

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/Triratna 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 Triratna 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 [Triratna 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](#).

S(cont) : what is there, copies it but a great artist might come and look at that same landscape and treat it in a completely different way, he doesn't allow himself to be determined, to be limited by it, when he paints a picture of it, in a way he sees something which isn't given, he brings something of himself into the picture in a way that the photograph cannot. In the same way the Bodhisattva is not limited by the data of experience.

So the opposite of the sign which is also identified with the sign is the Absolute, which is

indeed unrecognizable when met, how can you recognise it when there is no sign, there is nothing by which to recognise it. So if you think you recognise it, "Ah, this is nirvana", it cannot be nirvana, because if it was you wouldn't be able to recognise it because it is hui as it is said, it is unique, of its own kind, there is no sign which can give you any idea at all which it is like. So you cannot recognise it when you meet it. If you do it isn't it, if you don't it probably is. So of course it is indescribable. (pause)

What about this notion of merit. I have discussed this several times, several years ago; at least three times quite fully but what about this notion of merit in this context ? Merit as Dr. Conze says, is not to be despised. merit is the indispensable condition for all further spiritual progress". What is merit then ? In simple "

down to earth terms ? ~. Conze says it is attached to good deeds as

their fruit. Well one thinks within a traditional Buddhist context of good deeds performed in former lives, but suppose you don't take that sort of context, suppose you think in terms of good deeds performed in this life, well then what would merit be, what would merit represent ?

~ : The appreciation of oneself.

S : No, I wouldn't say that, it represents more the positive emotional experience that comes to you as a result of living a thoroughly skillful life, and clearly this is an indispensable condition for all further

spiritual progress. One might say the Mahayana or Buddhism generally C

attaches great importance to merit and great importance therefore to this

positive emotional state that one finds oneself in as a result of living skillfully in accordance with the precepts. And this is the basis on which one builds, so to speak all people find it within themselves; to follow a certain way of life, observe precepts, practice

meditation, put yourself in a more skilful mental state, well you feel quite different.

_____ : Is merit not usually interpreted also as providing objective consequences ?

S Oh yes in ones physical body even in terms of merit arising as a result of skilful actions performed in previous lives yes, in terms of even the type of body you have~the type of appearance, the effect you have on other people, your complexion, your beauty, all this is the result of or expression of merit according to traditional t~~~~ing~ or the fact that things~~come to you easily, people are kind to you, generous to you~this is all the result of your merits. Some people whenever they set foot outside the door they get knocked down by something, by a bus, or by a car or bicycle (laughter) other people it just never happens. This is explained traditionally to be due to merit or demerit as the case may be, but doesn't one find this

This is why it is a traditional Buddhist belief that if things seem to be going wrong, well clearly its a sig~ of a deficiency in merit somewhere, Os one should build up a store of merit, usually by making offerings to the monks, feeding them, perhaps overfeeding them, offering them robes, performing pu3as. Maybe if you feel your are very deficient in merit, constructiong monastries, and things like that, building stupas. I suppose it could even subjectively, even psyc~logically, make a big difference to your attitude if after doing all these things you actually felt now you had a pretty good stock of merit in you account and it perhaps could give you increased self- confidence and ~~~able you to surmount whatever obstacles and diffic- ulties you were having to face. ...

End of side one

S : Again, bringing things down to a very practical almost commonsense level, if one was trying to be a bodhisattva, trying to practise the

dana paramita, as distinct from just giving danat~ how should one do that, how should one give a gift in such a way that one is not supported by a thing Is it enough to speak as Conze does in terms of disinter- ested ness, unselfishness, or is something more required than that ? It is almost as though the dana to dana paramita, this is putting it in very sort of basic terms, has to be an expression of your inner- most nature not something that ~0~~a5 it wert~5elf~c0n5ci0~5l~ do. (Pause)

So you would almost be suprised if you performed some action and somebody came back and said "that1s something really that you did" ?

S : Yes in a sense almost surprise to you because you weren~ L thinking

S3. S(cont) : in those terms, you were just (so to speak) being yourself. It is as though someone was to come up to you after lunch and say, "thank you for passing the salt", what is remarkable about that ?, you just passed the salt, isn't that the thing to do ?, you don't think in

