

## 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*

## The "Heartfelt Advice to Rechungpa" seminar

Held at: Padmaloka in September, October and November 1980 (Full Moon Days)

Those present: Sangharakshita, Subhuti, Abhaya, Kovida, Lalitavajra, Sona, Kulananda, Andy Friends, Colin Millar, Clive Pomfret, Chris Pegrum.

S: If someone reads the whole of the first song and the introductory paragraph then we'll go through it verse by verse.

Subhuti: "At one time the Jetsun Milarepa was staying at Ramdin Nampu with his son-disciples, Rechungpa, Drigom Repa and others. One day, while Rechungpa and Drigom Repa were having a long debate about the teachings of Naropa and Medripa, the Jetsun commented, 'First listen to my song, then continue your discussion'".

My Gracious Guru always sits upon my head,  
The realization is always in my mind.  
Oh how can one describe this joyful feeling!

Listen you two, one Repa and one priest,  
Who still linger in the realm of action.

If you do not understand within,  
Your noisy bark will but inflate  
Your pride and egotism.

Is not the clearance of misunderstandings  
Within called the 'Endless View' - a yogi's glory  
Confirming reasons and the Scriptures?

Is not Nhamdog dissolving in the Dharmakaya  
Called spontaneous practice - a yogi's glory  
Confirming meditation principles?

Is not self-purity of the Six Senses  
Called the action of One Taste - a yogi's glory  
Responding freely to times and changes?

Is not the Experience of the Bliss-Void  
Called the function of the Whispered Lineage ...  
A yogi's glory conforming with  
The Four Initiations?

Is not the art of brightening Sunyata  
Called the Stages and Bhumis of the Path ...  
A yogi's glory witnessing  
The sign posts on the way?

Is not the consummation of Self-mind  
Called the attainment of Buddhahood  
In one life - a yogi's glory  
Confirming the Four Bodies?

Is not a possessor of the Pith-Instructions  
Of reason and the Scriptures called  
A Guru with a Lineage - a yogi's glory,  
Embodiment of Love and of Compassion?

Is not one with compassion and great faith  
Called a disciple with great capacity  
A yogi's glory embodying  
The merit of veneration?

One must observe the mind to gain a decisive  
View. To win progress one must meditate;  
One must act to reach the consummation.

Perfection of Mind is the Accomplishment;  
The Fourfold Body of Buddha is  
A presence and Realization.  
He who knows one knows all."

S: All right then, 'At one time the Jetsun Milarepa was staying at Ramdin Nampu with his son disciples, Rechungpa, Drigom Repa and others'. You notice this phrase "son disciples". What does that suggest?

\_\_\_: They're very close to him.

S: Very close to him. Sometimes in these songs heart disciples and son disciples are mentioned. As far as I recollect son-disciples are closer than heart-disciples. But to go into that a little bit more heart-disciples are close and son-disciples are close but in what sense do you think are son-disciples perhaps closer than heart-disciples? What exactly is meant by a son-disciple? That involves asking what is meant by a son. Clearly there's an analogy here between biological son-ship, biological fatherhood and the spiritual equivalent. So what is the point of the comparison?

\_\_\_: The inheritance.

S: It's the inheritance. It's the same spiritual genes, as it were, transmitted though obviously it's more than a question of literal transmission. The Buddha in the Pali texts says quite often to the disciples, to the bhikkhus that is, you are my own true sons born of my mouth, born of the Dharma. So a son is born as a result of the impregnation of the mother but the spiritual son is born from the Buddha's love that is to say the Buddha's teaching, from the Buddha's communication of the Dharma. He goes on to say born of the Dharma so it's a spiritual birth. So this suggests in a way that [3] the disciple is sort of impregnated by the Buddha's word, and having been impregnated in that way, gives birth to himself, that is to say his new self, that resembles the Buddha, resembles the teacher because he's born of the Buddha's mouth,

born of the Buddha's teaching. So there's something like that suggested in this expression, the son-disciple, in the case of Milarepa in relation to Rechungpa and the others. It's as though there's not only a sort of biological begetting but also a spiritual begetting. It also suggests that the disciple is, as it were, feminine in relation to the guru and having been, as it were, spiritually impregnated through the teaching as I said gives birth to himself, that is to say his new self, his spiritual self which is of course like the teacher; the guru, hence his son. In other words you're not his son, Rechungpa is not Milarepa's son before that sort of spiritual rebirth takes place. He's not just his son by going along and listening to him and spending a lot of time with him etc., etc. But only after he's been spiritually reborn as a result of listening to Milarepa's teaching and being deeply influenced by it so a son-disciple presumably is one in whom this process has taken place. Others are just disciples, even heart-disciples but they're not son-disciples.

So 'One day while Rechungpa and Drigom Repa were having a long debate about the teachings of Naropa and Medripa.' Medripa is Maitripa, Naropa of course is the guru of Marpa who was Milarepa's guru, and Medripa or Maitripa is another great spiritual, Tantric master of the same family, so to speak. So Rechungpa and Drigom Repa were having a long debate, discussion, about their teaching and the Jetsun commented, 'First listen to my song, then continue your discussion'. So what do you think that means? First listen to my song, then continue your discussion.

Kovida: He's telling them that they're wasting their time.

S: Because the text says, 'were having a long debate.' They'd been discussing a long time. Maybe they weren't getting anywhere, so what does that suggest? What do you think might have been happening?

Kulananda: The process was somewhat reactive.

Subhuti: Taking sides.

S: Taking sides almost or it could have been just rather theoretical, rather dry, rather academic, not based on any experience. So then he says, 'First listen to my song.' Well obviously Milarepa's song will be based upon his own experience. It's as if he is saying listen to my song, listen to the voice of someone with experience, because after all have Rechungpa and Drigom Repa met Naropa and Maitripa? Have they actually met them as far as one knows? No. So what have they got, they've got their teachings. So what does that suggest? They're not in personal contact with either Naropa or Maitripa but they've got certain teachings of theirs. We're not told how they've got them or in what form they've got them. Maybe they've [4] got them in the form of written texts or maybe they've just heard about them. But they're not in contact with Naropa and with Maitripa themselves. No doubt their teachings whether written down or not written down are expressions of their inner realization but then Rechungpa and Drigom Repa are not directly in contact with the authors of those teachings, they've only got the teachings to go by so there is a possibility of, as it were, misunderstanding, of them preoccupying themselves only with the letter of the teaching because the teacher is not actually there to check them at every stage but Milarepa himself is there. So when he says first listen to my song it's as though he is saying listen to the song, listen to the voice of someone who has the actual spiritual experience and then interpret the teachings of Naropa and Medripa in accordance with that. Because since they've only got the

teachings of Naropa and Medripa, they haven't got Naropa and Medripa themselves they're interpreting those teachings just in accordance with their own limited understanding, their very limited understanding, with no possibility of that being checked or corrected if necessary by either Naropa or Medripa so it's important that they are in contact with someone like Milarepa who is able to teach them directly in accordance with their needs from his own actual experience.

Kovida: In a sense they're not in contact with the tradition.

S: They're not in contact, you could say, with the living tradition, they're only in contact with the words of the tradition, the teachings, that is to say in verbal form whether written down or not written down but they're not in contact with the people from whom those teachings originate from, whom they emanate, so they've got a stage further removed. Maybe those teachings have been handed down through several generations of disciples so there's room for misunderstanding on the way. So it's necessary for those teachings to be illuminated by someone who has got some personal experience. So this little episode illustrates the whole difference between you could say the Hinayana and even the Mahayana on the one hand and the Vajrayana on the other and this is why the Vajrayana emphasizes the importance of the guru because the guru is the person with personal experience, with personal understanding who enables you or helps you to understand the written records of the teaching which is very difficult for you to do by yourself. So the Theravadin will say well we've got the Pali texts, we've got the Tipitaka. All we have to do is read but that Tipitaka has been handed down through generations of disciples. You can't be sure that you've got a correct and accurate record, you can't be sure that they've all understood. Even if they have understood and even if a correct record has been transmitted to you how can you be sure that you really do understand in the absence of some spiritual experience on your part. So the Vajrayana would say that even if you do have the actual scriptures, even if you do have the words of the [5] Buddha himself you can't usually be safely trusted to understand and interpret them yourself. You need to study them with a teacher, with a guru who's got a deeper understanding of them than you do yourself. So this is one point of difference say between the Hinayana and the Mahayana on the one hand and the Vajrayana on the other. It's as though in the Vajrayana the guru represents the living spiritual tradition, not just the words in which that tradition is embodied. It's not enough to have the words of the tradition, you need the living spirit of the tradition, here represented by Milarepa as well. The scriptures contain teachings of say general significance or teachings that were addressed to other people and not to you. But the guru is in contact with you, he sees what your specific need is. So in the light of his own experience, in the light of the general principles laid down in the scriptures he can give you the teaching that you actually need. This is again why the Vajrayana stresses the importance of the guru so much.

So he says, 'First listen to my song, then continue your discussion.' He's not saying that they shouldn't discuss the teachings of Naropa and Medripa but they've got to have a proper basis for discussion. So he's asking them to listen to him, to listen to the voice of actual spiritual experience and then in the light of that continue their discussion. One has probably often had this experience of hearing people discuss this or that aspect of the Dharma and you can see that neither of them have really got a clue but they're having a vigorous discussion. Maybe they're agreeing, maybe they're disagreeing but perhaps neither of them have got much understanding of what it is that they are talking about.

Then in the first verse of Milarepa's song he says, 'My gracious guru always sits upon my head, the Realization is always in my mind. Oh how can one describe this joyful feeling!' What does he mean by saying that his guru always sits upon his head?

Clive: He's always with him.

S: He's always with him, yes.

\_\_\_: He looks after him.

\_\_\_: There's that influence always there.

S: Yes, but basically it means he always remembers his guru. The basic meaning from which all the others develop is that. He never forgets his guru. There is a Vajrayana visualization practice where you visualize the guru immediately above one's head - this is part of the guru yoga practice. So this is a very specific form of remembering the guru. So you get this sort of idiom of keeping the guru always on the top of the head. So this means always remembering the guru and feeling the presence of the guru in a very vivid, concrete sort of way. Not just remembering him in a casual way. Since he's on the top of the head it means remembering him with respect, [6] remembering him with veneration, remembering him with devotion etc. as you do when you actually visualize the guru as being immediately above the head. You understand the significance of the top of the head, the crown of the head, the topmost part of the body, the most honourable part of the body. So it's with that part, as it were, that you come into contact with whatever is above, in this case the guru.

When Milarepa says my gracious guru always sits upon my head it is not that the guru is taking the initiative so to speak and coming and sitting on his head, it means that he himself always keeps the guru sitting on his head, that is to say he always visualizes the guru as sitting on his head. He always remembers the guru and he remembers him with respect, devotion, veneration etc., remembers him with all that is best in himself and establishes constant contact with his guru at that highest level of himself. The guru of course not representing simply the human personality but the embodiment of the ideal. So Milarepa you may remember always begins his songs with this sort of invocation or this sort of mention of the guru but here it's especially appropriate in view of the circumstances under which he is singing this song because Rechungpa and Drigom Repa have been just debating the teachings of Naropa and Medripa without apparently as far as we know being in spiritual contact with them whereas in the case of Milarepa he is maintaining his contact, his spiritual contact with his guru Marpa all the time - that is part of his general experience one could say. That is with him all the time and it's out of that recollection at least in part that he is giving the teaching contained in the song. So in a way there's a contrast between their attitude of being concerned simply with the words of the dharma and Milarepa's attitude of being concerned with his guru and with his own actual spiritual experience. So he says my gracious guru always sits upon my head, I never forget him. It also means something like he is a constant source of inspiration, it also has that sort of connotation. Elsewhere he refers to the guru as the crest jewel because in ancient India sometimes if you had a sort of top knot you tied it up with a string or a thread and you could tie a jewel in that as a sort of ornament or decoration so you'd select a particularly precious jewel for that purpose especially if you were a wealthy person or a king. So the most valuable jewel that you have, the most valuable object that you had would be placed right at the top of your head. So the guru is compared with that very often, just like

a precious jewel that you keep right at the top of your head and it also as I said has the connotation of a source of inspiration. The crest jewel is a sort of idiom in Indian literature generally of what is most precious and what you most highly value or what you respect or look up to or which gives you happiness. So when Milarepa speaks of Marpa always sitting on his head there are all these sort of suggestions and connotations.

So 'my gracious guru always sits upon my head, the Realization is always in my mind.' So what does he mean by that exactly? The [7] 'Realization', and in the translation it has a capital 'R', 'is always in my mind.' It's slightly ambiguous in English. It can mean either that he constantly enjoys that higher spiritual realization, that higher spiritual insight or it can mean that he never entirely forgets it. He may not always be in full enjoyment of it. His experience may fluctuate but he never entirely loses touch. The realization is always in his mind at least to the extent of his always bearing it in mind, of never forgetting that he's had it. So to the extent that he really remembers it to some extent at least he is then actually experiencing it. So in this opening verse he describes or rather he refers to two things. He refers to his own constant recollection of his guru and his own perpetual realization. He refers to the fact that he never forgets his guru and also that he's never altogether out of contact with the higher spiritual realization. In contrast to his two disciples who are at least for the purposes of this story only in contact with the words of the teaching.

