

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

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

DS9. 161 it's ~ ~ ~ &

..S: (cont.) like if you do exercise and you're rewarded for that by an increase of your muscles. Do you see what I mean? It's not a reward, it's the natural result with which you are left - you are changed, you are different, your muscles are bigger. So in the same way, if you perform skilful actions that changes you, it modifies your being, you are left with some positive gain, and that positive gain is what we call merit, punya. You become a more positive person, a better person. One can look at it in that way too.

Greg Harman: It does seem that er, through, um this word merit seems to be like that. I mean if you give um ... something in return ...

S: Well, in a sense there is a return in the sense that there is a result, there is a positive result, something does ~cc~to you, your actions do affect you, they rebound upon you, so something rebounds to you, to your credit. Obviously one shouldn't think too much in these terms - some Buddhists do. They're keen on their merit. Bhikkhus as potential sources of merit, provided they're good bhikkhus. Some laymen in some Buddhist countries seem to regard bhikkhus as sort of merit-making machines. Put a penny or

a rupee in the slot, and out comes the packet of merit. (laughter) _____: I've heard that somewhere they sold their merit.

S: Yes, that's true. That is an incident mentioned in the 'Survey', where a Jain - not a Buddhist - a Jain ascetic, who practised asceticism for many years, then decided he wasn't going to continue the spiritual life, but he'd accumulated a lot of merit, so he sold it to another ascetic (laughter) and with the proceeds he set himself up in business (laughter). I actually heard this story in India. (pause) The Jains are even more literalistic than are the ~ra~mins, (~ some ~~~\v~~~~L ~s~ou\&~?~. It's not perhaps beside the point that Bhagavan Rajneesh was born and brought up as a Jain °. (unclear) ... ~e's possibly still reacting against his faith. (pause)

Vessantara: The popular version of this idea of merit seems to leave aside the state of mind with which you actually perform the action.

S: Yes. Yes, it seems to be regarded as an almost mechanical

process. (pause) There's a curious conception which I've never

I~~.

S: (cont.) been able to investigate. I've heard of it in, I think it must be in popular Theravada, of the punya-devata: the merit-god. There's a sort of punya-devata hovering over you. I remember my friend Sangharatna referring to the punya-devata, every now and then. I don't know whether it's a canonical conception, I rather doubt it. But the concept of your merit as calling into being a sort of punya-devata.