terms of practicing the paramita dana. to you see ? Because in the case of a real Bodhisattva if someone might come up to him, "thank you for sacrificing your life and limbs", you know when you have been brought back to life and you would be just really surprised that he wouldn't even mention it. You would say, "didn't really sort of feel it, just did what was needed, didn't really do anything in particular". It does point to the fact, this whole teaching, bringing it down from this very lofty Indian altitude, that virtue mustn't be too self-conscious mustn't be too deliberate. Nietzsche has something to say to this effect doesn't he, talking about chastity in Zarathustra, does anyone remember? I think there is a passage where he says, "Be chaste if you want to practice chastity, if you want to, but don't make too much of it". "Well this is just a fancy I have at the moment to practice chastity" But don't emphasise it too much. You don't have to call the whole world to witness when you give a halfpenny, some people almost do this you find this among Hindus quite a lot, I am afraid you find this amongst Buddhist monks, you find it among Christians philanthropy and Charity, I remember Christian missionaries in India doing this among the Tibetans, they'd stand there with Tibetan refugees waiting in front of them and they'd be doling out flour or rice from a sack by

the spoonful and the Tibetans would be standing there with their bags and

and blankets and things, just waiting for this spoonful to be doled

in and the missionary would be there with his spoon stretched out saying : "receive this rice or flour, do you know who sent you this, do you know who had given this you, Jesus. Jesus is sending you this, so you have got to be grateful to Jesus and Jesus is sending it to you through us, so don't forget it is all coming from Jesus, and we are giving it to you, you have got to be grateful to Jesus, you have got to be a Christian, do you realise that, Jesus is giving you this"

Well only then do they give the poor refugee the spoonful of flour - or rice or whatever it is, . I saw them doing this, making too much

of a song and dance about it, as we say. I mean the gospel itself, in

one of the gospels, Jesus himself says, "when you give alms give it to

privately, let not your left hand know what your right hand is doing

They certainly weren't practicing that.

COULD : There is the parable of the rich man and the poor man. The rich man was right up to the front saying all the gifts he give

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and the poor man just at the back.

S: there mustn't be too much, any ideally, self-consciousness in the spiritual life & in the moral life. In more basic terms this is what it is getting at: you should be moral, you should be spiritual much as a flower blooms, not that you're unconscious, not that you are unaware, but you aren't too self-conscious about it, you are just being yourself, not being especially virtuous, as though virtue was something strange out of

the way of our usual - - - . So perhaps at the end of this

chapter the Buddha does answer Subhuti's question - "I have heard, Subhuti, that those who have set out in the Bodhisattva-vehicle" Subhuti has asked about this, "should give gifts, without being supported by the notion of a sign". It is as though if you want to start being a Bodhisattva, if you want to embark on this Bodhisattva path, this is what you've got to do: practice dana, but practice dana-paramita, give without being supported by the notion of a sign, give disinterestedly, give naturally, give spontaneously, give freely. Only a sort of naturally generous-hearted sort of person can even think in terms of being a Bodhisattva. If you are mean, grasping, selfish and so on you cannot think in terms of being a Bodhisattva.

_____ Can you make clearer the connection between "being supported by the notion of a sign" and this giving in a natural free and disinterested way. It is a bit clearer with a notion of a being, but being supported by a notion of a sign, I don't see the connection so clearly.

S: Well a notion of a sign is sort of a fixed idea almost. It is as though there is a sort of a double barrier, the barrier of beings themselves and the barrier of the signs indicating the presence of beings in that narrow limited sense.

_____ Is it also that one sees that dana paramita itself the actual giving as such of something fixed, certain, this is dana paramita practice ?

S: Yes, if you do this, well then that's dana. One could look at it in that way. In other words it ties up a little perhaps with the third fetter the sila - - - you sort of go through the motions, well that is what dana is supposed to be, this is the sign that you are practising dana if you do this, if you do that. It doesn't really become then something free and spontaneous and natural and even creative. You've got a certain fixed idea about dana and you proceed to act in accordance with that.

_____ I don't quite follow what you said about there being a double barrier.

S: Well first of all there are as it were, "things", and then there are "thoughts about things" and the words corresponding to those thoughts. So it's as though the signs represent the second barrier and the beings, sattvas, represent the first. They are barriers in the sense that they stand between you and reality; it is not only your perception of things which stand between you and reality, but the words which you attach to your perception of things. They form another sort of perhaps even subtler barrier standing between you and reality. You not only mistake

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_____ Your mistaking things for realities isn't simply because you have got confused by language ?

S: Well it can be sometimes; but even apart from language you have a perception of things as things, but that can be certainly strengthened or reinforced by language which anyway embodies that kind of perception, that kind of confusion even. It is not that if there was no language, you would perceive things as they are, you would still perceive things, and things are not realities, but one does not only perceive things but also uses words in relation to things and that sort of reinforces one's view of those things, those beings as representing realities. Though of course originally it was that kind of perception that gave rise to that kind of language, not maybe individually, but with people in general.

Subhuti Just taking the words literally as they stand, "who gives a gift should not be supported by a thing", that seems relatively straightforward ; "nor should he be supported anywhere", what is being said in addition there ?