And then he says, 'Oh how can one describe this joyful feeling.' In other words, there's a feeling of constant inspiration and encouragement because he always remembers his guru and a feeling of constant attainment one could say, because he's always in touch at least to some extent with the higher spiritual realization. So he feels that he's got everything he needs - he's in contact with his guru, he's in contact with the Dharma in the truest sense, the Dharma in the sense of an actual spiritual experience so he's perfectly happy, he's got nothing to worry about. He's joyful, not only joyful, he's indescribably joyful. He says oh how can one describe this joyful feeling. Perhaps that also is meant to suggest that Rechungpa and Drigom Repa are not joyful in the way that he is. They don't have those two sources of joyful feeling.

Anyway he goes on and says, 'Listen you two, one Repa and one priest, who still linger in the realm of action.' So the Repa is of course the cotton-clad ascetic or yogi of the Kagyupa tradition. Priest presumably translates Bhikkhu, that is to say there are these two kinds of spiritual practitioners, one following the tradition of the sutras and the other following the tradition of the Tantras. But they're in much the same position. One of them is a freelance yogi, the other is an orthodox monk but here they are having this long debate about the teachings of Naropa and Medripa and not getting anywhere apparently. So the fact that one is a freelance yogi not ordained as a monk and that the other is ordained as a monk and is following the rules very strictly is coming to the same thing in the end for both of them. They're both involved in this rather useless discussion. So one could sort of paraphrase it and say well whether you're technically a follower of the Hinayana or technically a follower of the Mahayana or technically a follower of the Vajrayana that doesn't really matter very much. The point is are you able to get beyond the words of the [8] teaching. Are you actually in contact with a teacher. Do you actually have any spiritual experience of your own? These are the things that matter. So therefore he says 'listen you two, one Repa and one priest.' He says listen, stop your debate, you can continue that later on in the light of what I'm going to tell you but for the time being listen, you've done enough talking so just stop and listen you two, one Repa and one priest who still linger in the realm of action. So what is this realm of action do you think?

Kovida: Karma?

S: It's something like karma. It's not very clear what technical term this translates but clearly it refers to the whole samsara, the Wheel of Life. All their debating, all their discussion isn't doing anything to get them off of the Wheel of Life. There is no spiritual value. So he draws attention to the fact that even ostensibly religious activities like debating about these teachings can still be essentially worldly in character and not help one to get off the Wheel of Life, in fact can contribute to the Wheel of Life still turning. The fact that one is a Repa and the other a bhikkhu doesn't really help them very much, it's quite external apparently. They are still lingering in the realm of conditioned activity of various kinds. Do you think this word linger has any significance - that they're lingering? After all one is a yogi, one is a bhikkhu, they ought to be getting on with it, they ought to be really treading the path, they ought to be getting off the Wheel of Life but they're not. They ought to be getting away from action based on ignorance and craving but they're not doing that. They're lingering in the realm of action, that is to say action based on ignorance and craving. It suggest malingering. In the army especially malingering suggests just putting up an appearance of activity or putting on an appearance of activity. They put on an appearance of religious activity but it isn't really religious activity. It's spiritually meaningless.

So then he goes on, 'if you do not understand within, your noisy bark will but inflate your pride and egotism.' So what is this understanding within? This suggests that understanding without... within here means inside so understanding within, understanding inside is contrasted with, apparently, understanding without, understanding outside, so in what sense can one be said to understand without or outside, what would that mean?

\_\_\_: Just in terms of the letter.

S: Just in terms of the letter but why do you think outside?

Sona: Understanding with the intellect but not in the sense of insight.

S: You remain external to it. It remains external to you. It's out there. Something that you see and understand intellectually but which doesn't have [9] any relevance to you, which doesn't affect you, which you don't feel, which doesn't influence you, which doesn't transform you. You understand it but you are alienated from it. You're at a distance from it, it's at a distance from you. It's an objective understanding in a quite alienated sense. This is something which is very, very common isn't it? You can understand something in this so to speak alienated fashion and understand it quite well but in a way you don't understand it because you don't actually come into contact with it. There's no element of feeling in your understanding and it's the feeling that establishes the personal contact or personal connection. Your understanding is, as it were, scientific. So that presumably is understanding without. This sort of pseudo objective understanding that doesn't have any transforming influence on you and therefore if you do not understand within, that is to say if your understanding is not conjoined with feeling. If it doesn't have a transforming influence on you, if you don't really assimilate, then your noisy bark will but inflate your pride and egotism. This presumably is a rather disparaging reference to their debate. It's just like two dogs barking at each other. If they don't have the internal understanding, if their understanding is purely external and intellectual, if the teaching since they don't understand it within, doesn't have a transforming effect on them they'll be just left unchanged. They'll be left just as egotistic as before and their discussion



will only contribute to the increase of their pride and egotism. So Milarepa's emphasizing the importance of truly understanding the teachings, not only those of Naropa and Medripa but spiritual teachings in general. Not understanding them just externally but understanding them internally, understanding them with feeling. Feeling seems to be the significant factor here. Feeling provides the link, the connection between the object and the subject. You have to develop a feeling for the teachings, not a sentimental feeling of course, a spiritual feeling. It's just as in the case of poetry, you can read a beautiful poem, you can understand it but it can leave you cold, you haven't really understood the poem because you've not brought any feeling to your understanding of it, you haven't read it with feeling.

Clive: You can develop a feeling from a particular aspect of the teaching.

S: This is usually what happens. There's some particular aspect of the teaching that arouses your interest or you develop a feeling for it and from that you proceed or you progress to the other aspects. So in a sense it doesn't matter which aspect you have a feeling for to begin with. The important thing is to have a feeling for some particular aspect of it or other and make a start there. So the word understanding is perhaps not quite adequate. It's not a question of understanding in the purely intellectual sense but understanding and feeling and assimilating.

\_\_\_: Is worship a development of that sort of thing?

[10]

S: Hmm. One could say that but worship just pertains to the whole emotional side. Worship is basically devotional and emotional in character and what this verse is saying or is suggesting is that unless there is an understanding within which means the feeling must involve an element of feeling, then there's no transforming influence so it may be that devotion or the feeling develops to the point of devotion or faith or not but at least some feeling must be there for the understanding to be understanding. You can notice this if you look in some Buddhist magazines or if you read some books on Buddhism, it's quite evident that the person has written that article or written that book with what one can call external understanding. That's all that that author has brought to the subject, an external understanding. He's got all the facts right perhaps but in a sense he's totally wrong.

Kovida: There's nothing of himself in it.

S: There's nothing of himself there except in a very indirect and alienated sort of way.

Clive: If you have external understanding it doesn't imply internal understanding but if you have internal understanding it presupposes the external.

S: Yes, the internal includes the external but the external doesn't include the internal. So external understanding is an understanding which is not part of yourself, which is dissociated from yourself, which suggests that your understanding itself, your intellect, is dissociated from your self, that it's an alienated intellect which is exactly what is represented in Blake's symbolism by the figure of Urizen. Urizen represents this alienated reason, this alienated intellect and according to Blake this alienated intellect is especially dominant in Newton, Bacon and Locke, the founders of modern Western civilization practically. So you could say that it's not only a question that one is not able to understand the teachings with this alienated

intellect, one can't understand anything with the alienated intellect. One can't understand life with the alienated intellect. From Blake's point of view the whole of modern science is an attempt to understand life by the alienated intellect. There's recently been a book published on Newton and according to reviews Newton was even technically insane. But the whole of modern science with recent modifications perhaps is based you could say on Newton's world view, a world view created by an alienated intellect. The world view of Bacon and Newton, perhaps Locke too to some extent, is the world view that underlies the whole of our scientifically, industrially, technologically based civilization. So you can't understand the Buddhist scriptures, you can't understand spiritual teachings with that sort of alienated intellect and as I said you can't understand life itself with it. But this is what we have for the most part, this is what most people have, a sort of alienated intellect, an intellect which is not a living [11] part of themselves, the intellect which is not a sort of expression of their living selves but something which has become separated from them and which has acquired a sort of factitious life of its own. So you can't really understand anything with that sort of intellect. That's the sort of intellect that one brings to the study of Buddhism and to life itself. So you could call that external understanding as distinct from internal understanding, the internal understanding of course being fused with an emotional element. So from Milarepa's point of view and from Blake's point of view the whole modern Western way of looking at things is deeply alienated.

Kovida: It must be a sort of characteristic of humans.

S: It is a characteristic of humans. It does seem that a degree of alienation in inverted commas is essential to the evolutionary process but it's a quite fine balance. It's all right for the self-consciousness to be developed, without the development of self consciousness there's no higher evolution but if self consciousness is over developed and if the intellect becomes alienated from the rest of the being, especially from the emotion well then also no higher evolution, no further development can take place. So to some extent the self-consciousness, the intellect, has to develop a life of its own but it can't do that too much, it has to remain in contact with the being as a whole especially with the emotions.

Clive: You say develop a life of its own, what use is that?

S: Because one is originally in a state of simple sense consciousness so one has to... the next step is that one develops self consciousness in the sense of reflexive consciousness. You are able to see where you stand as an individual and therefore you are able also to imagine yourself as you would be in the future, you are able to imagine an ideal and develop towards that but by virtue of the fact that you are able to do that if your self consciousness becomes extreme you can think of yourself in a quite alienated sort of way and completely lose contact with the rest of your being. So the mere fact that you can envisage an ideal for yourself contains the seeds, that is to say the potentiality, of alienation. An animal cannot form an ideal for itself - in other words cannot imagine the possibility of a higher development - because an animal cannot think of itself. But when you become self conscious you are able to think of yourself, that is to say you are able to think of yourself as subject, as object. That is a very dangerous thing to do. It enables you to form an ideal for yourself and then to develop in accordance with that ideal but at the same time it alienates you from yourself, if you're not careful. So therefore the ideal has to be kept very close to the actual needs of the living person. This is something that Lawrence was going on about constantly. He was totally against ideals because for him ideal was a dirty word. It was a product [12] of the alienated

intellect, pure and simple. So therefore this self-consciousness or the intellect which grows out of self-consciousness is a very dangerous weapon indeed. It can point out to you the next stage in your development so that you can so to speak gear yourself up to that. But on the other hand it can lead you completely in the wrong direction. So people like Lawrence and people like Krishnamurti, they over react, they say don't have any ideals, it's too dangerous but that is no solution because it means you're left with simple sense consciousness and you can't do that because even if Lawrence says don't have any ideals he is still thinking in terms of ideals and Krishnamurti the same. He ties himself in endless knots in this sort of way.

Clive: So a healthy self consciousness sees enough for the next step.

S: Yes.

Clive: How can you develop a thumb rule for that?

S: A rule of thumb suggests something theoretical but again that is on the wrong track already because it cannot be just theoretical, it must be an actual feeling or experience. You must ask yourself what you actually feel. Do you feel in touch etc., etc.

Kovida: It's predestination.

Clive: What I meant was there's a healthy degree of alienation in this and I was thinking what is the healthy degree of alienation.

S: Well where you are still in contact with your feelings and able to experience them and where you can see the connection between your present feelings and the ideal. If the ideal is so remote that it has no point of contact with you at all, with any of your present feelings then it's alienated. It may be true abstractly but so far as you're concerned it's just a product of alienation. There's got to be some actual contact, you've got to have some feeling for the ideal as formulated. So you may have to bring the ideal down a bit. There are people who have discussions about Nirvana. Nagabodhi sent me the third issue of Western Buddhist which is the organ of the Scientific Buddhism movement, and there's an editorial note saying in the next issue they're going to tell the reader all about Nirvana, they're going to give a scientific explanation of Nirvana!! (Laughter). This is the alienated intellect at work with a vengeance and despite Nagabodhi's very well written article on the subject they just have not seen the point, they've not grasped it. So here they are with these alienated intellects busily devising this scientific explanation of Nirvana for their next issue. So all the things that the Buddhist scriptures say about Nirvana no doubt are perfectly true and completely valid but as repeated just as those definitions or definitions as repeated simply by people's alienated intellects, have got no value at all, they are not actually an ideal. An ideal isn't just a sort of abstract thing. An ideal [13] is an ideal for life, as it were. It's got to have a definite relation to life. You've got to feel that relation, you've got to feel that kinship or sympathy with the ideal. If you don't it's a product of pure alienation and therefore it's not an ideal for you. So we have to sort of steer a middle way here. Not have an ideal which is so abstract and so remote and so unreal that we can have no feeling for it but at the same time not have such a low ideal that it virtually coincides with our present feelings and inclinations completely. The ideal must always be a little bit beyond but not too far beyond, not so far beyond that we can't feel any connection with it.

\_\_\_: (Isn't the ideal of the individual for the Tibetans quite adequate)?

S: Yes. Provided of course one doesn't take individual in the usual sense of just someone who is a bit individualistic or assume that everybody just because they've got a separate body, is an individual already. Otherwise you already are your ideal. If you think that then no progress is possible. But one of the features of the alienated intellect or the reflexive consciousness is that it is able to abstract itself or oneself completely from the existing concrete situation and formulate a conception of oneself which is totally removed from what you actually are and then turn that into an ideal with which you have no connection. This is what happens and that is very dangerous indeed.

Clive: Often the ideal that is produced in that situation is one that springs out of the emotional psychological state in the person. For instance they might lack in some...