_____ : An individual ...

S: Apparently an individual one~a sort of guardian angel, because he protects you. I've not had the opportunity of investigating all this. (pause)

~~~~~&: It's a sort of poetic idea, i~£ ~o~- . -

S: Yes, indeed, yes. But you know, the Theravadins are really good at spoiling poetry by taking everything literally (laughter).

Subhuti: What about the last, "And why ? For ...", why does that arise, in fact

S: The last sentence ? That seems very inconsequential indeed, doesn't it ?

Subhuti: Yes, yes.

S: "And why ? Because from it has issued the utmost, right and perfect enlightenment of the Tathagatas ... and from it have issued the Buddhas, the Lords." That's fair enough. "And why? For the Tathagata has taught that the ~harmas special to the Buddhas are not just a Buddha's special dharmas. That is why they are called 'the dharmas special to the Buddhas' " It seems a complete inconsequentiality there. Perhaps there is some thread of spiritual connection ? (Yes) they're called 'Buddhadharmas', these special attributes of the Buddha, mm ? ( ~harma \erc

the Buddha, a~~~~ts ~~~~~

Vessantara: Seems to be almost a sort of common Perfection of Wisdom version of the syllogism, seems to be a sort of 'A is not A, therefore it's A'

S: Mm (pause)

Subhuti: Something else is suggested by this. Conze heads this section, 'the Dharmabody as the result of merit'.

~sc'. t~3.

S: Yes, yes, I noticed that

Subhuti: I'll just, just, it just occurred to me

S: ... quite beside the point.

Subhuti: Unless, unless what he's

S: ... (unclear) beside the point.

Subhuti: Unless what he's taken it to be is sort of the special dharmas of a Buddha, are, as it were his, the attributes of a Buddha are the sort of consequences of, of the merit of the Buddha, in some sense.

S: The Dharmabody in the sense of the Dharmakaya cannot be the result of merit ( as we saw in previous sections ). The Dharmabody can only be the result of prajna. Perhaps he regards these eighteen Buddhadharmas as making up the sort of Dharmakaya, which could be the connection~aL~ produced by Prajnaparamita

(pause). is of course somewhat confused rather than 'I

clarified by saying that these, the dharmas special to the Buddhas III " is why they are not the Buddha's special dharmas, and that~, That

are called the 'dharmas special to the Buddhas'. It could be that there's some sort of conception sort of~limmering in the background, that Buddha's eighteen special dharmas as being the result, being the product, being the outcome of the Prajnaparamita which he has realised~ ~his enlightenment.

: Seems like a more subtle form of the thirty-two marks.

S: Mm, yes~a~~C~\~\&t a4~~

(That they~~egat~~~ .~

S: Transcendental counterpart. The thirty-two marks are the product of punya, but these eighteen attributes presumably are the product of prajna. (pause)

~s9. 164

Side two.

S: If someone would like to read 3a. "The Four Great Saints" down to the end of 3b. "The Bodhisattva's thought of Enlightenment"

3. THE RANGE OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

so far about the first eight chapters. In chapters 9 to 12, the orchestra plays the same tune once again, but with some variations and in a different key. The Sutra first considers (3a) the four great, or main, Saints of the Hinayana (chapter 9), and after that the Mahayanistic Bodhisattva first (3b) at the beginning of his career (chapter 10a), then (3c) near its end (chapter 10b), and finally (3d) at its very end (chapter 10c). This again, as in chapters 6 to 8, leads us to the Dharmabody (chapter 10c), and to the merit with which that is bound up (chapter 11, 12).

~. The four Great Saints

Chapter 7 already referred to 'the saintly persons', and claimed that they have all gone beyond karmic coefficients and the distinctions of conditioned life. Elsewhere, however, the Scriptures tell us that Streamwinners, etc., obtain a distinctive fruit of their conduct. How can this contradiction be resolved? The answer lies in the statement, also found in chapter 7, that no dharma can be grasped or expressed in words. - In consequence none of the saints can grasp a fruit as his own. For the true nature of any object a Saint could obtain is unconditioned emptiness, and the assumption of a separate subject, or 'self', as the partaker or owner of the fruit, would also be clearly erroneous.

9a. The Lord asked: What do you think, Subhuti, does it occur to the Streamwinner, 'by me has the fruit of a Streamwinner been attained'? Subhuti replied: No indeed, O Lord. And why? Because, O Lord, he has not won any dharma. Therefore is he called a Stream-winner. No sight-object has been won, no sounds, smells, tastes, touchables, or objects of mind. That is why he is called a 'Streamwinner'. If, O Lord, it would occur to a Stream-winner, 'by me has a Streamwinner's fruit been attained', then that would be in him a seizing on a self, seizing on a being, seizing on a soul, seizing on a person.-9b. The Lord asked: What do you think, Subhuti, does it then occur to the Once-Returner, 'by me has the fruit of a Once-Returner been attained'?-Subhuti replied: No indeed, O Lord. And why? Because there is not any dharma that has won Once-Returnership. That is why he is called a 'Once-Returner'.-9c. The Lord asked: What do you think, Subhuti, does it then occur to the Never-Returner 'by me has the fruit of a Never-Returner been attained'?-Subhuti replied: No indeed, O Lord. And why? - Because there is not any dharma that has won Never Returnership. Therefore is he called a 'Never-Returner'. -9d. The Lord asked: What do you think, Subhuti, does it then occur to the Arhat, 'by me has Arhatship been attained'?-Subhuti: No indeed, O Lord. And why? Because no dharma is called 'Arhat'. That is why he is called an Arhat. If, O Lord, it would occur to an Arhat, 'by me has Arhatship been attained', then that would be in him a seizing on a self, seizing on a being, seizing on a