S: Well, " when he gives gifts he should not be supported by sight- objects or by sounds", in other words, he should not be supported in any particular way, in respect of any particular sense organ, even the mind. (pause)

There is also this question of the amount so to speak of merit being related to the extent to which the Bodhisattva does not get supported by a thing, or with a notion of a sign. How is one to bring this down so to speak to a common sense level ? Well, the more

you function disinterestedly, the more you give disinterestedly, the more positive becomes your emotional state. It seems to be as simple as that on this level.

_____ just going back to this thing about being supporte

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~6. °~"" ,~~ctd:by objects etc, to become unsupported must be quite a gradual process although you can actually acknowledge that everything

around you actually supports and determines the way you see yourself, you can't actually just sort of say, "well I'm not going to be determined by this", you have to start with quite small things.

& . Well this is obviously this whole question of path of fusion and the path of transformation a glimpse of the truth, at least no more than a glimpse to begin with and then only gradually do you bring your whole being, the rest of your being into alignment with that vision~th~t insight, that perception.

_____ : I was thinking that you could actually look for very small things in your life, just quite insignificant things, things which actually still do determine you. You can actually look at those quite clearly and you can start on that basis actually trying to break those perceptions down.

S: They give a concrete example in the case of this perfection of

giving It should be quite easy.

_____ : Sorry I have lost you somewhere.

S: Well, give a concrete example of the sort of thing you have in mind.

SL~~?r~\o~~ perhaps this looking in the mirror when I get up in the morning, I find I've got a habit of actually looking in the mirror to sort of establish I'm still there (laughter) It maintains my view of myself - so, a way of getting round that would be to

actually stop that habit...

S: Assuming you were in a sufficiently positive emotional state to be able to do without it, so that it didn't lead to a sense of self- alienation that you weren't there any more, which wouldn't be very positive. No , I was thinking ~ relation to dana.

Christmas presents and presents and birthdays and so on.

S: Yes you give Christmas presents, just because it is Christmas, ~v' & other people are giving, other people are observing Christmas, it is in the air, advertistr~ k encouraging you, every shop is begging you to buy something to give as a Christmas present. Yes. If you just go along with that, it isn't exactly dana paramita. That is a little habit one could well break. Develop the more positive or skillful habit of giving one's presents in connection with Wesak perhaps.

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_____ It seems important that when we give we actually feel generous, or we feel metta.

S: That is important, but I think we mustn't forget the needs of the person to whom we are giving. ~~~ is most important & that he should get what he needs. Ltha~ you should feel good giving it. Do you see what I mean ? Yes I think If one gives, well~ one need not bother too much about the feeling, the~ must be some feeling there, presumably but some people won't and they don't want to give until they really feel an absolutely uncontrollable urge to give, meanwhile the wretched person that they were thinking of giving to might be either dying of starvation or freezing with cold or whatever. I think, oh yes you should have a genuine feeling to give but you should be very careful that you don't attach too much importance in connection with dana ~ feeling really good about giving. I mean in a sense who cares how you feel the important thing is that the deed should be done, the gift should be given. One mustn't be too unduly subjective in ones approach. It is like the doctor, a doctor might get up one morning, might feel in a really grumpy mood, not feel like helping humanity at all, but does that mean he should not go into his surgery , not attend to his patients ?

One thing that this whole chapter seems to be getting at in a way one could say is that in a sense there shouldn't be a sort of separate specifically religious life, labelled as such. I've mentioned before a criticism by the Egyptians of the Greeks , ~< one of the criticisms they

had many criticisms of the Greeks, they didn't have much respect for the Greeks at all because they weren't the ancient Greeks in those days, they were the very young (~e~ " ~\~r~ sort of Greeks7~ one of their criticisms was that the Greeks had gymnasia , do you remember my mentioning this. So why did they think it a weakness that the Greeks had such things as Gymnasia ?

: Well in the course of your everyday life you were not getting sufficient exercise.

S: Well exactly. So you had to set aside a separate establishment in an entirely artificial manner you had to go and take exercise because you were living in a basically unhealthy unbalanced way. This was the Egyptian view. So I could say in the same way there should not be a separate religious life~ a religious life separate from the rest of ~0~T life there shouldn't be specifically religious acts, your whole life should be an embodiment of skilfulness, dana, giving shouldn't be

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S(ctd): the sort of a way you act in a highly self conscious manner on special occasions. It should be something quite natural to you which you are doing all the time, without thinking about it, as a flower blooms without thinking about it presumably. Not that you are of course unconscious, unaware as a flower is, but you don't think very much in a way of what you are doing, of your so called generosity, it is not the practising a paramita, it is just you being yourself. You are doing what seems a perfectly natural, simple straightforward sort of thing; someone hasn't got any money, you have got some, you give them some, well, there is no great deal in that, nothing very special, you have got, he hasn't got, of course you share it, you don't think in terms of yourself being a great Bodhisattva practicing a great virtue or paramita. So it is because we have got ourselves into such a profoundly irreligious state such an unskilful state we have to think in terms of religion and being skilful

Well this is very much the attitude of Lao-tzu in the Tao-te-ching. The things like morality were introduced only when people started degenerating, before that they were

perfect, never thought about such things. So the religion of Buddhism isn't something you take up as it were as a separate interest a separate occupation as you might take up stamp collecting or bee keeping, it is something you do all the time because it is a natural expression of yourself, the way you feel the way you are, the way you function.