S: Yes. It can be compensatory. You can have people who have an ideal of love for instance but that can be compensatory and they can have it in a purely abstract sense without any feeling of love in themselves at all. But they can be sort of intellectually convinced that they are very loving because they've got this actually quite abstract ideal of love as their ideal. For instance they take it for granted that they're full of love - why? - because they worship the god of love, that's their ideal so of course they're full of love. Not only that, they're actually worshipping the god of love, they must be full of love but actually that is a purely abstract ideal for them. It's only the word love that is there. They don't actually feel love in most cases.

Sona: Would you say that Socrates had an alienated awareness? He's always sort of dissecting everything but there doesn't seem to be any concrete ideal.

S: This is I think the view of Nietzsche, that Socrates' activity was essentially destructive. One does get that impression. Reading Nietzsche on Socrates it does seem quite convincing. He also makes quite a lot of [14] the fact that Socrates was ugly. He thinks that is significant. That he had a snub nose and protruding eyes and so on and also his voice. That suggested that he was alienated from something within himself which sometimes spoke to him in this sort of way and told him not to do something, not to do this and not to do that. So, yes, you can make quite a case out for Socrates being in fact a quite alienated individual, a very gifted individual but nonetheless alienated and contributing to the development of the alienated Western consciousness. But perhaps it's essential. Socrates perhaps marks the transition from the naive thinking of the pre-Socratic Greeks to the more sophisticated self-conscious thinking that you get from Plato onwards. But nonetheless there is a strong case to be made out for Socrates having done a great deal of damage.

All right so 'If you do not understand within, your noisy bark will but inflate your pride and egotism.' The teachings are meant to overcome things like pride and egotism but if you don't have a genuine deep understanding of them - if your understanding is purely intellectual, then you can use those teachings and deal with those scriptures in such a way that your pride and egotism only increase. You can pride yourself on knowing the scriptures very well and being a great scholar in them etc.

'Is not the clearance of misunderstandings within called the 'Endless View' - a yogi's glory confirming reasons and the Scriptures?' So is not the clearance of misunderstandings within called the endless view. Perhaps we'd better take this word view a bit literally as translating

the Sanskrit drsti or Pali ditthi which we get in samyak drsti and micchaditthi. So is not the clearance of misunderstandings within called the endless view. As one's understanding becomes more and more an internal understanding and less and less a purely external understanding, as your understanding becomes more and more a matter of personal experience, all sorts of misunderstandings... misunderstandings about the Dharma, misunderstandings about life, misunderstandings about yourself, misunderstandings about other people, misunderstandings about reality, these will be cleared up. I think this is a recognizable or well known feature of deepening spiritual understanding. That misunderstandings are cleared up and the misunderstandings usually arise out of a purely external understanding. So as the understanding becomes more and more internal, more and more a matter of understanding within, naturally misunderstandings are cleared up and this is called the 'endless view'. Now why should it be called the endless view?

\_\_\_: Nothing obstructing.

S: Nothing obstructing, yes. Or take it quite literally, an endless view. An endless vista. An infinite vista, an infinite perspective. This suggests infinity, this suggests freedom, this suggests sunyata and it [15] suggests that in all your misunderstandings you've just limited your view so far. So when misunderstandings are cleared up it's as though everything is opened up, everything is expanded. I was reading the other evening something by Dr Suzuki, a talk he gave many years ago, he was supposed to be talking on the supreme spiritual ideal but he chose to talk in his own Zen way. So he started talking about a little thatched hut back in Japan, a little thatched house back in Japan and he said that he used to get up in the morning and the first thing he did was to open his window and then he said in Japan certainly if you lived in an old style thatched house, opening your window was quite a different thing from opening your window in England where he was giving the talk. He said because in Japan if you live in one of these sorts of houses, when you open the window you just take away the whole of the side of the house because the window is... there's just a transparent sliding screen. So you just slide the whole thing back - that's opening the window. Opening up the whole side of the house and he said then when you've done that the house extends into the garden and the garden extends into the house. There's no difference between them. So that's more or less like the infinite view. But he said in England windows are just holes made in the wall and you just peer out of them. So you can say that's like the more limited view, isn't it? That's like the sort of misunderstanding. In the case of the more limited understanding you're just peering through a hole in the wall. You see something but you don't see very much. But in the case of the infinite view, the endless view, there's no wall there at all. You could even say there's no house there at all. There's no limitation, there's no obstruction in any direction. So this process should go on constantly. It should go on all the time. It should increase in fact. As you get a deeper and deeper understanding of the teaching, as it becomes more and more a question of understanding within and not a question of understanding without. As the intellect is less and less alienated, more and more united with the emotions. In fact the higher emotions. So he says is not this a yogi's glory. So glory suggests a sort of radiance, the halo in religious art is sometimes called the glory. So it's as though as the yogi through his meditation gradually transforms his external understanding into an internal understanding there's a sort of aura spread around him, a sort of glory spread around him. This is the yogi's glory, the glory of realization you could say 'confirming reasons and the Scriptures.' In Buddhist thought traditionally there are only two, as it were, sources of authority, sources of true knowledge. One is reason and the other is experience. In the Hindu schools, in the Vedic schools, the Veda is regarded as an independent source of valid

knowledge. In Indian philosophy there's a great discussion about the sources of valid knowledge. These are called pramanas. How many pramanas there are. According to the (Charvakas) the materialist, there's [16] only one which is sense experience. Anything that you can't experience through the senses just doesn't exist. It's only the senses which are a source of valid knowledge. The Buddhists hold that there are two sources of valid knowledge. One is experience at all levels, sense experience, mental experience, spiritual experience and so on and reason. Buddhists accept, that is to say Indian Buddhism traditionally accepts reason as a source of valid knowledge. Reason in the quite technical sense of valid inference. You could say logic, accept that as a source of valid knowledge. As an independent source of valid knowledge. The Hindus, the orthodox Hindus, accept that the Vedas are an independent source of valid knowledge, that is to say as a pramana because they are revealed at the beginning of the cosmic period by Brahma. So Hindus will not accept as true anything that contradicts the Vedas. Buddhists do not accept the Hindu Vedas as independent sources of valid knowledge. So then the question arises where do the Buddhist scriptures come in. Originally the Buddhist scriptures did not come in at all because the only valid, the only sources of valid knowledge were reason and experience on all its levels. But later on it came to be thought that the Buddhist scriptures after all did contain a record of experience, that is to say the Buddha's experience and the experience of his disciples. So they came to be regarded also as in a sense authoritative but only as slices so to speak of human experience, enlightened human experience, not as an authoritative scripture in the Vedic sense. So in the end it came to be considered important that there should be an agreement between these three things, that is to say reason, the scriptures as the record of the Buddha's experience and your own personal experience in meditation and so on. So therefore Milarepa says, 'Is not the clearance of misunderstandings within called the 'Endless View' - a yogi's glory confirming reasons and the Scriptures.' So it is important, so to speak, that your own personal experience should be in accordance with reason or at least should not contradict reason, because it may go beyond reason, it should not contradict reason on its own level and should be in accordance with the scriptures but of course with the scriptures as interpreted by the understanding within, and that may differ very much from the scriptures as interpreted from the understanding without. In other words if you are on the same spiritual path as the Buddha so to speak it is to be expected that your experience if it is genuine will more and more coincide with his. So your own experience should be confirmed by the scriptures, though obviously not by the letter of the scriptures only. So you would expect that in the end you would find these three things in perfect agreement - reason, the Buddha's teaching in the scriptures and your own experience. You would see in a way that these were just almost three aspects of the same thing.

Kovida: Why is there any distinction between reason and experience? I [17] wouldn't think you'd be able to deduce anything without experience.

S: Reason is not entirely separate from experience because reason deals with matters of experience. For instance reason in the technical sense of inference, valid inference, that is to say if you take it in its syllogistic form. You've got the famous example: Socrates is a man, all men are mortal, therefore Socrates is mortal. So this is an example of rational thought, an example of inference but what is the subject matter of the inference. It is Socrates and Socrates originally must be a matter of experience.

Kovida: It does seem to be (a sort of actual experience).

S: But again in its abstract form it isn't because you can give examples of deductive logical processes using letters and not any actual things. You say all A is B etc. etc.

Kovida: But how do you relate that in experience. If your (touchstone) is relating to your own experience within, an abstract logical formulation.

S: The abstract logical formulation enables you to understand clearly the process and then you can apply that to the raw material of experience. So you don't have any inference, any concrete inference dissociated from experience but you can have experience which is not made the subject of logical statement of logical inference, so the two are distinct. Experience is not enough. Inference enables you to predict also.

Kovida: So in a sense it's a function of mind.

S: It's a function of mind. An animal for instance doesn't reason or at least a few of the higher animals reason in a very rudimentary way but not in the very sophisticated and elaborate way with whole chains of syllogisms that a human being does.

Kovida: In a sense it's not a separate verifiable method because it's not separate from you.

S: Well in that sense nothing is separate from you obviously. Nothing that you do is separate from you.

Kovida: Anyway it seemed like the way (... unclear ...)

S: Well even the Vedas aren't separate from you in a sense because the Vedas are revealed through the Rishis who are human beings but the Veda according to Hindu belief doesn't have any beginning or any end. It isn't created. So it's quite different in that sense but Buddhism doesn't accept any such Veda. In other words it doesn't accept anything which is not a part of human experience. Reason is also a part of human experience in the broader sense but within that you distinguish these three things. You distinguish the rational process. Something established as valid through the rational process, something established as valid through your personal experience and that being in agreement with what you read in the scriptures.

[18]

So if you find that your experience agrees with reason or does not contradict reason and is also in harmony with what you find in the scriptures then you can be quite certain that you are on the right path. It's so to speak an additional check or that there are two additional checks. So therefore Milarepa says 'a yogi's glory confirming reasons and the Scriptures.' And then he says,

'Is not Nhamdog dissolving in the Dharmakaya called spontaneous practice - a yogi's glory confirming meditation principles?' So what is this Nhamdog, we've met it before. It's the flow of thought, the ceaseless flow of thoughts. I think - this is my guess - it represents the Sanskrit (Cittadhara) which means almost like a waterfall of thoughts. It's this constant flow or stream of thoughts. It also suggests distraction and mental disturbance because when you try to meditate and to be one-pointed it's this that disturbs you. It's the flow of thoughts all the time. So is not Nhamdog dissolving in the Dharmakaya called spontaneous practice. So what is the Dharmakaya? There are three kayas, Niramanakaya, Samboghakaya and Dharmakaya. The

Dharmakaya is the highest spiritual reality, it's transcendental reality as actually realized and in that sense as having become the 'body' in inverted commas of the person realizing it. If you realize something you incorporate that, you assimilate it, you embody it don't you so in that sense it is your body. So the Dharmakaya is the highest reality as realized by you and therefore has become your body. It's not an abstract and therefore one speaks of the Dharmakaya of the Buddha, you don't speak of the sunyata of the Buddha because that's an abstract term so to speak. So Dharmakaya is the highest reality as actually realized, as actually embodied and of course it's only a Buddha who has a Dharmakaya or the Dharmakaya. So is not Nhamdog dissolving in the Dharmakaya called spontaneous practice. So Milarepa has been speaking in the previous verse of clearing up misunderstandings so here he is speaking of this stream of thoughts dissolving because after all, all the misunderstandings are part of this stream of thoughts, part of this mental disturbance and the more deeply you go the more you develop your understanding within, the more all these misunderstandings are cleared up, the more the stream of thoughts simply dissolves and what does it dissolve into? There are two kinds of dissolving but Milarepa doesn't mention this. There's a temporary dissolving and there's a permanent dissolving. The temporary dissolving is when the stream of thoughts dissolves into the second dhyana and onwards because up to and including the first dhyana there's mental activity so you can have a temporary quiescence, a temporary dissolving of thoughts in the second, third, fourth dhyanas but they come back again of course when you emerge from the dhyanas so to speak and trouble you again. So they only disappear entirely, they only dissolve entirely when Insight is developed and this of course - the dissolution of these [19] thoughts due to the development of Insight, this is of course the dissolving of the Nhamdog into the Dharmakaya which is of course transcendental. So in other words one can think of the whole of the spiritual life and spiritual practice, spiritual experience as a constant steady dissolving - permanent dissolving - of all one's misunderstandings, all one's wandering thoughts, all one's mental disturbances, the whole stream of thoughts in the fullest sense, into the Dharmakaya. As it were, he says spontaneously. He says this is called spontaneous practice. I wonder why he says spontaneous practice. Perhaps it is because it's something which happens naturally when your spiritual practice reaches a certain momentum.

Kulananda: I suppose it's something you can't do.

S: Yes. If you're doing it in a sense it's still over self conscious so there are still thoughts. So 'This also is a yogi's glory confirming meditation principles.' In other words, this is really what meditation is all about. This is really putting meditation into practice. Meditation isn't just experiencing a blissful mental state for a while. It's really the permanent dissolution of wandering thoughts of the whole stream of thoughts into the Dharmakaya which means of course that the Dharmakaya is more and more so to speak realized. It's as though the energy which was in those thoughts, the energy which was in that stream of thoughts all go to increase or to enhance one's realization, one's experience of the Dharmakaya. It's not that the energy in those thoughts is sort of lost and you're left in a sort of blank state.

Abhaya: So if you're meditating out of the dhyana state there's this ...

