannot but identify hi~self with that need of theirs to such an extent that he devotes all his energies to helping~ to helping to actualise it. It's not literally, I would say, that he himself as an individual, as a person takes the responsibility for that. He identifies himself with the fulfilment of that need, as do others.

(Pause)

Vessantra: I'm not quite sure of the distinction between identifying with the need and taking responsibility.

S: Well he doesn't take sort of personal responsibility in the sense of thinking that he will do it. But he, as it were, throws himself into that task, you know, wholeheartedly, completely, for~etting himself, er, not thinking in terms of 'I will do this'. The task, as it were, the magnitude of the task compels him to dedicate himself to it, but not that he is thinking that he will do it. It is as though you are present at some terrible accident, you see that there are a lot of people injured, a lot of people needing help. You just throw yourself in, you don'tk ~I~ll take the responsibility I'll help them', no you just throw yourself in to do whatever you can, you identify yourself with their needs. (pause)

You see the need so clearly that you cannot but devote yourself to the satisfaction of that need, but you know, you devote yourself to it so wholeheartedly that you are not really able to

think in terms of you being the one who is devoting himself, to satisfy that need. You've no sort of energy left over, so to speak, to think in those sort of terms, you just throw yourself in.

V: Is it useful to see it. really see it as taking a vow, because that would imply, you know, a kind of 'I will do it'.

S: Well what does a vow mean? What does (prani~~ana) mean~ This raises quite a big question, what is a vow?

Co~r It's setting yourself a particular course of action.

S: But then, in what sense does a vow differ from a decision or a resolve?

_ Well, the vow is external as well, you can make a decision, but other people are not really aware of it,

if you actually take a vow then it also involves people.

S: Yes but you can make a solemn promise~~~i&~~ other 7

people presumably, or does that amount to a vow.

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V: Sometimes it can be a natural expression of(e~~~desire to do something, so strong and quite explicit, you know

S: Yes, a vow does have the connotation of binding yourself, committing yourself, in a particularly strong and solemn kind of way. Sometimes the Bodhisattvas vow is represented as a promise given to all beings, an undertaking given to all beings.

V I c~~ 't honestly separate that from promise, in~~1 sensea~a\~j both can be broken, but if you're saying that a vow is so solemn that it can't be broken, then there's no ne~for the vow in the first place.

S: Well not necessarily, because the fact that it cannot be broken could spring from the fact that it has been made public. You can't break it because you've made it.

V: Presumably with the Bodhisattvas it just can't be broken A because it comes from the bodhicitta?

S: Mmrnm

V: So perhaps it's not a vow, in that sense, that can be broken.

S: Yes, it is represented as an expression of the Bodhicitta, quite clearly. But then, the Bodhicitta itself is not, is not, what shall I say, is not indestructible, because the Bodhisattva becomes irreversible only from the 8th Bhumi. So what does irreversible mean? It means that he can give up being a Bodhisattva; that means give up the Bodhicitta; presumably that means give up the Bodhisattva vow. So, the vow becomes unbreakable, according to tradition, apparently, only from the 8th Bhumi onwards. When the Bodhicitta becomes irreversible the Bodhisattva himself becomes irreversible from full enlightenment for the sake of all. So, the vow from the first Bhumi cannot be broken without giving up the Bodhicitta itself, so long as the Bodhicitta is there, one might say, the vow cannot be broken, in that sense it's a natural expression of the Bodhicitta. So long as the Bodhicitta is sustained, so long

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as it is maintained. In that case one might raise the question, well what is the difference between the Bodhicitta and the Bodhisattva's vow? It might be said that in a sense there is no difference, that the Bodhicitta can be subdivided into

2 aspects, one aspect of which is the vow, the other is the actual practice of the 6 paramitas. One representing the Bodhisattva's consciousness of his goal, his determination to fulfil it and the other the actual steps he takes to bring that about. So it's not that you've got three things, the sort of Bodhicitta, the pranidhana and the practice of the paramitas, you've got only one thing, the Bodhicitta, functioning in these 2 different ways.