So what applies to dana, applies also to sila it should not be a too self conscious practice of ethics, or patience and forbearance, or of energy and vigour and of meditation or even more so prajna, wisdom. It means in a way, looking at it from another point of view~ really to understand, to grow or develop is in the deepest sense a natural thing, not sort of some unnatural thing grafted onto you, but an expression of your deepest nature, your deepest need, so that when you are as it were being religious, you are not acting in an artificial manner, like a dog walking on stilts, you are being yourself in the best sense of the term. Well that is how some people practise their religion, they are just like dogs walking on stilts, he tries to do it, it is a highly artificial performance, taking him years to learn, he probably does it quite well, quite creditably, he probably can walk on stilts better than any dog in town, but that is not a sort of simile for the spiritual life, it is not just putting your doggy nature on a pair of stilts and calling it spiritual development and sort of stalking along on these stilts in a highly artificial

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S(ctd): manner in front of an admiring audience.

People shouldn't notice it almost when you are being as it were "religious", or if they do only because of naturalness, they are so accustomed to naturalness that it is unnatural to them, so they take notice of it. Just as the Egyptians took notice of the Greeks gymnasia, the other way round. The Greeks with their Gymnasia took note of the fact that the Egyptians didn't have any gymnasia. Of course the Egyptians did have lots of temples, you could of course apply the argument, which they applied against the gymnasia, against

their own temples. If they had really balanced and healthy, they wouldn't have needed any temples. Otherwise they might have come back

and said , what were the temples, the temples were houses of

the Gods. And the Gods were real and the Gods actually lived in their temples and therefore needed to be served. And that the whole of society the state was in fact geared to that in that way every thing was completely unified everybody was a servant of the God, everything belonged to God.

So for them living in that sort of society, to be religious as to some extent it is to

modern Tibetans, is an ordinary natural thing, a part of life. It is not something sort of super-added on to life. so perhaps we can think of the Bodhisattva practicing dana or the other paramitas in that sort of way at least as a beginning at least to help us get some sort of feeling for the Bodhisattva and his practicing of the paramitas in a greater sense. (long pause)

Whatever else may not be clear, it does seem to be clear that in this chapter the Buddha is answering Subhuti's original question, by saying that one who wants to be a Bodhisattva should practice the dana paramita. This seems to be the gist of the matter. I mean he should practice in a particular way because he is practicing the dana paramita not just dana in the ordinary sense, should try to bring himself to a state of mind in which to give without thought so to speak is natural. The Mahayana was quite concerned with the question of riches in this connection, because some of them would argue, some teachers argued, that you could not really practice dana paramita unless you had something to give and therefore the Bodhisattva should not eschew riches, shouldn't glorify poverty because then he would be unable to give things, in this case material things, to living beings. So what does one think of this? I mean is it necessary that one should have things especially material things, and therefore have to earn

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ao. S(ctd): them or earn the money to buy them in order to be able to

give things to other people, can one really give in this basic sense on this basic level if one hasn't got something to give? In which case what should one do about it? It's all very well to talk in terms of giving the dharma, giving fearlessness, but very few people can do that, what about this question of giving on the ordinary common sense level. Surely you have got to have something to give?

_____ One can give one's work.

S: One can give one's work, but is that always appropriate? Sometimes people say, "well I'll come and help you", when I was in India, lots of people wanted to come and help me with my work in England. It was very kind of them, and some of them were Buddhists, they were very keen on coming and helping me, they seemed really taken with the idea of work in England, but I didn't really need their help I felt, didn't think they'd be able to help by just coming over and all that sort of thing. If they had offered me a lot of rupees, well I would have accepted that gladly to help my work in England very much, but they only wanted to give themselves, their time and energy and so on, because I knew they were quite limited to say the least with absolutely no idea of how I was to be helped with my work in England at all. Their idea of helping me seemed to consist of me paying their fare to England and looking after them and showing them round and going back to India in a blaze of glory saying that they spent a year helping Sangharakshita in his work. But at times material things, money is necessary. So what does one do on that level, does one need as it were to earn so that one can give?