S: Yes, which means meditating with Insight on the basis of the dhyana experience developing Insight.

Abhaya: But if you don't get to that state there is this alienated understanding isn't there? If in



the actual process of sitting you haven't reached the dhyanas then there's a measure of that alienation...

S: If you have an experience of the dhyanas, even short of Insight your thinking will be less alienated because through the dhyanas you're in contact with rarefied quite intense feeling. I think one could say there will come a sort of intermediate stage, that if one has had some experience of the dhyanas but hasn't yet developed Insight, nonetheless one's thinking will become, as it were, more real, more genuinely intellectual and from that you will develop actual Insight.

Clive: Are you saying that you can't actually have Insight with the alienated intellect by the virtue of the fact that it's alienated?

S: Yes. And it is the alienated intellect that is, as it were, softened and harmonized through the dhyana experience. This is in a way the significance [20] and value of the dhyana experience. The dhyana experience, as it were, comes between the alienated intellect on the one hand and the Insight on the other. There are people who have a relatively less alienated intellect because they are in contact with their feelings but if you experience the dhyanas then you come into contact with very powerful rarefied feelings which have a very strong influence on the intellect and the intellect becomes much more integrated and much more able to develop into Insight. But even an ordinary person with no Insight can have a relatively un-alienated intellect if they are in contact with their feelings but certainly there's no question of the alienated intellect directly developing into Insight. This just is not possible. The mediating factor is the very powerful emotions generated in the dhyanas, which may not be when you're technically meditating. But the general principle is that unless your alienated intellect is transformed by being brought into contact with very strong emotion so that the two are fused, there is no possibility of developing Insight. Insight is no nearer to intellect than it is to emotion. If we use the word Insight it sounds more intellectual but actually it isn't any nearer to intellect than it is to emotion.

Abhaya: Insight isn't intellectual.

S: Insight is not, though it has a sort of intellectual sound to it, it is not any nearer really to what we know as intellect than it is any nearer to what we know as emotion. Even ordinary creative thinking requires intellect and emotion to be brought together to some extent and Insight requires intellect to be brought together with very highly developed emotions which are usually experienced only in connection with the dhyanas. Only on the basis of that sort of intellect or intellect come emotion, let us say, brought closer and closer together, can Insight or let's say even the higher imagination be developed.

Abhaya: I was reading a little bit of literature written by someone called the Christian education Movement on Buddhism and it was saying that the Buddha reached enlightenment by thinking. He thought himself through to enlightenment.

S: They think of meditating as thinking hard.

Abhaya: There was a little picture of the Buddha in the thinking mudra! I've never seen that mudra anywhere!

S: Well there are some Japanese pictures of Bodhisattvas just with their chin on their hand, you could say reflecting but not like that.

Clive: You refer to Insight and the higher imagination - is that a good analogy?

S: Well if one uses Insight, the term Insight as I said one can think of this as something just intellectual so the intellectual uses concepts. The [21] imagination uses images. So one can say that there's no more reason why reality should not be mediated by images than by concepts. Concepts in themselves are no closer to reality than images. You get images for instance in sutras like the Sutra of Golden Light and the Pure Land Sutras and these are no further from reality you can say than the more conceptual method of say the Perfection of Wisdom sutras. So you could say there is a higher faculty which is much more integrated than anything we usually experience. When this higher faculty uses concepts we call it the intuition or even the higher intellect. When it uses images we call it the imagination. You could say something like that. But here one is using imagination much more in Blake's sense, not imagination in the sense of fancy of course. Using it in Coleridge's sense, the romantic sense.

Clive: Would you say that fantasy is a product of the alienated intellect.

S: Or even alienated imagination in a sense you could say, yes you could say that. Fantasy is alienated.

Abhaya: I thought you said somewhere that the imagination was a higher faculty.

S: Yes a higher faculty in comparison to the alienated reason and alienated emotion, yes. Again I must have been thinking of it in the English romantic sense. The sense in which the term was used by Blake and by Coleridge.

Abhaya: How can this be relating it to what you call this higher faculty which can use either concepts or images to mediate the reality ( ) intuit. How can we bring it down to imagination versus reason. How could imagination be a higher faculty in that sense?

S: I think it's a question of words really because one can speak of a higher reason and a lower reason, the lower intellect and the higher intellect, even a lower imagination and a higher imagination. I'd rather call the so-called lower imagination fantasy and keep the word imagination itself with a capital 'I' definitely for the higher faculty in so far as it uses images. In so far as it uses concepts one could call it Insight.

Clive: So we're saying that this higher faculty has a conceptual side and...

S: I haven't said it has a conceptual side, one could say that. I've said it is capable of using the conceptual medium which you could also say means it has a conceptual side and it's also capable of using the medium of images which means it has an imaginative side.

Clive: In itself it's beyond both of them.

S: Again you could say that but again don't make it alienated. Don't take distinctions as real differences. When one says well there is this higher faculty which can use concepts or it can

use images well then one is tempted [22] to think well it exists apart from those two functions, as it were. So you make it in a way something abstract. This is something that the alienated consciousness can do very easily but it has to sort of stop itself and maybe it's sort of ( ) to stop and just think of a higher spiritual faculty which just has these two aspects, you could say intuition and imagination or Insight rather and imagination. There's no need to sort of wonder what it is like without those two things and to posit something higher in a more abstract sense which is not functioning in either of those two ways. One can do that but how real is it or does it not represent a stage in the process of alienation itself.

Sona: After a dhyanic experience, coming out of the dhyanic states, if you're in sort of a state where the Nhamdog is sort of stopped for a moment do you have to sort of push forward by using one of these faculties to develop Insight or is it enough to sort of be in a sort of receptive mood and see things as they really are?

S: It does seem that both things can happen but the sort of classical Buddhist method is that as one emerges so to speak from the dhyana experience you don't actually emerge from it but it fades into the background so to speak, and mental activity starts up again. So the general sort of tradition is that one doesn't allow that mental activity just to take any direction it pleases but you definitely use it - I won't say to understand - but you allow that mental activity to assume the form of a conceptual understanding of the teaching. In other words you sort of turn over in your mind say what has been said about the truth or reality in conceptual terms but because that has the backing of your dhyana experience it can then be transformed into an actual Insight into whatever it is that those concepts are merely symbols of. For instance you may know say the words of the teaching say that everything is suffering, that this is suffering or that that is suffering but it's just words, you've just got intellectual understanding but suppose you come down from the dhyana experience, it means you're very concentrated, all your energies are together, but then your mental activity starts up but the dhyana experience is in the background still and you're still very (concentrated) and then you just sort of say over to yourself these things - such and thing is suffering - so that's a conceptual formulation. You are using concepts but in that sort of concentrated state with the background of the dhyana experience you start not just thinking about it in an alienated conceptual sort of way but really penetrating into and understanding it and seeing the truth of it and that can develop into Insight.

Sona: That's traditional.

S: Yes that's the classical approach.

[23]

Sona: What are the other approaches?

S: You mentioned earlier just sort of, as it were, remaining passive or remaining receptive and you sometimes may just see something, I mean see something objectively without any mental activity and they'll be a flash of understanding or Insight with regard to it without your having, as it were, repeated to yourself the traditional formulations to begin with.

Sona: Could you also use the sort of faculty of the imagination say (while you were conceptualizing)?

S: Well yes because you could say call to mind - this is what you do ideally when you visualize, visualize Buddhas and Bodhisattvas - you have first of all the sort of experience of thoughtlessness represented by the sunyata state which should precede the visualization and then the visualization arises and sometimes it's said it should arise spontaneously. It's a sort of expression of reality in terms of images just as the conceptual teaching is an expression of reality in terms of concepts. So you can either have a sutra like the Perfection of Wisdom which deals with concepts or a sutra like the Pure Land sutras which deal in images or you can have a mixture of both.

Sona: Would that mean that the visualization takes place outside the dhyanic experience?

S: Yes it happens outside it though again it should happen against a background of it. Ideally you should have practised. But it isn't just a concentration exercise in other words though you can look at it like that too. It can have that effect too. You can't get a very deep concentration doing visualization just because you are doing visualization. But in a way an element of distraction, technically speaking, is necessary to the development of Insight. Distraction in the form of very directed and controlled mental activity. You may have to sacrifice your dhyana experience for the time being to develop Insight. In other words come down from the realm of the gods a bit.

Clive: Why do we develop dhyana then. Is it because we're too much in a thought ...

S: And a distracted state.

Clive: You have to develop dhyana to balance.

S: Right yes and then you can come back to the middle where there is mental activity but it is not a chaotic mental activity, it's a controlled even creative mental activity. Anyway it's coffee time.

[24]

S: All right let's go on to the next verse then. 'Is not self purity of the six senses called the Action of One Taste - a yogi's glory responding freely to times and changes?' So the self purity of the six senses - what do you think is meant by that? What are the six senses?

Abhaya: The five physical senses plus the mind.

S: Take the mind to represent at its best let us say rational activity, directed thinking, even purposeful thinking. So what is this self purity of the six senses? What are the senses essentially?

Kovida: Does self purity mean getting rid of the sense of self from these six sense (realms)?

S: No, I don't think it's that though it is in a way implied but it's not the literal meaning of self purity here.

Abhaya: Is it more like (when Suzuki opened his room and decided his window was not obstruction.)

S: This raises the question what obstructs, what obstructs the senses. Therefore I'm asking first what are the senses? I mean in Pali and Sanskrit they're vijnanas. Usually they're translated as consciousnesses but I think if one translates it as awarenesses that brings out the meaning more clearly. There's an awareness of visual form, there's an awareness of sound. There's an awareness of taste, there's an awareness of ideas, of concepts. So what's wrong with being aware of things? Is there anything wrong with being aware of things? No there's nothing wrong with being aware of things. If you're aware of something just aware of it, aware of a visual form through the eye and so on, there's nothing wrong with seeing things, there's nothing wrong with hearing things etc. Nothing wrong with thinking about things so in that sense the senses are pure. They're pure in themselves so the self purity of the senses is their purity in so far as they are mere forms of awareness.

Kulananda: In themselves they are pure.

S: In themselves they are pure, that is to say in so far as the senses represent simply different forms of awareness, they are pure. That is to say they are neither skilful nor unskilful. They are karmically or ethically neutral. So then the question arises what makes them impure or rather how do the pure senses become associated with impurity.

Kulananda: Grasping.

S: Well that is one specific example but they become associated with impurity to the extent that the object of the sense awareness acts as a stimulus or an occasion for unskilful mental states of which grasping may be one. So for instance you may have an awareness of a particular visual form and this may give rise to the unskilful mental state of anger. So the [25] unskilful mental state of anger, as it were, contaminates your sense awareness, your sense awareness becomes mixed up with the unskilful mental state. But in the awareness itself there is nothing impure, there is no impurity. So there's nothing wrong with the senses as forms of awareness or as faculties of awareness. This is what Milarepa is saying. So 'Is not self purity of the six senses called the Action of One Taste.' Now what does he mean by that? What is this action of one taste? This one taste is the expression one gets in the Vajrayana especially. I think it's more or less peculiar to the Vajrayana. You get first of all in the Mahayana the understanding or the realization that everything is sunyata. Then one gets a further development of that, that all things ... if all things are sunyata they are all equally sunyata. So if they are all equally sunyata then they are all equal, they are all same and you even get a jnana of sameness, a (samatajnana) the awareness of the sameness of things. So if everything is the same then everything gives you the same experience. Isn't that obvious? So if everything gives you the same experience everything has the same taste. Taste is simply a more concrete term for experience. So Milarepa says 'Is not self purity of the six senses called the Action of One taste?.' If the six senses are pure in themselves as forms of awareness then does not the exercise of those six pure senses give you all the time the same experience? Do they not have all the time simply one taste? Supposing you simply experience the world through your senses including your mind without any kind of unskilful or even skilful mental state interposing, well what sort of experience do you get? You get the same experience all the time. An experience of complete, as it were, clarity. Just like a mirror mirroring everything. Everything is the same to you. There's no particular reaction. Just pure awareness in all directions. Awareness of forms, awareness of sounds etc., etc., without your mental state being disturbed in any way. So is not self purity of the six senses called the action of one taste - a yogi's glory responding freely to times and changes. But even responding has to be

understood carefully because it doesn't mean changing or being influenced. It's more like a mirror - put a flower in front of a mirror it reflects a flower, put a leaf in front of it, it reflects a leaf. So in the same way your senses. If you come in contact with one particular visual form well you see that. Another visual form you see that. So you respond freely to times and changes not responding in the sense of adapting or changing but in a sense that the changes don't make any difference to you.

Clive: The senses are a mirror.

S: The senses are a mirror. Sometimes one can have that sort of experience, for instance, you go out into the country, you can sometimes have that experience just looking at or just mirroring the trees or the fields or the clouds and so on. You don't particularly want to grasp the trees, you [26] don't want to cut them down or do anything with them and you don't want to necessarily grasp the clouds. You've no particular emotional reaction to them, you're just happy to see them. That's quite enough. You don't want to do anything more than that.

Kulananda: You're not actually looking at anything.