soul, seizing on a person.-9e. And why? O Lord, the one whom the

Tathagata, the Arhat, the Fully Enlightened One has pointed out as the foremost of those who dwell in Peace. I am, O Lord, an Arhat free from greed. And yet, O Lord, it does not occur to me, 'an Arhat am I and free from greed'. If, O Lord, it could occur to me that I have attained Arhatship, then the Tathagata would not have declared of me that 'Subhuti, this son of good family, who is the foremost of those who dwell in Peace, does not dwell anywhere; that is why he is called "a dweller in Peace, a dweller in Peace

The division of the supramundane path into four stages, each marked by a distinctive type of Saint, is a venerable ingredient of the whole Buddhist tradition. At present we look at these dwellers in the transcendental realms from such a distance, that they all may seem pretty much the same to us. It will nevertheless help us to understand the meaning of the text if we attend to the standard definitions of the four types of Saints: A 'Streamwinner' is one who forsakes three fetters, i.e. the view of individuality, the contagion by mere rule and ritual, and doubt, or perplexity. A 'Once-Returner' is one who 'attenuates' sensuous greed and ill-will, while a 'Never-Returner' manages to get quite rid of them. An 'Arhat' finally forsakes the five 'higher' fetters, i.e. greed for the world of form, greed for the formless world, excitedness, conceit and ignorance.

In 9i~ this lore is confronted with the dharmic facts, and found wanting. The word dharma here means 'a really existing thing'. ~ then refers to a famous passage in the Scriptures of all Hinayana schools, where the Buddha enumerates his eighty chief disciples as being, - each one, the foremost in some distinctive spiritual achievement. Sariputra there is the one foremost in 'wisdom', meaning Abhidharma analysis (see p. 8i). In the Suttas on the 'Perfection of Wisdom', it is, however, Subhuti, a secondary figure in Theravadin and Sarvastivadin writings, who is held to be most qualified to expound 'perfect wisdom' and 'emptiness' (A xvi 306, xxvii ~54). Anguttara Nikaya (1 24) names him as the disciple who won Arhatship on the basis of meditation on friendliness and who, teaching the dharma without distinction and limitations, is the 'chief of those who live remote and in peace'.

What then is this dwelling in Peace in which Subhuti is said to excel? The Sanskrit *a-ran a*, is one of those words with manifold meanings in which these Suttas abound. The word may denote freedom from strife, battle, or fighting, i.e. harmlessness; or freedom from passion and any kind of defilement, i.e. purity; or it may also mean that Subhuti lived in solitude, retired from the world, in a remote forest, in quietude and peace. A man is 'peaceful' if he has inward peace of mind and if he behaves peacefully towards others. Subhuti's deep insight is the fine flower of his friendly behaviour.

'I am an Arhat free from greed.' It was customary for Arhats to testify to the fact that they had achieved Arhatship. so we read in Theravadin (p. 424) that, 'when the Ven. Vitasoka had attained Arhatship, he experienced the happiness and joy of emancipation, and he thought to himself, "I am indeed an Arhat"'. Likewise, Ashvaghosha in his beautiful poem on Saundarananda describes how Nanda the Fair 'related to the Buddha his success in attaining his object', and said (xviii 10): 'My births are now extinct. I live, as one should do, from practice of true Dharma. My tasks are all accomplished. What had to be done I have done. Still in the world I am, no longer can the world affect me!'

~S9 I~~

S: This chapter seems very concerned with self-consciousness or over self-consciousness, with regard to one's spiritual attainments - putting it simply. I'm reminded that there is a passage which reflects this sort of attitude in the Pali canon itself. I think I've quoted it somewhere - it might even have been in the 'Survey' - but there's a little incident, a little episode where Moggallana meets Sariputra. Sariputra has been spending the whole day in the forest meditating, and Moggallana remarks that Sariputra's face is bright and shining, and Sariputra says in explanation that he had spent the whole day meditating and abiding in, I think it was second dhyana. And he says that, 'though I spent the day abiding in second dhyana there never came to me the thought that I am abiding in second dhyana'. Do you see what I mean? There's a sort of parallel. It's as though one must not be self-conscious or over self-conscious with regard to the spiritual states that one has attained. If you grasp too strongly at a spiritual state, what you're grasping at is not a spiritual