_____ : Doesn't it come down to your level of development, that if you haven't got very much to give in terms of experience, then perhaps you do have to work to be able to give physical things.

_____ It also depends on why you earn. I mean if that is the reason why you earn then it is fair enough.

S: Right, so the process of earning doesn't do you more harm than what you give would do good to the person to whom you give it. Unless you really want to sacrifice yourself of course.

_____ This is presumably another example of the inconsequential connections, "and why? because the heap of merit..."

S: This sort of argument if it is an argument is a circle, the argument doesn't develop in a linear manner at all.

End of tape 4.

The Diamond Sutra Tape 5.i ~I.

Subhuti: Is samjna always perception in the sense of this, er, well mistaken perception? Interpretation' I think you called it somewhere

S: Well on the sort of common sense level which seems to be, that of say the Pali Canon; samjna means something more like recognition, as one of the skandhas hm?

Subhuti: Yes.

S: For instance you perceive, let us say, you know, something green of a certain size and shape in the distance and you recognize it as a tree; you know as a result of your

previous experience of trees, your knowledge of trees, that kind of perception is called samana. (Pause) So that is the common sense usage of the term, the word. So it's not just perception in the simple sense, it is also recognition that is to say the identification of the perception as ~ percepti~pn of this or that: that the green patch of a certain size is in fact a tree. O~ covr~ in the actual process of recognition or perception it's probably not possible to distinguish~JAh great care, between the purely perceptual element and the element of recognition, hmm?

The whole process takes place so S~~~ ly. Though in some cases, not so swiftly. You may be uncertain what it is that you're seeing, w~her its a tree say, of which the leaves are all brown, or a rock hmm ? You have to be very careful then, quite clear what your perception is, but you~not clear what it is you actually percieve. Then after examining it more closely you recognise it as, in fact, a tree, er which is brown, rather than a rock or- a boulder.

Subhuti: Mm. Is then samjna in the sense that it's used here the attachment of er, ontological status to , to that*er, recognised object?

S: Yes. That question is not gone~nto in the Pali Canon, it remains on a sort of common sense level. But from a Mahayana point of view it is more a matter(mu ch as it is for Bishop Berkeley in Western thought), that you don't rest content with the perception uh ? You don't rest content with the perception-cum-identification or cum-recognition. You posit behind what you actually percieve an entity , to which the particular colour, shape and so on pertain as attributes hmm ?

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Something which has a sort of definiteknature at the same time. It's for this reason that I intend to say, or have said that Buddhism is nominalist rather than realist in its attitude. I don't know whether that can be sustained in detail, but certainly it's a sort of pointer to the nature of the Buddhist position.

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S: Well, it's nominalist in the sense that it does not posit, er, a real object behind what is actually perceived and named as the green patch of a certain size, shape and so on. Realism posits a sort of real tree behind all those percept~ ; it maintains that the tree is more than the sum ~otal of all those percepts , you don't merely

as it were, experience percepts , you see a tree which exists independently of the percepts . Buddhism would reply that a tree

which exists independently of your perceptions of the tree is sheer illusion, mm ? Not that the tree only exists in your own mind, so to speak, its not quite that point of view. (Pause) Even if there was a real tree behind your perception of the tree, so to speak, you could never know it because all you would know would be your perceptions. So you might as well drop the whole idea of the tree which exists independently (or3 your perceptions of a tree anyway, or of anybody's possible perception of a tree.

But for common sense purposes, its useful to think of a tree which actually exists - apart from its being green and °~~ ce4&'~ shape and size and so on. But it does lead to confusion

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Subhuti: Its that, that's being got at here is it, that that attachment of a metaphysical ...?

S: Yes, the positing of an entity behind the actual experience, to which the experience refers. In Buddhism the so-called object is more the objective pole of the experience itself. That there is just perception within - or just awareness<and within that perception, within that awareness there is a sort of differentiation into opposit~ poles, one of which we identify as the object, the other as the subject huh ? But t~ere~n~ot in fact discrete, seperate, independent objects and subjects, uh?, which mutually percieve- and are perceived, uh?

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(Pause) I mean if the object was really different from the subject how would you perceive it, how would you even know it was there.? So Buddhism tends to think not in terms of a world of objects perceived by subjects but to think in terms of a world of perception, a world of experience, a world of awareness within which there are degrees of polarisation into what we identify as subjects and objects.

It's as though, to give a further comparison, which may or may not be helpful, it's as though we usually think in terms of a void

an empty space, an empty room in which there are balls floating about which impinge on one another from time to time. They are solid, concrete. But Buddhism thinks more in terms of that empty space not being empty space but being filled with a very fine almost luminous sort of medium, but here and there it sort of coagulates, it thickens a bit, and these thickenings are the subjects and objects. Hmm? . or maybe that doesn't help an awful lot. (Laughter). Or maybe I should say there are sort of - thickenings in fact, you know. There are pairs of coagulations.