S: Well you may even be looking but you're not looking with any intent. With any sort of subjective interest in the narrow sense. You're just content to see. So everything therefore has the same taste. You get the same experience from everything and of course you can have this in two ways. You can have this as a result of dhyana experience. Just because there are no wandering thoughts and sometimes you experience this when you come out of meditation you see things but you're not thinking about them, you hear things but there's no reaction to what you hear. You're just reflecting, you're just mirroring. So this is one form of the experience but it soon goes doesn't it after a few minutes perhaps. Sometimes you have this when you wake up in the morning before you start actually thinking. You are awake which means you're aware, you hear everything, see everything but mental activity hasn't yet started up so you have this sort of experience. You can also have it on the basis of Insight. For instance supposing you actually have Insight that everything is impermanent etc. etc., then whatever you look at you'll have the same experience.

Kulananda: But what about the emotional response? You said that certain positive mental states ... if it comes into contact with grief it manifests as compassion. If it comes into contact with happiness it manifests as sympathetic joy. Isn't there a changing experience?

S: But this is different. Here we're concerned just with the senses, just with the awareness. No it's not alienated but there is just no mental disturbance. It is just pure awareness. You could say if one looks at it in terms of the Bodhisattva ideal. If say the bodhicitta has arisen, if there is a feeling of compassion, then in accordance with the needs of people objectively seen that bodhicitta will cause you to function but you will still be seeing things and experiencing things through the senses in that mirror like sort of way. You will not be subjectively disturbed. It's a very difficult sort of functioning to get an idea of because it is not motivated by any conditioned mental state but on the other hand it is not alienated. We can only think of it in terms of something mechanical and automatic which suggests something alienated but it's not like that.

\_\_\_: You're not doing it for any gain.

S: You're not doing it for any gain.

\_\_\_: Just doing what needs to be done.

[27]

S: Yes, it's like a sort of play you could say. Sometimes it's expressed in those terms. Like a sort of game. If you win it you win it, if you lose it you lose it. It doesn't matter. You're not playing the game to win. In a sense you are but not in an ultimate sense.

Kulananda: It gave this person motivation. Isn't this more impersonal in a way?

S: Well you could say that but one has to be careful how you use the word impersonal. It implies a sort of negation of personality rather than going beyond personality.

Clive: You're subjectively not disturbed by whatever it is. You're able to put all your energy into it.

S: All the more so because if you're self disturbed some of your energy is leaking away into the disturbance.

\_\_\_: Keeping the other party at bay.

Clive: So in this way your energy is clear.

S: Yes. There's no sort of subjective turbulence.

Kulananda: You know it's not your energy.

S: 'So is not self purity of the six senses called the action of one taste - a yogi's glory responding freely to times and changes'. In other words Milarepa's envisaging the sort of person who has just got no subjective mental states. Certainly nothing unskilful or negative. Who is just aware, whose awareness just mirrors whatever comes in front of it.

Clive: He's got no subjective mental states.

S: You notice that thinking is also a sense. It's not that he is not thinking because you may need to think. That may be objectively necessary. I've talked about this at length on some seminar or other but it is directed purposeful thinking. For instance if there is a need for something to be objectively done you sort of ask yourself how should I do this and you work it out but you don't worry about it. In other words you use the amount of mental energy and the amount of concepts actually needed to work out that particular question, work out that particular problem and find the answer. You're not just sort of worrying about it, not beating about the bush. Your mind is not ticking over about it. So there's nothing wrong with mental activity, there's nothing wrong with using concepts to arrive at a certain conclusion so that that conclusion can be implemented. That is not excluded.

Kovida: It's almost like someone who's constantly thinking about themselves in a subjective way like someone who's blind because that whole thinking sense is used up within themselves. The blind man can't see. (The senses are used up in the same way with thinking.)

[28]

S: It's as though Milarepa is not or Buddhism generally is not against mental activity. What it is against is unnecessary mental activity. Unnecessary mental activity is one could say neurotic. Quite a large part of people's mental activity is neurotic mental activity, not mental activity which is actually required or actually called for by the circumstances of the objective situation.

Kulananda: What gives rise to neurotic mental activity?

S: That's quite clear isn't it. It's all sorts of unskilful mental states especially those which go quite deeply. Feelings of insecurity, anxiety, fear etc.

Clive: A sort of constant compensation.

S: For instance, you could say to somebody would you mind going and cutting that tree down for me. So they just ask how shall I cut a tree down. I shall need an axe. OK, where's an axe? Oh it's in the woodshed, I'll go and get it and then off they go and cut the tree down. There's a certain amount of mental process but not very much. You ask somebody else and they say oh I don't think I know how to cut a tree down. I never cut a tree down before, what would my mother say if she knew I was cutting a tree down (Laughter). Oh yes I haven't written to her since last week, oh yes cutting the tree down where's the oh axe, or shall I use a saw, oh I'd better go and see somebody about that and I wonder if it'll fall on me when I cut it down!' All this is unnecessary mental activity for neurotic reasons. Do you see what I mean? So there's nothing wrong with mental activity as such. Mental activity which is necessary to the carrying out of a certain purpose but all the mental activity that is not really related to that is neurotic.

Kulananda: Is that not experiencing the emotions and just getting caught up in the whole series of ...

S: Well you just didn't keep to the point (Laughter). Sometimes it can be so chronic that you forget all about cutting the tree down. You get into ... you get completely sidetracked. Even if you do it will be with a great waste of mental energy in the process and therefore all sorts of unnecessary thoughts and reflections and doubts and so on. Also you get if say people take up meditation, they don't just ask you how to meditate and then go and do it. There are all sorts of unnecessary thoughts and reflections that come up in connection with it. They may in fact never get around to meditating at all but be thinking about meditating or never getting around to committing themselves but be thinking about committing themselves etc. This is what goes on.

Clive: All this is described here as a subjective mental state.

S: Yes. I'm not referring so much of course to those mental activities which are objectively necessary for the attainment of a certain end which has been [29] recognized as desirable.

Clive: What about imagination as a sort of ...

S: Well that is a higher faculty altogether.

Clive: But it's mental activity isn't it?



S: Only in the very broad sense. It's a question of the definition of mental activity. In the sense in which I'm using the term now it isn't. It isn't a part of mental activity. One can so define mental activity so as to include everything even of that sort. It's just like well, is a Buddha a human being? Well in a sense he is. In a sense he isn't. It depends how narrowly or how broadly you define the term 'human being'.

Clive: This thinking about this state of (mirroring) you start thinking that the person just stops thinking altogether.

S: No, you'd only think that if you forgot that the mind itself was also a sixth sense and that its activity is quite valid, its objective activity is quite valid.

\_\_\_: It's a form of reflection.

S: It's a form of reflection. Technically to say it reflects dhammas which is in this context ideas, concepts.

Clive: In that sense a certain amount of mental activity is reflected. You can have reflected mental activity.

S: No. You always reflect mental activity so there's nothing wrong with the mind being aware of thoughts or ideas or mental processes which are necessary for the accomplishment of a particular purpose. There's nothing wrong in that. There is a difference between the mind consciousness and sense consciousness because in the case of sense consciousness you are not responsible for the objects that come before it but in the case of mind consciousness you can exercise a certain amount of control and should exercise. So those thoughts or mental processes which you allow to come before the mind because they are objectively required are not undesirable in any way.

Kulananda: It still makes it sound as if the thoughts arise in independence of the perception of the thoughts. It's almost as if there's a sort of independent process going on which is thoughts and then your mind consciousness is the perception of the (in)dependent process.

S: It's not quite like that but again in a sense it is because even in the case of sense consciousness you can to a slight extent, though to a much slighter extent, determine the content of your own field of say visual consciousness. You can decide to put your hand up in front of your face so that you see your hand, but in the case of the sense consciousness that element is much more limited. For instance in the case of mind consciousness [30] you don't have any choice and it's a quite neutral matter, with regard to those ideas which are derived from sense impressions but you do have a choice in the way in which you combine or recombine those or you do have a choice when it comes to ideas which do not originate in sense impressions. So there is a greater freedom, as it were, with regard to the content of mind consciousness or mind awareness than there is in the case of the content of ordinary physical sense consciousness or sense awareness. But on the other hand, yes, especially with regard to ideas which originate internally, the mind has a certain responsibility for its own ideas.

Kovida: It raises the question is there an objective correlative like nature that stores thoughts. Like where do thoughts come from ( ) and if there's a sense that receives them it seems to

(presuppose) a world of thoughts.

S: Well yes. In a sense there is though not quite in the way that nature is in the case of the objective world because at some time in the past your mind, let us say, has received impressions and they may sort of come up from time to time as though appearing before you so to speak from nowhere but presumably they are impressions you've received some time in the past. So these ...

Kovida: And that process presumably is infinite and therefore it's always there, as it were.

S: Sometimes you don't know whether a thought has really come from within you or has been suggested from outside you but in any case there is no ethical significance in the mind simply being aware of its own content. Ethical significance arises only to the extent that the mind is responsible if it is responsible - for its own content.

Kovida: So in a sense you can't be responsible for thoughts that accrued in the past until you actually accept them in the conscious mind.

S: Yes. You can't be responsible for them or feel responsible for them until you really acknowledge them or recognize them as your own thoughts. For instance, supposing somebody puts a thought into your head and you're quite aware of that in the present. Well you can be aware of it and that is an end of the matter, you are not responsible for the thought. You can of course make it your own and in that way become responsible for it, that is another matter. But if you remain simply aware of it then it does not become your own.

Clive: Do you think that if somebody's put a thought into your head earlier on in your life and now you try to become receptive to it but that thought is directly contrary and it's going to bring up direct tension between this new thought...

S: Well only if there's a situation in which that thought has not only been put into your head in the past but that you have accepted it and made it your [31] own. That is the real crux and then if of course another thought is put into your head later on which is directly opposed to the first one and if you want to make that second thought your own certainly there will be a tension between the two, a conflict and one will eventually oust the other.

Clive: So let's say when you're meditating you may be constantly receiving thoughts. Some of them are going to be quite superficial, just energies more or less, and some of them are going to have a deeper connection so in attempting to put all thoughts out of your mind you're going to discover just the depth.

S: Yes. One could say it is from this point of view not so much a question of your being aware of anything but it's more a question of being responsible for it in the sense that you make it part of yourself. For instance somebody may put to you the idea of say committing a murder. Well you can be simply aware of the idea of committing a murder so there's nothing wrong in that, there's nothing wrong in being aware of the idea of committing a murder, but supposing you dwell upon it and gradually you start liking the idea and making it your own, that is an entirely different matter and then to the extent that you do that you become responsible for that because that is your own idea then. You're not just reflecting an idea. So therefore there's nothing wrong in this mirroring activity of the mind. What you have made

your own you have to mirror. If you decide yes you are going to murder somebody you are aware of the idea of murdering still so if you make an idea your own you are still aware of that idea but the fact that you are aware of an idea doesn't necessarily mean that you've made it your own. So in that sense mind awareness is innocent, is pure.

Clive: We're using reflecting in a different way to when you actually reflect on something to make it ...

S: Yes. Reflecting on is different. That is actively thinking about. Though of course you can think about something without losing, as it were, your purity. If your thinking is directed and if the end to which it is directed is let us say a skilful end you can carry on purposeful thinking without the purity of the thinking being affected by what I've called subjective mental states or defilements you could say, but that sort of possibility we don't usually envisage.

Kovida: Surely that's why it's so easy for him to see that they're wrong because he's in a state where he can actually think in their position and see clearly their position and decide what to do without it affecting him in any way.

S: This is so even on a quite ordinary level. If you are not let us say emotionally involved in a certain situation you can see quite easily, quite clearly what the people who are involved in that situation ought to do even [32] though they themselves are unable to see it. It's pretty obvious to you. It's obvious to anybody who's not involved that it's not clear to anyone actually involved, just because they are involved. So the basic point here that Milarepa is making is that there's nothing wrong with sense activity in the sense of the senses simply mirroring or being aware of their respective objects. The senses are not impure, the senses as such, the senses are not evil. Any impurity, any unskilfulness is the product of something other than the actual sense awareness.

All right then the next verse. 'Is not the experience of the Bliss Void called the fruition of the Whispered Lineage - a yogi's glory conforming with the Four Initiations?' So the experience of the bliss void. What is this bliss void? What is the void to begin with? The void of course is sunyata but then what is sunyata? Sunyata one can take here as simply the term for ultimate reality which in as much as one speaks about ultimate reality at all one has made it an object, an object of thought but is it an object. Well it isn't an object because if one said that it is an object or if it is an object then it is contained within the framework of the subject/object duality and according to Buddhism by definition ultimate reality transcends this subject/object duality but the minute you think about ultimate reality even the ultimate reality that transcends subject/object duality you make an object. So as far as you think about reality, reality is always an object, even though it cannot be an object but you cannot think about it except as an object due to the very nature of our thinking process. So all right sunyata stands for that. Sunyata stands for that reality which transcends the duality between subject and object but which we cannot think of to the extent that we think about it at all, except as an object. So sunyata stands for that. What about bliss? Bliss here stands for the subject. Bliss stands for the subject in the sense that it stands for the whole feeling and emotional side of things. It stands for your own actual experience and especially it stands, in this context, for meditative experience and especially it stands for the experience of one's own more refined, more subtle energies. It also stands for the body. It stands so to speak for that whole side of things. You could say it stands for the body. It stands for subtle energies, it stands for

emotions. It stands for the whole subjective side of things. So sunyata stands for reality appearing as object and bliss stands for reality appearing as subject. But they are joined together. It's the experience of the Bliss Void. In other words it's the experience of the yuganadha state as it is called of the bliss merging with the void. The experience of bliss merging with the experience of the void. Sometimes it is said that the Mahayana gives you the experience of the void, it does not give you the experience of the bliss, the Vajrayana gives you the experience of bliss. So the experience with which Milarepa is concerned is the experience of the [33] bliss and the void in one. In other words you transcend the subject/object distinction by experiencing the void and the bliss equally and merging the two.