state at all. And by grasping at it you show that you haven't attained it. Or by insisting on your attainment too strongly you make it clear that in fact you haven't attained it. It's not that in a way the Arahant doesn't know that he's an Arahant because Subhuti says: "An Arahant am I~~free from greed'. ... If, O Lord, it could occur to me that I have attained Arhatship, then the Tathagata would not have declared of me ... ~' etc etc. On the one hand he is aware that he is an Arahant, but we could introduce a distinction and say that though he is aware of it, he isn't conscious of it. Do you see what I mean? It's not that he's ignorant of what he's attained, but he doesn't insist upon it, he doesn't make it an object of grasping, for it isn't an object, he doesn't see it as an object. If he has to express it, if he has to talk about it, he has to present it to other people as though it was an object which he has attained, but he's only conforming to linguistic usage, he doesn't really think or feel, himself, that he has attained to anything in that way - that's why he's attained it. (pause) So, bringing the whole thing down to a much more ordinary everyday level, how would one look at this?

: Could you ...

S: There is a principle here which is valid, I think, at every level of spiritual life, so what would that be?

-(~,--, I was going to say, could you use the sort of analogy

of physical fitness again? you know, like if you do exercise you can't really think in terms of possessing fitness, but you know that you are fit.

S: Well, perhaps you could say you devote yourself to developing your health and strength (I mean) you don't actually become a (?phallic) narcissist. You'll know what I mean if you've read your (?Reich).

: You're not doing it for °t~self. You're not result-orientated really.

S: It's even more than that because you should be result-orientated. If you're doing physical exercises you're out to produce a certain result in the form of increased fitness. But what should, what

should your not be nonetheless ?

: You shouldn't settle down.

S: But does that mean you should carry on your physical training indefinitely ? Try to become fitter and fitter, and get bigger and bigger muscles ?

You don't see it as an end in itself. ~S:~S~you don't see it as an end in itself

Subhuti: You're not sort of appropriating it

S: You don't pride yourself in it. You don't sort of stalk around sticking out your chest and anything of that. You're not over-conscious of yourself having a better physical development than~ certain other people. You're not full of yourself, in that sort

of way. (long pause) There is Dharma pride.

S: U~vA . Not exactly Dharma-pride, there is a Vajrayanic term Budd

>How would this differ ? (pause) Is it pride in the literal sense ? If not, well, what is it ?

Could be the natural expression of er, (what's achieved)

S: In a way, but not quite.

Subhuti: Buddha-pride doesn't involve egotism at all does it ? It's a bit like being an Order member and thinking that because you're

~s9 ~ '~.

Subhuti: (cont.) an Order Member a certain standard of behaviour is, sort of expected, well is expected

S: Except at that level there's no sort of conflict at all. You cannot but think that you belong to the Buddha family and therefore you should, well not that you should, because there's no conflict of what you would rather do/what you should do - that is how you are just going to behave. That is the natural and appropriate behaviour. Your Buddha-pride is not pride in yourself, it's pride in the family to which you belong, so to speak. And since you are a member of that family you cannot let that family down. you can only behave in a way that is appropriate to a member of that family. But again, as I've said, at that level there's no conflict between what you'd like to let the family do~wn occasionally, and you know~ what you~should do ,i.t. not let the family down, no, there's no conflict.

Subhuti: You say, 'at that level', but er, Buddha-pride, sort of as~it were, technically pertains to what level ?

S: Well, quite an advanced level inasmuch as it is a Vajrayanic concept, and inasmuch as the Vajrayana presupposes the Mahayana, so you should be a fully-fledged Bodhisattva. In fact, I mean technically, according to tradition the whole of the Va~rayana takes place within the tenth of the bhumis of the Bodhisattva. This is tradition. So that is quite an exalted ½ - level. Therefore I think I'm justified in speaking of 'that level'; in saying it's on that level.

Subhuti: Yes.

S: I don't know if anybody has ever heard of 'Holy Willie's prayer' ?

No ?T~(laughter) Scot's have. Well, 'Holy Willie's prayer'

is a well-known satirical poem by Robbie Burns, and the speaker is none other than Holy Willie, a pious Scottish Calvinist, who's offering up thanks to God that he's not as other men, that he's much more pious than other men are, you know, barring a few minor slips like drunkenness and fornication (laughter) But he's over-conscious, I mean he's very, very highly conscious of whatever small merit he possesses~ that's the point~of the satire. Obviously that's an extreme case in a very warped tradition anyway~ (laughter) of over-consciousness of 'spiritual' in inverted commas, you know, merits.

~S9. I 69.