A double coagulation here, a double coagulation there though each one relates to the other as subject and object. Whereas actually there are only sort of areas of relative density in this tenuous medium which is distributed throughout the room.

Subhuti: (Laughing) it's a realist overtones.

S.: Yes, yes, illustration. Or you could say that it's this tenuous medium is sort of brilliant, it's luminous, it's radiant. But here and there there are little sort of double spots of darkness. These are the subjects and objects.

No doubt the world of the Prajnaparamita is a quite rarified sort of world. Even though the language is apparently quite simple and straightforward. Anyway, any final points?

_____ Just a small one. You say that the Bodhisattva accrues merit through, or infinite merit through, no notion of a sign; you also say that it's very difficult to think of the Bodhisattva in personal terms, so how could a force, as it were, a Bodhisattva force accrue merit?

S.: Well, one might say if one wanted to be paradoxical in the style of the Diamond Sutra itself, who else, or what else, could

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accrue merit except an impersonal force, real merit? In other words~~ we have to reverse our usual way of thinking. I mean, you are standing in the way of your own accumulation of merit all the time. If you would just step aside or get out of the way, the merit would come streaming and pouring through! (chuckles)

Voice: So, does that mean that the Buddha's indicating to Subhuti that dana is an innate quality?

S.: He's not quite saying that, maybe that's our sort of reading of it but I think it's a reasonably fair reading. Dana is an innate quality in the sense that you are innately void, one,

could say. If you realized that well this innate dana, this innate generosity, will be released. One has to go very deep, you know, beyond the psychological level to , as it were, a metaphysical level of being before that is possible. It's not just releasing one's potentialities in the ordinary sort of encounter group growth-oriented sort of manner, Hmm?

If to be a Bodhisattva is natural, to practise dana is natural.

(End of Side A - End of Tape)

95,

Jinavamsa:

2c. Boddhahood and the thirty-two Marks

Chapter 4 spoke of the 'signs' by which separate things are recognized and marked off. Chapter 5 now deals with the 'marks', by which the body of the Buddha is distinguished from those of other men. As in the world around us we should not look for 'signs' anywhere, so in the Buddha we should not look for the

thirty-two marks of the superman.1

5. The Lord continued: 'What do you think, Subhuti, can the Tathagata be seen by the possession of his marks?'- Subhuti replied: 'No indeed, O Lord. And why? What has been taught by the Tathagata as the possession of marks, that is truly a no-possession of no-marks.' The Lord said: 'Wherever there is possession of marks, there is fraud, wherever there is no-possession of no-marks there is no fraud. Hence the Tathagata is to be seen from no-marks as marks.'

The possession of marks is discussed also at 20b, ~6a, 27. The word Sam pad, here translated as 'possession', has other meanings as well, and one might also speak of the 'excellence of his marks', or the 'sum total of his marks', Sampad means the attainments or' accomplishments of the individual in the course of his religious career, and the word is regularly used for the 'achievement' of morality, trance, wisdom, or Nirvana. The connection of the topic of merit with that of the thirty- two marks was immediately obvious to the average Buddhist at the time of the composition of this Sutra. For he was aware that each one of the Buddha's thirty-two marks was born of a hundred acts of merit. He would, however, infer from the 'Information about these marks can be found in my Buddhism, pp. 3~, and my translation of the Abhisamayalankara, pp. 98-102.

argument of chapter 4 that he was wrong in his belief that the -six perfections can be practised in the hope of winning Buddha-hood. And this inference is now confirmed by chapter 5. It would, indeed, be a mistake to suppose that Buddhahood is some real, actually existing, condition produced as a result of the merit gained from giving, and the other perfections. It is true that one side of the Buddha, his glorified body adorned with the marks of the superman, is in fact the fruit of this merit. But the real Buddha, in his Dharma-body, is without these marks. In his true reality the Buddha is not produced by anything, and he is also not marked off from anything that would be different from him. It is easy to see that here the Buddha, as he is perceived with the eye of Faith, is contrasted with the Buddha as Wisdom conceives him. And the point of view of wisdom is declared to be the superior and final one.

The term fraud alludes to a saying of the Buddha which the Mahayanists were fond of quoting: 'All conditioned things are worthless, unsubstantial, fraudulent, deceptive and unreliable, but only fools are deceived by them.¹ Nirvana alone, the highest reality, is free from deception.' Two classes of facts are here distinguished—the deceptive multiple things on the one side, and the true reality of the Absolute on the other. In its fifth chapter the Sutra prepares the ground for chapters 7 and 26, by pointing out that it would be a mistake to place the Buddha among the false, conditioned things, and that this is done by concentrating on his visible and distinctive features. Our conception of the Buddha must do justice to him as the unconditioned Absolute. It is the constant concern of this Sutra to guard the Absolute against misunderstandings. This theme is so important to it that it recurs again and again, as we shall see in the further course of our exposition.