Kulananda: Is that the Mahamudra practice?

S: You could say that this is the Mahamudra practice in the highest sense. So therefore also he says a Yogi's glory conforming with the four initiations. No need to go exactly into what the four initiations are. They differ from one tradition to another but they represent different levels of spiritual progress in the Vajrayana. So Milarepa is saying that the experience of the unity of the bliss and the void represents the culmination of the entire Tantric spiritual path as symbolized let us say by the four initiations. But the Vajrayana generally emphasizes that the experience of let us say the bliss side of things is extremely important. It is not enough to experience just the sunyata side of things, the void side of things. According to them the Mahayana tends to experience that, as it were, mentally only whereas the Vajrayana claims to experience it also in terms of energy which means in terms of bliss or even in terms of the body. So this is why they emphasize that in their particular practice or tradition.

\_\_\_: You could say realization's actually permeating deeper and deeper.

S: You could say that. The body perhaps symbolizes that also. It's not enough to have so to speak an understanding, even a perfectly genuine internal understanding of sunyata via the concepts of the mind. There must also be a much deeper experience of it in terms of energy and bliss. This is the point of the Tantras and the experience of bliss and the experience of the void must be brought together and that this is the highest spiritual attainment.

Then the following verse, 'Is not the art of brightening Sunyata called the Stages and Bhumis of the Path - a yogi's glory witnessing the sign-posts on the way.' So what does this mean? The art of brightening Sunyata. What do you think brightening sunyata means?

\_\_\_: Deepening your experience of it.

S: Deepening your experience of it.

Kulananda: Creative activity in the context of sunyata.

S: It's as though sunyata is, as it were, there. Let's say out there. We saw in the previous verse that sunyata, the void, represents so to speak the objective pole of reality let us say, but your task is to make the objective subjective, to assimilate or incorporate the objective and this here seems to be called brightening sunyata. It's as though sunyata is in darkness because you haven't realized it. The light of your consciousness hasn't illuminated it. So brightening sunyata suggests that you bring your own consciousness more and more into harmony with sunyata. That you become not [34] just conscious of sunyata in an alienated intellectual way

but your consciousness is fused or blended with sunyata. You realize sunyata and this is called brightening sunyata. Again I don't know how literally the expression translates. Lighting it up, as it were. It also suggests bringing something forth from the void.

Kulananda: I was wondering whether it meant anything to do with the Bodhisattva ideal in terms of making better in a way, making things clearer and ...

S: That is implied because there's a reference to the stages and bhumis of the path and the path is of course the Bodhisattva path and it's the Bodhisattva about whom Milarepa is speaking. I think it must be assumed in this particular context that Milarepa is always speaking about someone who accepts the Bodhisattva ideal and therefore he's speaking about the Bodhisattva or about the spiritual path in a specifically Mahayana sense in terms of the Bodhisattva ideal.

Clive: It's the dissolving of the subject/object dichotomy.

S: You could say that except that the object here is, as it were, the archetypal object of reality as object. That is to say sunyata not just object in the ordinary sense and Milarepa is saying, as it were, that one mustn't forget that after all the Buddhist scriptures, the Mahayana sutras, contain very elaborate descriptions, very highly detailed descriptions of stages and bhumis. Milarepa is saying that one mustn't forget that what one is really doing is progressively brightening sunyata. This reminds me of a metaphor somewhat connected with this. In one of these sutras - it's the Dasabhumika sutra - which deals with the ten bhumis. The Dasabhumika though it deals with the ten stages also deals with the thirteen viharas and I think it's the thirteen viharas that are described in terms of the progressive making of a beautiful golden ornament out of gold. You start off with the lump of crude gold and first of all you have to smelt it and then you refine it and then you make it malleable and then you start shaping it and in the end - I forget whether it's the tenth bhumi or the thirteenth vihara - you fit in the precious stones and you've made a tiara for the prince. So the sunyata is like the lump of gold and brightening sunyata is like, as it were, forming the gold progressively into the more and more beautiful ornament, the tiara.

Kulananda: You're moving from experience of sunyata to actual Dharmakaya.

S: Because if you've got a lump of gold well that is given, that is just there, that's the object, but if you shape it then you blend your consciousness with it because your consciousness, as it were, imposes a particular form on that gold to bring out the gold-ness of the gold more and more strikingly. To enhance the gold. It's almost suggesting that sunyata is enhanced in the process of realization by human beings. In other words sunyata does not exclude its realization by human beings. It's as though it isn't complete [35] without it. Because it isn't just an object don't forget. You think of it as an object but in reality it isn't an object. It transcends that dichotomy. So sunyata in reality is sunyata as realized, not just sunyata as object. So the real gold is not the gold that is just a lump in the earth, the real gold is the gold that is made into an ornament. So actually you could say that there is no such thing as an unrealized sunyata. An unrealized sunyata doesn't exist, it's just an abstract notion. There's no such thing as Buddhahood, there are only Buddhas. There's no such thing as a lump of gold without any particular form. It always has a form. So there's no such thing as sunyata, there's only the stages and bhumis of the path.

Kovida: You could see it in a simplistic way as well that there is an objective sunyata and there have been one or two Buddhas that have been making it bright but when you actually get there and are enlightened your being enlightened makes it three times (as bright).

S: So, Milarepa says also a yogi's glory witnessing the sign-posts on the way. These different stages and bhumis, they're just sign-posts, as it were, to let you know that you are on the right path, that you are making progress.

Abhaya: Just a technical point here. Could you say technically that Nirvana is sunyata realized?

S: Nirvana is more a term used in the Hinayana than the Mahayana. The Mahayana uses Nirvana in connection with the Arhant, not in connection with its own ideal of the Bodhisattva.

Abhaya: So this term Nirvana is never used in the Mahayana.

S: I won't say it's never used. It's used in say the Lankavatara sutra but then they distinguish different kinds of Nirvana. There's a Nirvana of the Arhant and Nirvana of the Bodhisattvas and so on but as generally used Nirvana refers to the Hinayana path. So it wouldn't be said here that Nirvana and sunyata are the same thing because that would be saying that Hinayana ... the Arhant's enlightenment is the same as that of a Buddha and that point of course is denied by the Mahayana. They represent rightly or wrongly historically speaking the attainment of the Arhant as a lower attainment than the attainment of a fully enlightened Buddha. So therefore Nirvana as the attainment of the Arhant could not be equated with sunyata. One of course can only equate them by questioning the validity of the distinction between the Arhant ideal and the Bodhisattva ideal or the Sravakbodhi and the samyaksambodhi. One can think of the spiritual path in stages and bhumis in this way - that one is, as it were, progressively bringing sunyata into, I won't say existence, but well the text says, Milarepa says, brightening it up. It's almost like taking brightening in a different sort of sense, it's like brightening up, maybe not gold because gold doesn't [36] tarnish but a metal which has become rusted or tarnished. The metal is there, it's still the metal but it needs brightening up.

Clive: Are you suggesting that sunyata once shone brightly?

S: Well it does shine brightly because it is, as it were, gold but you don't see it shining brightly, you don't see the gold because gold to itself is gold but it doesn't look like gold to you because of the tarnish which is external so you brighten it up and then for you it becomes gold, it's gold for you as well as gold for itself. In other words you make what was formerly to you objective, subjective and in that way in a sense the object here is the void, it's the sort of ultimate object and you are concerned as the ultimate subject because of that then the subject/object dichotomy itself is transcended. So you see there's a sort of common theme running all through these verses in different ways on different levels. It really is the transformation of what is thought of or understood as objective into something which is experienced as subjective. So it's a progressive overcoming of alienation. Alienation understood in a much more comprehensive sense than it's usually understood.

'Is not the consummation of self-mind called the attainment of Buddhahood in one life - a

yogi's glory confirming the Four Bodies?' There's a note to self mind - the text reads such and such - more literally 'Is not the exhaustion of Self-mind called the attainment of Buddhahood..?' Mahayana Buddhism holds that the phenomena of exhaustion and of consummation seem to be always inseparable; exhaustion of something such as the desires and ignorance, implies the simultaneous consummation of something else, such as transcendental Wisdom and Compassion.' If you've exhausted your selfishness you become unselfish don't you? It's using a negative term in a positive sense. Maybe it would be better to speak of exhaustion of self mind because self in English at least has got a suspect connotation hasn't it? So 'Is not the consummation of self-mind or exhaustion of self mind called the attainment of Buddhahood in one life - a yogi's glory confirming the Four Bodies.' So let's take it more literally - the exhaustion of self mind. What does that mean, the exhaustion of self mind?

Abhaya: Isn't it like the complete stopping of the waterfall?

S: Yes it's that also.

Clive: What's that?

Abhaya: The stopping of the Nhamdog, the stream of thoughts.

S: But this also raises the question of relative emphasis on the negative and the positive in the Hinayana, the modern Theravada - the emphasis falls very much on negation, exhaustion. Very little is said about the complimentary phase and perhaps psychologically that is not very desirable if you're dealing say with people who are newly in contact with Buddhism. It's probably [37] not very skilful to speak simply in terms of exhaustion, negation, giving up and so on. So that's why say in the FWBO we speak more in terms of growth and development. That is I think easier for people to latch on to. Not that there again isn't that complimentary phase of giving things up and shedding things let us say just as the plant sheds its old leaves as it grows. That's there too but if you speak too much in those terms from the beginning you probably put people off.

Kulananda: Talk more in terms of the bliss side of things than the sunyata side of things.

S: Purification and refinement of the ego rather than in terms of its total abolition.

Kovida: In some ways it's easier to give things up if you've already experienced them than it is things you've not experienced. If you talk of developing positive emotions that's just abstract.

S: You don't know what you're supposed to be developing.

Sona: On the other hand you put an ideal which is just slightly above yourself

S: It's just a question of which is the more skilful starting point to suggest.

Clive: Why do you think it is that people respond more to the idea of growth and development than renunciation?

S: Because I think on account of our particular tradition in the West they don't have sort of deeply ingrained the idea of something positive which is sort of revealed or which is uncovered when you give things up. In India this is the case. If you take for instance Hindus, they firmly believe that there is an underlying reality, an absolute reality which they call Brahman and that the more things you give up the more you uncover that or reveal that within yourself so in a way the more you gain. But in the West people don't think in those terms. They think giving up means just giving up. Giving up means just losing, leaving yourself with nothing, not that you uncover the transcendental reality underneath. No, giving up is merely giving up. Progressive impoverishment and nothing but impoverishment. So for them giving up means something quite different. They need a compensation.

Kovida: In a sense it's the opposite in a way. You have to give up things to gain enlightenment. You do good in this life you get something better. It's as if you're gathering things.

S: I think the Indian, say the Hindu, has got a deeper faith in the underlying reality so even if it isn't actually explicitly mentioned he thinks of giving up in terms of just uncovering that underlying reality but we don't have that sort of tradition in the West. As I said giving up is merely [38] giving up and therefore you find people asking why should I give up? To the Hindu, let's say however non-practising a Hindu may be, it's obvious why you give up - you give up to free yourself for the divine or you give up to uncover the transcendental reality. It's obvious they will say. He never thinks in terms of giving up ... He may admit he's unable to do it and this is his own blindness and weakness but he believes that if anybody can give up it's a good thing because it will uncover a deeper reality underneath. You don't have to convince him of that. You have to just convince him that, that being so he agrees he ought therefore to make the effort to give up. He'll never argue that there isn't that underlying reality but in the case of the Westerner you'd have to convince them of that and perhaps that is quite difficult, that's a purely metaphysical position or will appear as such to him. So it appears more natural and more acceptable to speak in terms of individual growth and development especially as it fits in with the evolutionary way of looking at things, it fits in with the 'growth' movement up to a point, the growth movement in the West, especially in America, and it's this question of sort of carrying it quite a few stages further.

So what are the Four Bodies? These are the Four Bodies of a Buddha. We've heard of three but what about the fourth. Well there's the Nirmanakaya, there's the Samboghakaya, Dharmakaya and quite often a fourth is enumerated, in fact this is usually called the Svabhavakakaya the self originated body which is usually explained as being the synthesis of the first three. Other kayas are spoken of - Sahajjakaya, the spontaneous body and the Mahasuhkhakaya, the body of great bliss. It sort of goes on and on.

Clive: Why is it there?

S: Just to help you to get a more concrete grasp of it. Because if you think of the three bodies as three bodies, one shouldn't take that too literally of course but if you do take it a bit literally there is the danger that you think there are these three bodies, as it were. If you think of them as too distinct then you need to bring them together, you need to emphasize that they aren't really separate. So to emphasize that you introduce a fourth body which is the body which unifies them, as it were, and this is called the Svabhavakakaya and inasmuch as the Nirmanakaya is symbolized by different figures that Svabhavakakaya is also symbolized by a



figure which in some Tibetan traditions is Samantabhadra, though the Nyingmapas have the Nirmanakaya symbolized by Padmasambhava, the Samboghakaya symbolized by the thousand armed Avalokitesvara, the Dharmakaya symbolized by Amitabha and the Svabhavakakaya symbolized by Samantabhadra, so you have a four kaya system.