\_\_\_\_\_ Can you understand this passage so that this whole attitude is bound up with the first fetter perhaps, and that both from the fact that one has attained Stream Entry, it is not possible to ...

S: Yes, yes, because this passage is concerned with the fact that one shouldn't simply transfer one's worldly attitude of acquisitiveness and possessiveness to so-called spiritual things and so-called spiritual attainments. If one transfers that sort of attitude to those so-called spiritual attainments, those so-called spiritual things, they lose their genuinely

spiritual quality. You cannot have a possessive attitude towards enlightenment. You can have a possessive attitude towards your house and your dog, and you can continue to possess your house or your dog without that possessive attitude. But there's no possibility of having a possessive attitude towards enlightenment, because if you have a possessive attitude towards your concept of enlightenment it's clear proof that you haven't attained enlightenment at all. So even on the ethical level an over-consciousness of one's own virtues is a serious defect, or represents a serious defect in those virtues themselves. You certainly shouldn't be, all the time hitting other people over the head with your virtues. That's what Holy Willie wanted to do. Perhaps we should prevail upon our Caledonian friends to read 'Holy Willie's prayer' to us on some occasion (laughter). Some of them probably know it by heart anyway. Every true Scot knows the works of Burns by heart (laughter).

a Scottish voice ) : What was wrong with Holy Willie: was that he was trying to put other people down as well, he wasn't ... he's just...

S: Well you can't put yourself up without putting other people down, really. You can't put God up without putting humanity down. Well, his worldly prayer begins - I can't imitate a Scottish accent, which is a pity - but it begins something like, he addresses God as:

'O Father in the Heavens dost dwell  
And who, as pleases best thyself; Sends one to Heaven,  
and to Hell,

All for thy glory (laughter) Not for any good or ill  
They've done for thee.'

This is a masterly exposition of Calvinism in a nutshell. Burns hits

~o. ~S9. S: (cont.) the nail well and truly on the head, and so the poet proceeds .  
(pause) I think that this poet should be better known in the FWBO. He got into serious trouble on account of ?~~~ ~'~ There were a lot of ... (unclear) ...

Yes, Conze says: " 'I am an Arhat free from greed' it was customary for Arhats to testify to the fact that they had achieved Arhatship. Uhm, clearly this is a somewhat risky procedure because then, suppose a tradition develops, that you know, you attain Arhatship, well you testify to that. Well some people might think that they'd attained Arhatship and think that they were bound to testify, mm ? And perhaps a sort of tradition develops that, well, & as a matter of sort of politeness, it's expected of you, you testify to Arhatship. In the Zen tradition there's a bit of this - people sort of proclaim their (?kensho) don't they, their insight. Or the Master proclaims that, then all the good boys who'd attained (kensho) in the course of the retreat axe stood up in front of the class and praised - which doesn't seem quite the right sort of thing to do. I think sometimes t~e~'re even given certificates, go to the top of the class. (pause) But presumably it is quite difficult to speak about any personal spiritual attainment or insight without appropriating it. This is perhaps why the sort of, 'a~ ~ central tradition of (

Buddhism encourages a sort of healthy reticence.

So one isn't to sort of exploit one's own experiences, even when thoS~ experiences are quite genuine, quite authentic. If something is imparted quite naturally in the course of

communication that is one thing, but one doesn't go about sort of proclaiming one's experiences or insights.

I mean a pentecostal christian might give an address on 'How Jesus saved Me' but a Buddhist would not give a talk on 'How I gained enlightenment'. It's unthinkable.

Chakkhupala; In the Pentecostal church that I belonged to there was a practice of fasting which was quite common. It was also commonly understood that it was extremely immodest and very unspiritual to mention to anybody the fact that you were fasting. You could always tell who was. They looked very hungry and were very quiet! (Laughter).

S: Could be why I've not met any. (Laughter) Well this is based upon a passage in the gospels isn't it, where Christ is represented as saying that if you do fast conceal it from other people and be bright and happy so that they shouldn't know you are fasting. They

perhaps didn't get as far as that. (Laughter) ~ Chakkhupala; They managed the first bit.

S: Anyway it's a step in the right direction-maybe we shouldn't be too hard on them. (laughter). I've known people on the FWBO observing silence not to say celibacy going round with a rather self-conscious air. I remember one of our Friends on a very early retreat used to walk around with a rather stern countenance and someone might come up to him and just speak a few words and he'd look at them and he'd lift up his arm and here he'd written 'Silence'~ (Laughter) because he was observing silence. A little on the self-conscious side. (Laughter). But Nietzsche touches upon this in connection with chastity. I think if you are observing chastity i.e. celibacy, then do it in a sort of carefree-lighthearted sort of way. Don't make too much heavy weather of it as though it's such a very big thing. Or such a great virtue. (Long Pause)