¹ In the Pali Canon a similar statement is made about the sense-pleasures at A.N. v 84, 24-5.

2d. Buddhahood and the -Dharmabody

Chapter 5 contrasted the Buddha's physical body with his essential being. The next three chapters now deal with the Buddha's 'Dharmabody', which is held to represent the absolute reality of Buddhahood. The Dharmabody is considered from

three points of view: (2da) as the body of doctrines, or teachings, in chapter 6; (2db) as the result of guosis in chapter 7, and (2dc) as the result of merit in chapter 8.

S: Well the basic theme of this chapter is that the Buddha is not to be seen by the possession of his marks - you can't recognise the Buddha simply from the marks. That is to say the marks of a superman which he possesses. (Pause) One cannot, that is to say, recognise a Buddha from anything external. Later on in the Sutra it says that even the Chakravatin raja according to tradition possesses the 32 marks, so how then is one to distinguish between the Chakravatin raja and the Buddha as they both appear the same externally. It does tie up with some of the things I was saying sometime ago, quoting Ruskin, do you remember? Asking the statue or the image or representation generally of Apollo. (Long Pause)

Do you think Conze is right in contrasting so much the Buddha as perceived with the eye of Faith as the Buddha as Wisdom perceives him?

Subhuti: He seems to identify in a way, faith with popular devotion or something like that, he doesn't mean faith in any very spiritual sense.

S: Certainly not faith as the emotional equivalent of wisdom. (Pause) In effect we tend to give Precedence to the conceptual mode or approach over the imaginal type of approach. In other words it assumes that wisdom is or is more adequate expression in terms of concepts than it finds in terms of images. Because one might say, suppose one did have a representation of the Buddha complete with these 32 signs or 32 major marks and four, I think it is, minor

signs. Well they are no doubt according to tradition the marks of a superman, but couldn't one do better than that so to speak,

in representing the Buddha. Do you see what I mean? If one is thinking in terms of an image of the Buddha one isn't simply thinking in terms of representation of a figure bearing the 32 marks. One is thinking in terms of a figure which expresses wisdom and compassion, energy, peace and so on. (Pause) And that sort of image is the object of, well maybe even popular devotion, but certainly of the kind of faith which is the "emotional" counterpart of wisdom. It's as though Conze is assuming that the Buddha, who is the object of faith, is simply the

Buddha as conceived of as possessing these 32 marks. It doesn't seem necessarily to be the case.

Shantiprabha: Where did this concept of the 32 major marks actually come from? Is it Buddhist or is it perhaps pre-Buddhist.

S: Well one doesn't really know. It's represented in the Pali Canon as, so to speak, pre-Buddhist. Learned Brahmins are represented as being well versed in these 32 marks and immediately recognising them on the Buddha himself. Until recently I was of the opinion - I must have read this somewhere years ago - that there was no reference to the 32 marks in pre-Buddhist Vedic Literature, but when I was in India I did come across one reference to this sort of; I can't remember it just now. It's one of the things I'll have to follow up, but certainly the 32 marks do not figure to any degree of prominence in Hindu literature. Whereas clearly the Pali literature represents the Brahmins of the Buddha's day as being well equipped with these, it represents knowledge of these 32 signs being part of the standard equipment of a learned Brahmin.

Many Brahmins of today haven't even heard of them if they haven't read Buddhist texts, they certainly haven't come down to the present day as part of Brahminical tradition.

Subhuti: It's a very bizarre list to make much sense of.

S: Yes. I think it's Rhys Davids, who comments that some of them do seem to have a sort of aesthetic quality, aesthetic value. Others seem to be purely symbolical and others seem to be left over from the sort of conception of the cosmic man, the Purusha of earlier pre-Buddhist, Vedic tradition. According to some account I read that some had attributes of the God of fire (Agni). It is a very strange list indeed. But as Conze points out it

was general Buddhist tradition, general Buddhist belief, that the Buddha was equipped with these 32 marks on account of his performance of the Paramitas in previous lives.~resumably Conze doesn't say so but I think it would be the first five paramitas because you may remember and I think I have said that when the Buddha is represented in Tibetan art with two haloes, one around the body and the other around the head, the halo around the body represents the ~vL~~~~VU~ - the accumulation of merits, which is of course also connected with the 32 marks or body as possessing the 32 marks. Whereas the halo around the head represents the or the accumulation of knowledge of wisdom. Again there is the point that it is to some extent assumed, in some cases assumed, that the Buddha bore his 32 marks on his physical body, but on the other hand he's shown in some episodes as not being recognised by certain people until he teaches. Whereas if he had actually borne the 32 marks on his physi~al body, well surely he would have been irn+iately recognised as the Buddha, or as an extraordinary person. So it is therefore sometimes said that the 32 marks are marks which the Buddha bears on his subtle body not on his physical body. On the subtle material or on the astral counterpart of his physical body. Images of the Buddha do not in fact represent him usually as equipped with all 32 plus 84 of these signs.