Clive: Each of those kayas symbolized by a particular Bodhisattva encompasses all the others as well.

[39]

S: Yes, you could say that too. You mustn't think of them as really different. They can be distinguished but they're not really separate. This is where one has to in a way be very careful in dealing with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the mandala, in a sense they're distinct but in a sense they're not distinct. They are different aspects of one and the same reality. It's not as though the fourth kaya is like a sort of string holding together the other three in a kind of bundle. You only have to think of them as being united because you've already quite wrongly divided them.

OK then the next verse. Milarepa says, 'Is not a possessor of the Pith-Instructions of Reason and the Scriptures called A Guru with Lineage - a yogi's glory, Embodiment of Love and of Compassion?' Now what does this mean? What do you think the Pith Instructions are? This is a phrase that occurs quite often in the context of the Songs of Milarepa.

Abhaya: The essential seam.

S: More like essential instructions. But not just, as it were, boiled down in a sort of abstract way. Not pith or essence in the sense of a higher degree of abstraction. It seems to mean more the essence of the matter as formulated in a way that is relevant to somebody's actual needs. It's not that you go through the scriptures and you generalize them more and more until you come to a few abstract statements. For instance there was this Middle Eastern story of the king who asked a committee of wise men to produce or rather to reduce the whole of knowledge to just a few simple statements or rather initially produced a short book and then when they produced the book they said oh that's too long and they asked them to boil it down just to a few chapters and they were too long and in the end he had it boiled down to a single statement which was to his satisfaction which was 'Man is born, he dies.' So this is a high degree of generality you could say but it is so general as to be meaningless for individual purposes so a Pith Instruction doesn't mean something which has been boiled down to a high degree of generality, to a higher degree of abstraction. It represents the essence of the matter as it is applicable to or relevant to the needs of an actual person in a particular situation. So Pith Instruction means something like that. So Pith Instructions of Reason and the Scriptures. So what does this suggest? I mentioned that reason and the Scriptures and one's own personal experience form a sort of trinity so it's as though the Pith Instructions draw upon rational arguments and the teachings of the scriptures in a highly concentrated way, a way concentrated through one's own experience and applied to somebody's actual needs. So Milarepa asks the question, 'Is not a possessor of the Pith-Instructions of Reason and the Scriptures called a Guru with Lineage.' This introduces the idea of lineage. We discussed it didn't we some time ago. So a Guru with lineage seems to be one who has himself received Pith-Instructions in [40] accordance with reason and the scriptures from a guru and who is in a position to pass those on to his own disciples. Not that the Pith Instructions are, as it were, something determinate. In a way the teacher has to recreate the Pith Instructions because his

disciples may be quite different to what he was like when he was a disciple and receiving Pith Instructions. So it's not as though you've got something which is a definite sort of teaching called Pith Instruction, a particular formulation which is handed on. It's not as simple as that. So it's as though a Guru with Lineage is a Guru who has himself received from a teacher concentrated instructions applicable to his own needs and who is also able to give to his own disciples concentrated instructions applicable to their needs, instructions which are in harmony with both reason and the scriptures and of course the product of his own experience. So this is a Yogi's glory embodiment of Love and Compassion.

Clive: Could you say that whatever the disciple receives is whatever is necessary to bring about the same experience in him as in his lama?

S: Yes, except that you must use this expression 'same experience' with caution. It's not the sort of duplication of an experience. In a sense an experience can't be duplicated. One does speak in terms of say the Buddha gaining enlightenment and the Buddha's disciples aiming at enlightenment, in a sense experiencing the same enlightenment, but it's the same only in an abstract sense. For instance, a number of different people may all feel very hungry and they may satisfy that hunger so you could say that they all satisfy the same hunger and achieve the same satisfaction but clearly that sort of statement is not to be taken too literally because even though in a general way, yes, hunger is the same for all and satisfaction is the same for all, they are different kinds of people and there will be so to speak subtle variations in their experience so it isn't as though enlightenment is a common thing which a number of people can possess, the thing remaining absolutely identical, it's more as though enlightenment is a certain way of functioning. It's as though people are functioning in the same sort of way, not that they have the same experience as though the experience was a sort of thing in which everybody could participate. Suppose everybody is running, you could say they all share the experience of running but is that experience of running a thing, an entity, in which they all share?

Clive: They're all running but they're all experiencing different things.

S: Well no they're not experiencing a different thing, that is to go to the other extreme. It's that the whole language of sameness and of difference is irrelevant here or really at least has got only a very limited validity. For instance, it has been pointed out that the word Nirvana or Nibbana as far as one can make out was not originally used as a noun at all. It is a noun derived from a verb. Those in whom all unskilful mental states had become exhausted were referred to as Nibbhuta, those who had become, [41] as it were, extinct, those in whom those unskilful states were extinguished. So therefore you could speak of someone as having become Nirvanized - I've used that expression in my translation of the Dhammapada as equivalent to Nibbuta. It's that they are nirvanized but one mustn't therefore think of them as sharing in an identical state, the assumption being that that state is a sort of entity. You can see how one can go from the verb to the noun, the concrete to the abstract in that sort of way. So later the idiom developed of people attaining nirvana as though nirvana was a thing, a definite state, something fixed but the original idiom seems to be of people becoming nirvanized which was rather different. So it's as though one can become enlightened, one enlightens rather than gains a state called enlightenment. Not that one enlightens once and for all but that one goes on enlightening and enlightening. It is a process or a function. Not an object which one acquires or a possession which you grasp or state in which you settle down or place you go to. So 'is not a possessor of the Pith-Instructions of reason and the scriptures

called a Guru with Lineage - a yogi's glory embodiment of Love and Compassion.' So what does embodiment of Love and Compassion refer to? The construction is a little obscure here. It is a yogi's glory to be a guru of that kind who is, presumably, an embodiment of love and compassion. Presumably compassion is equated with skilful means and the Pith-Instructions are an example of skilful means - upaya. This whole conception of skilful means is very important in the Mahayana and in the Vajrayana - that one is able to give different people the specific instructions which are suited to their particular individualities so this is a sort of adaptation of means to end in particular cases.

Abhaya: Is this an essential aspect of being a guru of a lineage, to be able to do this?

S: To be able to do it in the form of giving Pith-Instructions. Giving Pith-Instructions is a very specific kind of teaching. Somebody might be a very good teacher, he may know the scriptures very well but he may be able to expound the dharma only in a very general sort of way, in a way which is only generally applicable.

Abhaya: He himself could have received pith instructions, could he?

S: Possibly, but it would be rather unfortunate if he'd received Pith-Instructions not that Pith-Instructions are a particular kind of instruction but was not able to function in the same sort of way, it would mean that he had not benefited as fully from his own teacher's instructions as he might have done.

Abhaya: I was only asking because you were talking some time ago about being enlightened but not being articulate. Maybe a person who was unable to express it.

S: Well I was referring presumably there to the traditional concept of the [42] Pratyeka Buddha which is perhaps a rather contradictory sort of conception. I've mentioned that too. It could be that someone is enlightened but is not articulate in the ordinary social sense. He may not be able to speak very quickly or may not have a very large vocabulary but nonetheless and I think I've mentioned this on other occasions, a person of this sort is able to communicate despite their very rudimentary equipment and somebody else may be very articulate and with a good command of language but not really able to communicate, in fact have nothing to communicate. I think the point that is being made here is that it is not possible to be a guru with lineage who possesses Pith Instructions, that is to say who functions in that kind of way, without love and compassion, without skilful means. It's as though it's the love and compassion which enables you to adapt, though that's a rather questionable word, to adapt the dharma in the form of Pith Instructions to the very specific needs of individuals. In other words it isn't a question of just seeing their needs in a purely objective way, a sort of alienated way, you have also to be able to empathize with them, and only if you're able to do that will you be able to produce so to speak, Pith Instructions for their benefit.

Clive: It's saying that he can see what's essential for that (person).

S: But there may be a situation in which you can see what they need but you haven't, as it were, got the heart to give it to them. So the reference to love and compassion draws attention to the need of that heart too because sometimes you can, so to speak, just see what people's needs are and see where they're at but it's in a quite objective even slightly alienated sort of way and you don't feel impelled to do anything about it or do anything to help. So even

though love and compassion can't be regarded as a separate quality that element is necessary.

Clive: They haven't got the compassion to make the effort?

S: It suggests that you are in a way a bit split, a bit divided. Maybe you've got a very clear sharp awareness and a good understanding but that isn't really harmonized with the more developed emotional side of your nature. So you can see what somebody needs but you don't have the heart to take the trouble to give it to them so the love and compassion, that is the Mahamaitri and the Mahakaruna, they have to be there too. Though one must avoid thinking of them as sort of separate qualities that can be added on or which can actually exist separately from genuine understanding. No, it's as though there is a sort of split in you and you can see what people need but since there is that split in you, you are just able to see what they need but you just don't have the heart to give it to them. If your understanding and your emotions or your insight and your compassion were more unified you'd be able not only to see what they needed but also have the heart to give it to them.

[43]

Sona: All that becomes a sort of intellectual game for people. You see them as an object and no longer as another living being. They've got a problem and you know that just by prodding here and there and analysing a bit here and there you can find out what's wrong with them. You could actually suggest what to do about it and then help them.

Clive: If you really see what the problem is and you've got the heart to do something about it then you'd also have the heart ...The hard part is to approach it in such a way that it will get through to them.

S: Yes but for that to be possible both the insight, the wisdom, and the love and compassion are necessary.

Sona: In a way it would be harder to have the energy at your disposal (and not to take the trouble to work with that person.)

S: Well the more unified you are (the greater the extent to which wisdom and compassion are unified in you,) the more heart you will have so to speak to help people.

Kulananda: Is a possessor of the Pith Instructions necessarily not split?

S: Here it is suggested that the actual possessor of the Pith Instructions, again not that there is something called Pith Instructions to be possessed, is by virtue of the fact that he's genuinely able to give Pith Instructions it means he is an embodiment of love and compassion because you wouldn't even do that without the love and compassion. You'd just sort of perhaps see the need but not have any willingness to supply it. So Milarepa just seems to be underlining the importance of love and compassion.

Again in the Vajrayana there's great emphasis on this concentration of the teaching into Pith Instructions, that is to say instructions specifically designed for the actual needs of particular individuals. But you could say in principle this is not really limited to the Vajrayana. You could say many of the historical Buddha's teachings were Pith Instructions. It's not a question of him generalizing from an intellectual understanding of the Dharma but speaking out of the

fullness of his own spiritual experience and that is always a full experience regardless of the particular person to whom it is directed or to whom the Pith Instructions are directed. I think one must avoid these sort of suggestions of Pith Instructions being sort of boiled down versions of the scriptures or of something which is just intellectually understood. The Pith Instructions come from one's own experience which is of course in harmony with reason and the scriptures. But you formulate your Pith Instructions basically in the light of your own experience as applied to the needs of the particular person with whom you're concerned.

Clive: There's another complication then. If the person has got this degree [44] of love and compassion, has got this insight, then he wants to help that person but what medium does he use and ...

S: There isn't a question of any specific medium. He uses whatever medium is available. That's where the upaya, the skilful means, comes in. He's able to use anything. He can speak the language of the scriptures, he can speak in terms of traditional Buddhist teaching. Maybe he can speak in purely rational terms or he can speak in imaginative terms. According to the Mahayana scriptures, if necessary he'll work a miracle if that's the sort of approach that is needed. Or he may behave in a Zen like sort of way, an apparently crazy sort of meaningless sort of way because he sees that's what's going to produce the effect.

Clive: The thing I was thinking of was that some teachers in the West have difficulty.

S: It's quite possible for someone to be a genuine teacher and not understand the mentality of certain people or certain kinds say of people at first. But I think if he was a genuine teacher he'd very quickly acquaint himself with the mentalities of those people. He wouldn't allow himself to remain in that state of ignorance just because he wanted to communicate. If he didn't take the trouble you'd doubt whether he was a real teacher. He was just producing generalities and hoping that somebody would understand which is a different sort of thing. But it's probably important to realize that what one is communicating is not the Dharma in the formal sense at all. What you're really communicating is not that. You may think in terms of teaching the Dharma but actually this is not what you are doing at all, at least it's not what you should be doing. Basically you should be communicating your own experience and you're making use of the Dharma tradition, making use of the concepts of traditional Buddhist thought to do that. When you're communicating the Dharma in the sense of what is formally and historically Buddhism you should be communicating more than the Dharma. If you're not communicating more than the Dharma in that sense it isn't the Dharma. So you make use of the Dharma as a particular historical formulation, you make use of the Dharma in order to communicate your own understanding and experience. Not the other way around, not that you use your experience to communicate the Dharma, you use the Dharma to communicate your experience. That implies your experience must be sufficiently deep.

Clive: Via the Dharma you're enabling them to see your experience.

Kovida: You're letting them see you because you are the Dharma.

S: You are your experience. The Dharma in the sense of the formulated teaching, what is historically called Buddhism, is only the medium which you use to communicate say your own vision. The vision isn't something that you've got second hand from something called the Dharma. The vision is something [45] that springs out of your own experience so you use the

Dharma to communicate that not the other way around.