Subhuti; Why do you think Subhuti is the protagonist in the sutra?

S: Well it would seem that Sariputra could not very well be brought forward because he is already firmly associated with the Abhidharma type wisdom, that is to say wisdom in the sense of analysis. So presumably the compiler, if there was a compiler, if one is to talk about it in this sort of historical way, has to find somebody else, and the Anguttara Nikaya names him as the one who won Arahant on the basis of meditation on friendliness which is in itself very interesting and who is teaching the dharma without distinction and limitation is the chief of those who live remote and in peace.' Perhaps it's this combination of meditating on friendliness-because that suggests one aspect of the Bodhisattva Ideal-and then teaching the dharma without distinction and limitation which is suggestive of the other. So it's perhaps by reason of that sort of combination that he was selected.

\_\_\_\_\_ You'd think he'd be more liable to tend towards becoming a Bodhisattva - -

S: Well yes one would but then one comes up against this whole question of how literally one is to take the Arahant ideal. He seems in this sutra to be quite open to the Mahayana teaching in fact to give quite clear expression to it.

Gerry; ; When I read this about meditation on friendliness I couldn't help thinking of your idea of getting to Insight through the practice of the four Brahma Viharas.

~S9. 17~

S: This is not the standard Theravada view but apparently it is said that Subhuti did win Arahantship "on the basis of meditation on 4.~&~\~t( which is quite significant. It's " on the basis of~, it doesn't say directly by means of that. Perhaps one should be a little careful in drawing any conclusions. Yes Conze doesn't mention it but the word for forest is 'arajna' hence the play on 'arana' and arajna

\_\_\_\_\_ What's the difference between arana and ksanti?

S: Well arana, if you take it literally is a negative-term. Rana

is strife, battle or fighting as Conze says and A-rana is the negation of that. Ksanti does seem to be the more positive quality at least it's grammatically positive rather than negative.

While we're on this question of the 'eighty chief .1

disciples' - the Buddha enumerates his eighty chief disciples as

being, each one, the foremost in some distinctive spiritual

achievement. This is quite interesting. ( Working , 'c\c )

saying that there are these eighty chief disciples of the Buddha and the Buddha in a sense praises them, praises each one of them for being foremost in one particular quality or achievement. So what does this suggest?

\_\_\_\_\_ They weren't all the same.

S: They weren't all the same, yes. They were all arahants it would seem. But they weren't all the same, and not only that

Subhuti; Each one excels in his own individual way.

S: Each one excels in his own individual way. Perhaps it's almost as though the Buddha is pointing that out and sort of making it clear that within the Sangha at the highest level

there's a sort of whole galaxy of talents ~hat people aren't all good at the same thing even though they may all be enlightened they still have their individual talents and skills which presumably they can use, presumably they can employ.

Subhuti; It also gets away from a competitive spiritual

5 Yes indeed. Th~ir~~£~~ ~?~ complementary. Again it's like the thousand arms of Avalokitesvara, each holding a different weapon or a different implement or a different emblem. They're not all holding a hammer and a chisel or even a fountain pen or a pocket calculator.

Gerry (err; I thought~~t was principally because seeing

that living beings different things~ ~ coul~Tdo~t'~e same

~sq. thing. I 7~

S Well that's true. n in the case that I mentioned the different Arahants are all endowed with individual talents and 5k~ll5~50 the Arahant who is most suited to approach certain people is sent to those people. If a certain group o~eople need a sort of scholarly exposition of th#harma you don't send an Ar ah ant who's merely good at building work, you send an Ar ah ant who's good a~xpounding the ~harma. So it amounts to the same thing.

\_\_\_\_\_ So practically speaking variety is a key attribute.

S: Variety is quite necessary to th4variety of talents we're equipped with in the Spiritual community, within the Order. One shouldn't expect everybody to be good at the same thing

So this Anguttara Nikaya passage seems to suggest that even Arahants possess, maintain their individual talents. They are

better at some things than at others. How much more so inkhe case

of Bodhisattva~ presumably. perhaps Bodhisattvas are by virtue tha4~dhisattvas of the fact somewhat more versatile than the

~rahants, perhaps one could reasonably expect that. ((~~ ~s the Boddhistattva ideal itseif to be versatile,but,

you know, in the case of the novice Bodhisattva~~o~~ there are limits tot'~rsati~ity.~ts noqeasy to imagine somebody, even a Bodhisattva, individual Bodhisattva, being really good at everthing.Even the Buddha wasn't good at everything. Subhuti; ~ seems to be a really important concep~ because in your usual experience of , say your career, or whatever,you think of getting to the top : and you getting to the top means that other people don1t- there's ~ace on.Whereas with the spiritual life its not like that at all.