Vessantara: It seems to parallel the path of vision and the path of transformation.

S: Yes, with the vow roughly corresponding to the vision and the practice of the paramitas to transformation.

V: So what would cause a Bodhisattva to lose his vision?

S: Well, there are various references in some of the *Vajrasūtra* sutras. The main thing is that he just gets fed up with beings, as I said there's an awful lot of them (chuckle)

and they can be very tiresome and you're trying to save them and lead them to Nirvana and they don't want to be saved, they don't want to be led to Nirvana. They put up quite a stiff resistance even though you point out to them that Nirvana is a very happy state, they just don't seem interested. They

don't seem to want to attain Nirvana, for some strong reason. In fact, they're much happier in a perverse sort of way, just wallowing

in the miseries of samsara. They feel apparently more at home there, so it can be quite frustrating being a Bodhisattva. One can get quite fed up with beings, and then according to the sutras, one day you think, 'Oh away with all these beings' and then you sink to the level of the Hinayana path, the arahant path, the arahant ideal, the Bodhicitta collapses.

V: I thought he didn't actually have a notion of beings

S: \~ Shouldn't have. 59.

V: ... but that doesn't actually occur until further on in the *Bhūmīśāstra*, further on one doesn't have this notion of beings.

S: Yes, I mean the notion of self, whether with respect to oneself or others disappears in its entirety only when enlightenment is attained. Until then there are subtler and ever subtler notions of self. But the ideal is to get rid of all notions of self.

V: So the state, when he doesn't have a notion of being that's when he would be irreversible?

S: No, I wouldn't say that, because that would make no

difference between an irreversible Bodhisattva and a Buddha. One might of course argue that there is no difference between

an irreversible Bodhisattva and a Buddha, then you have still got those 4 remaining or at least 3 remaining Bhumis to explain away (chuckle). Because they are stages of progress to enlightenment for Bodhisattvas, so presumably it isn't quite fully enlightenment. Therefore there is some distinction between an irreversible Bodhisattva and a samyak-sambuddha. But it becomes more and more difficult to perceive.

V: Does it not go back to what you were saying in the other question and answer sessions. When you said that possibly, originally stream-entry was the point of Buddhahood but they started adding other stages in and possibly the same thing happened with the last four stages, the last 4 Bhumis,

irreversible Bodhisattva Buddha.

S: One could look at it like that, but there are stages ahead, but stream entry and irreversibility represent, so to speak, the real turning point. You don't have to worry really once you've entered it, you don't have to worry once you've become

irreversible complete enlightenment.

V: So, in this passage is the Buddha telling Subhuti how to take up the practice of a Bodhisattva, how he can become a better person. Is that what he's telling him, or, how a Bodhisattva can make himself irreversible.

S: Well, yes, one could say that so long as that notion of being persists, certainly in its cruder form, the Bodhisattva is not irreversible. But presumably it doesn't disappear completely even with irreversibility since then, presumably there would be no distinction between an irreversible Bodhisattva and a Buddha.

Subhuti: I can't quite get, I can't quite get hold of why Subhuti has asked the question, and why the Buddha gives this particular answer, do you know what I mean? I can't quite make it live as a dialogue.

S: Well, I think elsewhere Conze makes the point that 'The Diamond Sutra', as other Perfection of Wisdom texts, does not as it were proceed logically. It is in a sense inconsequential, he points out somewhere I think that the word 'therefore' occurs it has not the usual logical force of therefore. In the sense of 'for this logical reason', it seems to fly off at a tangent, there's no sort of linear progression of the argument or of the dialogue. This is presumably intentional on the part of the Buddha or of the compiler.

V: Does that not, though, seem to imply that there's more than one compiler?

S: Not necessarily. For instance we have in the 'Heart Sutra',

Therefore Sariputra. Do you remember this? This is not a logical therefore, this is inconsequential therefore. Conze goes into it somewhere. Ah yes, just earlier on in 'The Heart Sutra' - (Pause)

V: It is in a sense the Buddha gave the key to

it. The Bodhisattva stand, progress and W~ quite an appropriate answer to the question.