They represent him as equipped with some, with the ushnisha for instance, the Bodhic protruberance of the crown and the hair, the curl above the eyebrows, even the swastika on the chest, but not much else. Because if you try to introduce too

marks the figure begins to look a little grotesque. (Pause) For instance one of the marks is that the hands hang below the knees, which to us would appear rather silly almost. But one must remember that one of the epithets of a hero in Sanskrit is long-armed, so clearly it's to represent his sort of leng~ of reach. The long arms of the hero who is capable of fighting. In fact if represented literally to that degree well it certainly offends against our aesthetic feelings.

Shantiprabha: We do have a similar saying in our culture, we say the long arm of the law. (Laughter)

Subhuti: It is such a persisttflt theme in the Pali Canon. It's difficult to know what to make of it because it's not as if it was an isolated incident you could sort of explain it away as symbolical

S: There's a whole Sutta about it anyway sutta.

Subhuti: Yes. Have you ever formulated any theories?

S: I haven't. I've been on the look out for years for any references to these 32 marks or to any o~ We~ in pre-Buddhist literature. I think one would need to go into, one would go into Vedic literature quite thoroughly. My suspicion is that these 32 marks on the whole are sort of left over from the Vedic conception of the cosmic man. Well, you may or may not know that in many civilisations, in many cultures, there's the ideal, the concept of a sort of primeval, archetypal man, are you familiar with this? This is not an original ~v~cas~~ like Adam. Not a prim ord~al progen'ttor of the human race. In the Kabbalah for instance there is the concept of the heavenly Adam, Adam I think he's called. The sort of archetype of humanity~you could say. And in the Vedic literature you have this conception of the (~rus~~ in that sense and it is sometimes said, well there are hymns, Vedic hymns where the creation of the wOrld~ the creation of the ~~~~~rse~is described in terms of the sacrifice, the dismemberment of the primeval, cosmic or archetypal man. This seems to be~,quite common, quite a persist~nt theme in early myth and legend. So it would seem to me that some the attributes, so to speak, of this purusha,

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this cosmic, this archetypal man, have been sort of gathered together into a sort of tradition about a superman a(Mahap rasha~ and maybe the significance of the whole thing lost and then the whole body of attributes as they survived com~ to be associated with the figure of the Buddha or superimposed on the Buddha. So the Buddha inherited something of the sort of numinous quality of that original~purusha)figure. (Pause) So I think if one wanted to delve into the matter and try to get to the bottom of it, to understand what these marks were all about. I think one would have to investigate Vedic literature quite closely and this whole concept of the pvrusha. (Pause). It's as though the Buddha, though this also applies to the Chakravartin raja takes on something of the quality of archetypal man. It's as though the Buddha in becoming Enlightened from this point of view becomes a sort of model or archetype or pattern for other men in a spiritual rather than in a sort of mythological sense, do you see ~~~kat I mean? One must perhaps also bear in mind that the primitive culture~hich were perhaps not quite so primitive as we usually think didn't have any sort of evolu- tionary view, any evolutionary idea in the way that we had. They didn t think in terms of man being descended from the apes, descended from, or modelled after some kind of celestial pattern and this very roug~Ly or very broadly speaking was the heavenly man. (Pause) So there is a sort of celestial or heavenly pattern or archetype of man to which in a sense man not exactly Co,t~or~1 'o')~ which he must discover within himself. And the Buddha comes among other

things to represent that and this is presumably why he takes upon himself the marks of the so-called superman or (Mahapurusha). It's as if, by becoming Enlightened, by becoming the Buddha, fulfils that ideal. It could

well have been that in the Buddha's day there were ~',~ who did possess lists of these 32 marks or marks. ~ perhaps

na& forgotten whatever the ancient Brahmins originally knew

about their significance or their meaning. It's just become a list. (Pause) And also it is quite interesting that these 32, and I believe the 84 marks also, are possessed not only by the Buddha but ~C~akravartin raja - that is to say the so-called universal monarch. This suggests a close association between the two and of course we know there is the legend, the prediction, by the sage that the infant Gotama would either become a Buddha or would become a Chakravarti raja. If he went forth