S; Yes.Als~f course one, ~"S~ ~ay that Buddhist art someti~es gives an entirely wrong

impression as regards this differentiation~ this efflorescence of different talents. ~r instance there is ~cene representing the Buddha and a number of his disciples especially in modern popular Buddhist art in different Buddhist countries, well you get the ~uddha shown as if it were full scale, large as life, and you get the bhikkhus shown as smaller scale replicas of the Buddha, exactly the same as the Buddha, except that they don't have the (usnisa), do you see what I mean. And they are all exactly the same, exactly the same robe, exactly the same shape of head, exactly the same bowl, exactly the same meek expression, sometimes slight difference of features,

I ~. but they really are little rubber stamps of the Buddha and this creates a really false impression, one not borne out by the scriptures themselves.

Amoghavira; ~hing that struck me when I first moved into a

community was that under no other circumstances would I ~i~e with these people ... they are just so different from e.

S: It's not just a question of the people being different but their having different talents, and exercising these different

talents, ~ cooperatively or in collaboration with one another, and that does, yes ~s Subhgti, you know, this

Subh L-i, says, or that Subhuti rather, reduce competitiveness ~ you haven't all got to be good at the same thing.

A voice: You couldn't be an individual.

S: No. (pause) In a sense you're all (pause). And of course you shouldn't over-value your own talent-that's another aspect of the general theme. You shouldn't think the particular thing you are good at is the most important thing of all. No doubt certain talents are more useful than others. But I think one should be very careful not to try to introduce a sort of strict hierarchy of talents.

Subh lti: ...the talents they have aren't useful talents, by

and large, if you see what I mean ~.~

S: They are spiritual endowments, ~spiritual practices.

Subh ~ti: Yes, yes.

DAY 4

S. Let's go on to 3b (pause) and read up to 3c. Thank you very much.

(pause)

### 3b. The Bodhisattva's thought of Enlightenment

The career of a Bodhisattva begins, as we saw at chapter 3, with the 'thought of enlightenment', which is the vow to win full enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. In the life of Shakyamuni, 'the historical Buddha', this happened when he met the Buddha Dipankara, his twenty-fourth predecessor, from whom he received the assurance that he was destined for Buddhahood.

10a. The Lord asked: What do you think, Subhuti, is there any dharma which the Tathagata has learned from Dipankara, the Tathagata, the Arhat, the fully Enlightened One? Subhuti replied: Not so, O Lord, there is not.

- The Tathagata who learned dharma from Dipankara is the Buddha Shakyamuni, who speaks here.<sup>1</sup> One might infer that Shakyamuni at that time 'learned', 'accepted', 'received' or 'took over' some dharma from Dipankara, because, if he had not done so, how could he have formed the desire to emulate Dipankara, by becoming a fully enlightened Buddha, who is one who has understood the Dharma? This inference would, however, contradict the teaching of chapter 9, according to which there is no such thing as a dharma, and in actual fact Shakyamuni received no dharma from Dipankara—he heard no doctrine, and no real entity passed over into him.

DS 10

1 ~G.

S. This is quite important - especially in view of the rather literalistic way in which some Zen Schools seem to regard the transmission of the Dharma, that there is something literally transmitted from master to disciple down the centuries and going right back to Shakyamuni by virtue of having handed over to you

whatever it was that Shakyamuni handed over to (

Voice Is that how they see it? I'd always understood it as more as a matter of - I suppose partly this question of authority, you know, as each disciple had his understanding verified by the teacher, who had his understanding verified back to the Buddha.

S. But it is certainly how they speak of it, this sort of something handed down, something handed on~ even though they, well they speak of transmission, the word used is transmission, not verification though they also use that word. Transmission seems to be the key word, or key concept~ ~hat there is something definitely handed down which is not in the scriptures. ~ special transmission outside the scriptures. Pause.

Do doubt the best instructors ~e'A don't quite see it like that - as a transmission in( literal sense. But there is no doubt that many disciples do.

But here the Buddha makes it completely clear, and the Diamond Sutra is supposed to be one of the Sutras especially cherished by the Zen Tradition, the Buddha makes it quite

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S.. clear there's nothing transmitted. But then what does happen? It raises that question.

Pause

Sometimes the example is given of one candle being lit from another

or a flame from another. It is not that something literally

passes over.

Pause.

If you think of something literally passing over, you're thinking of Dharma in sort of material

terms.

Voice: i~\$ connected to , you know, lcoming

under the influence of

S: Yes, yes.

Long Pause

So in a sense, one would say, strictly speaking, there's no such thing as Buddhist ~radition ~f one understands tradition rather literally, not to say literalistically. There isn't really anything handed down, not anything that is genuinely Buddhism or genuinely the Dharma. There can be a cultural tradition but strictly speaking there can't be a spiritual tradition in the sense of something literally handed on or handed down, like a precious vase transmitted from generation to generation until somebody drops it.

(Quiet amusement followed by long pause).

Voice: This idea of sort of predicting, of the repredicting of the disciple to Enlightenment, in some ways it seems to bring IV' predetermination and predestination.

Yes, yes, but does it? I mean, this I suppose is parallel to the

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S.. discussion not to say controversy in Christian ~heology ~-& between human  
freewillL foreknowledge ~ what human beings will

do.

Subhuti: I always assumed that it meant stream entry.

S: It can't do because the Buddha is being predicted to Samyak- Sambuddhahood, which means he's on the path of the Bodhisattva> not on the path of the Arahant.

Subhuti: Yes.

S. So there's no question of stream-entry for him. Of course some later Mahayana traditions do place the two paths, as it were, end to end. But I think this is not quite legitimate - it

is rather begging the question. But usually in the Mahayana ~ ~s&o~

and certainly, I think here in the \ \ Sutras, the path of

the Arahant and the path of the Bodhisattva are considered alternatives - if you enter upon the one, you do not enter upon the other. So if you aspire to be a Samyak-Sambuddha, thereby becoming a Bodhisattva, you do not enter the Arahant you do not therefore gain stream-entry. Otherwise, that would be a way of looking at it, but well, it would be (predictive through) C because he entered the stream. But it is not a question of predicting the Arahantship consequent upon entering the stream~but a question of predicting the Samyak-Sambuddhahood which is a different thing. So

Subhuti None the less, there is a point of no return isn't there?

DSIO I ~9

S'. None the less there is a point of no return~ but if one was to go outside that

particular... one would then have to, as it were, somehow connect  
the two paths, bring

together, to unify them, to integrate them and then ask whether there was not a point of no  
return of some kind which Shakyamuni reached on that occasion and by virtue of which he  
could be predicted to Full Enlightenment, because that step having been taken, the rest, so to  
speak, follows as a matter of course. But then one would need to reconcile - divergent  
traditions, The Hinayana, The Mahayana because once you've gained stream entry, according  
to Hinayana dogmatics, you obtain Arahantship within at most seven births. But in the case  
of the Bodhisattva you have an innumerable series of (WO u ea

rebirths awaiting you over three Kalpas before you gain

Samyak-Sambuddhahood, according to Mahayana dogmatics or Hinayana cum Mahayana  
dogmatics. So you will have quite a lot of reconciling to do, if you adopted that particular  
solution. Probably a lifetime of research ahead of you. (Laughter and pause)

So, one probably cannot regard the prediction as based upon inference. That is to say that,  
not that Dipankara sees that this young man, SL' cJ b£ , as he was before he was  
enlightened, has entered the stream and therefore it can be inferred that he will gain  
enlightenment, and therefore he be predicted to that - it is not that - resumably Dipankara  
directly perceives.

~~~~~: It's usually, when the Buddha prophesises ,he gives the name

of the Buddha or what he will be called when he becomes a Buddha and what his
Buddha- & k) \o~

Pause.

DSIO

sce"„% I ~O.

S. So, thus prediction involves a direct perception rather than the result of inference.

Pause.

Voice: One of the powers of the Buddha is seeing the karma

S: Yes.

Voice: So would that be how that would manifest, the karma of the future?

S.. Well, the (uo~~t~r~ eri~ie jS the same in that on the one

hand, to begin with, the Buddha sees that the experiences which beings have at present are the results of karmas committed in the past and he sees that karmas which they are committing in the present will have certain definite results in the future. So here also it's a question of perception which operates independently of time. In that sense, it's direct - not a matter of inference.

He sees ~ specific experiences 'v' the present are the result of specific experiences in the past.

S: Yes, for instance, he sees people having certain experiences in the present. He does not infer, according to tradition that therefore they must have performed certain corresponding actions in the past. He actually sees what those actions were. Similarly, he sees them performing certain actions and see what the results will be, not by way of inference, apparently, but more by direct perception,--which suggests a sort of faculty of perception which transcends time.