Clive: If you realize in a certain situation that say with some one who has no conception of Buddhism that they're going to react to anything that smells of religion then you might communicate the Dharma to them without them ever suspecting that you were a Buddhist or anything like that.

S: This is true but this would only be applicable to the very early stages because if what you had to communicate became deeper then you would require a quite developed medium and that sort of developed medium has been developed one could say mainly or only after a certain point within Buddhism so sooner or later they would have to, as it were, be informed that what you were having to say was connected with what is historically known as Buddhism. But if they were not able to accept that it would mean that there was a lot of prejudice still within them and if there was that amount of prejudice still there would be no question of them continuing to develop so therefore their ability to accept that they had come in contact in fact with Buddhism would be directly connected with the need to overcome their particular prejudice against anything religious. In other words there wouldn't be any need for you to really keep them in the dark about Buddhism even if that was possible because if they were in such a state of prejudice that they had to be kept in the dark about it, it wouldn't be possible for them to evolve beyond a certain point. So that sort of approach as I said would apply only to the quite earlier introductory stages. When they got a bit more deeply into it they wouldn't even mind that it was Buddhism or that all their previous ideas were contradicted, they would have understood by that time the need for their previous ideas to be contradicted and for them to overcome their past conditionings and so on. You could hardly imagine someone entertaining a prejudice against Buddhism right up to the threshold of enlightenment because it would suggest that it's possible to entertain prejudice itself right up to the threshold of enlightenment. That sort of prejudice you have to get rid of a long way further back.

Let's go on to the next verse.

'Is not one with compassion and great faith called a disciple with capacity - a yogi's glory embodying the merit of veneration?' Is not one with compassion and great faith called a disciple with capacity. Well it's obvious that a disciple with capacity especially should have great faith but isn't it in a sense rather odd that a disciple with capacity should have to have compassion even though it's compassion with a small 'c' you notice. In Tibetan by the way there's no distinction of upper and lower case, small letters and big letters. That's just in the English. One can understand a guru having to be endowed with compassion but a disciple? Why do you think that is? 'Is not one with compassion and great faith called a disciple with capacity?' You can understand obedience and great faith or [46] humility and great faith perhaps or receptivity and great faith but compassion and great faith, is there any reason for that being brought in?

Abhaya: (Unclear)

S: Yes that's the main reason. In other words he's on the Bodhisattva path. He's accepted the Bodhisattva ideal. Right from the beginning he's working not just for his own benefit but for the benefit of all. What about the great faith? What do you think that implies? Or why is that especially important?

Clive: It's a basic necessity. You can't be receptive without it.

S: Yes. Also it provides a motivating force. All right a disciple with capacity. Is it being suggested that there are several kinds of disciples, ordinary disciples and disciples with capacity? Do you think that's being suggested and if so what is a disciple with capacity apart from the fact that he has compassion and great faith?

\_\_\_: Ability?

S: It's more like ability perhaps. Because if the disciple with capacity has compassion it means from the very beginning he's thinking of the needs of others, that is to say he accepts the Bodhisattva ideal. Maybe he thinks in a manner of speaking in terms of being a teacher himself and he's got great faith which means that there is a very strong motivating force. So he's not just a disciple. He's, as it were, a guru in the making you could say perhaps. He's not going to just jog along with whatever is just enough to help himself but he's going to be concerned with something much more than that.

Kovida: In some ways this whole school assumes that actually going to be functioning in that way anyway.

S: In a way it does because the Kagyupa school to which Milarepa belongs is a branch of the Vajrayana which is an extension of the Mahayana and accepts the Bodhisattva ideal but again it's very easy to accept it just verbally. This is one of the things I've mentioned before. I've mentioned that I've met say some Theravadins, Theravada bhikkhus, who technically because they're Theravadins they follow the Arhant ideal and they're supposedly just thinking in terms of their own enlightenment etc. and are devoid of compassion but actually you find that there are some Theravada bhikkhus who are quite strongly compassionate and quite strongly motivated by that and definitely think of the good of others. On the other hand you can find quite a lot of say Tibetan Buddhists who are surrounded by images and thangkas of Bodhisattvas and refer repeatedly to the Bodhisattva ideal but whose spiritual attitude is so to speak quite selfish. So therefore even within the framework of the Mahayana tradition this aspect needs to be [47] emphasized so that it doesn't just become a sort of tradition.

Kovida: And seriously put them into practice. You can't really function as one of these gurus unless you're actually in contact with other people so in a monastery situation in a sense you're unable to actually ...

S: Well in Tibet of course the monasteries were very big and living in a monastery you could be in contact with thousands of people which might be quite enough.

Kovida: (You can't have the) attitude of secluding yourself in a monastery.

S: But again this is what Milarepa did. He secluded himself in a cave but people did come to him so one isn't necessarily cutting oneself off from other people because you live in a monastery or even live in a cave. Nor are you necessarily giving yourself to people just because you mingle with the crowd, as it were. There are some people who are quite gregarious and sociable but they don't have any real contact with other people nor are they really very open to them. What I was going to add though to what I said before was say with regard to Buddhists in Tibet even though the emphasis theoretically was on the Bodhisattva

ideal and all that sort of thing but for hundreds of years there was probably hardly a lama, hardly a guru in Tibet who thought of spreading the Dharma outside Tibet. They sort of shut themselves off from the rest of the world. They only started thinking in terms of going to India and going to America when they had to, when they were thrown out as refugees and that is really very surprising. If the Bodhisattva ideal was really being emphasized so much and being really put into practice and Buddhism was established in Tibet and had all the imaginable resources apart from lots and lots of lamas and gurus and teachers, one would have imagined they'd be sending missions out right and left all over the place but they didn't.

Kovida: That's what I mean by being shut in a monastery. It becomes an institution.

S: Well anything can be a monastery in that sense. A crowd can be a monastery but they definitely confined themselves so that raises very serious doubts.

So then it goes on to say a yogi's glory embodying the merit of veneration. It's not quite clear here whether a yogi's glory in this case is the disciple himself who is the glory of the guru because he's such a good disciple or whether it is the compassion and great faith which are the glory of the disciple himself. It could be both of course. Perhaps it does rather mean the disciple with capacity is the yogi's glory. The disciple himself is deserving of veneration not to speak of the guru. But the whole verse, as it were, draws attention to a sort of distinction between a disciple and a disciple with capacity. I think one should take capacity here at least to some extent in the sense of ability. One perhaps can be a good disciple but not be a disciple with capacity. That is all the [48] more necessary.

Clive: Not being a disciple who is capable of giving Pith Instructions.

S: Perhaps there could be you could say that there are disciples, even quite genuine disciples who never become gurus. They remain disciples all the time. That is to say at least mentally and in terms of spiritual development they're always disciples. In a sense they never completely grow up spiritually. They are not son disciples because the son will grow up because he's like his father and he'll be an adult like his father. In the same way a son disciple will eventually be a guru. So a disciple with capacity seems to be that sort of disciple who will not remain a disciple in perpetuity, he will one day be a guru himself and one day be able to give Pith Instructions himself, who will be able to do whatever his own guru originally did.

Kovida: That's why I said he'd need to have contact with other people so he can actually put that into practice.

S: But it's very difficult in practice to get out of contact with other people so really the question hardly arises. (Laughter) It's more difficult not to have contact with people than to have contact with them I think probably. So in that sense external conditions favour being a Bodhisattva rather than being a Pratyekabuddha or an Arhant.

\_\_\_: If the Arhants had their way would they be completely cut off from other people?

S: I think the Arhant in this sense is a rather sort of abstract figure. I don't know how seriously one should take it. I think the Arhant figure for the Mahayana just represents the danger of spiritual individualism, not that it represents an actual ideal of spiritual individualism. In this connection I think it has been said and I think I've repeated it some years ago that a guru



should consider that he has not become successful as a guru unless his disciples do better than himself because if in each generation the disciples fall below the guru in a few generations what's going to be the state of affairs. So the guru should not be thinking in terms of keeping his disciples as disciples, he shouldn't even be thinking of the disciples doing as well as he did himself. He'll be thinking in terms of the disciples doing even better than himself. Otherwise the chances are that the whole tradition will degenerate very quickly.

Clive: Spiritually speaking?

S: In every way you could say or at least in some ways. One should not think of enlightenment in terms of a fixed sort of attainment. Because at least they can be quantitatively better. They may be no more enlightened than you but they may still have more disciples. So as I said if in each generation the disciples aren't quite up to the mark of the guru what's going [49] to happen in a hundred years or so. Only too often gurus, if one can call them that, think in terms of disciples being dependent on them and always remaining disciples and never in a sense going off on their own and starting things up on their own.

Clive: The guru's aim is to make every one of his disciples a son.

S: Hopefully, yes. That would be the ideal. Not just to have a crowd of spiritually dependent people around you all the time who remain in that condition of spiritual dependence. They're always the disciples, you're always the guru and even after you die they remain disciples because they're not able to do whatever you did. They just go on being disciples and instead of having you there they just have your picture or something and that's that (Laughter) or a few relics. (Laughter). But you see how easily this sort of thing happens. In a sense it happened with Buddhism at least at certain periods.

\_\_\_: You see it's going to happen with a lot of Tibetan groups. You see very few of their disciples who are anywhere near the guru.

S: Even, to refer to comparatively modest movements like the Buddhist Society one might not think very much of Mr Humphreys spiritually but he is an outstanding figure. I mean is there anybody in the Buddhist Society who can compare to him? There's nobody half as good as he is. If you think of the Maha Bodhi Society, think of Dharmapala. I knew his chief disciple (Varisinna), I knew another disciple, Sangharatna and another one Dharmaratna. I never knew Dharmapala personally but as far as I can make out they weren't a patch on him, any of them, and he wasn't a very highly developed person spiritually. He was a very good man, a very good Buddhist, yes a spiritual personality but they're not anywhere near that, any of them. Or were not, some of them are dead now. So if in each generation there's a falling away, a falling behind well what are things going to be like after a few years? So whenever you get a period of Buddhist history as you get say in the late Vajrayanic period in India, in Tang dynasty China with the different Zen masters, when you get a period when the disciples are even more distinguished and prominent and effective than the gurus this is a very promising sign, a very promising situation. You get other traditions where the second or third generation disciples become the real founders of the school. This is very promising indeed, it means a really live seed must have been sown which wasn't able to come into fruition for even in the life time of the guru himself. He did plant it but he himself was not able to bring it to full maturity, that was done by the disciples of his disciples. So I think one should think in those sort of terms, not just sort of being obedient disciples but definitely in terms of oneself being able

eventually to function in at least a guru-like sort of way and expand and not just continue but develop whatever was handed to one. It's [49] not just a question of jogging along and maintaining the same old set up. Of course it must be expansion in accordance with the same basic principles, otherwise it isn't expansion it is breaking away, that also sometimes happens. People break away and set up their own little shows. That is the other extreme almost or a different form of degeneration. So therefore the expression disciple with capacity is quite significant perhaps. It's not enough to be a disciple, one must be a disciple with capacity or a son-disciple.

Clive: It's also possible that some will act in the same way as the son-disciples. They may go off and set something up but not set it up in true accordance of the basic principles set down by the guru.

S: Well it depends how basic those basic principles were. If he wasn't setting it up in accordance with the same basic principles well he would no longer be a disciple. He'd be going off on a completely different tangent, but it may be that the basic principle was deeper than many people understood. Some people might think that he was going off at a tangent but in fact he would not be, it would simply be that he had a deeper understanding of what was really basic. On the face of it, it could look completely different but there must be an inner connection at least. (Pause) So in organizational terms within the FWBO it's as though everybody should think at least in terms of being a chairman after four or five years. That is to say all Order members. It's not that there's a sort of special class of capable Order members who are going to be chairmen in perpetuity with everybody else just sort of helping out. Everybody should think in terms of being chairmen and if there aren't enough Centres to go round well they will jolly well have to go and start new ones so they can be chairmen!

On to the next verse. 'One must observe the mind to gain a decisive view. To win Progress one must meditate; one must act to reach the consummation.' There's three important principles here which are often referred to as a sort of triad. There's the view, there is the path and there is the fruit.

Kulananda: Sila, samadhi, prajna?

S: Oh no, view is darsana. This is a different triad. View in the sense of your philosophy - inverted commas - that would be the nearest Western equivalent. First of all you have your view, your philosophy which lays down your basic aim, which clarifies the nature of your goal, which gives you your philosophy of life and then of course there is the path which enables you to implement the philosophy, and then there is of course the actual attainment of the goal of that philosophy, the goal of that path. So in Tibetan Buddhism these three are very often referred to. It's darsana, marga, and pala. But one must observe the mind to gain a decisive view. First of all notice decisive view, a very clear cut, a very definite view which provides you with a definite philosophy of life which you're going to [50] follow, which you're going to put into practice, to which you're really committed. It suggests that. It's not just a theory. It's your definite philosophy of life. It's what you definitely do believe intellectually formulated. So you need that according to the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. But to gain that you must observe the mind, why that? What is this observing the mind and why is it so important in formulating your view?

Abhaya: Because it means you've got to be disentangled from your own subjective unskilful

mental states.

Clive: Could it also imply that you must find out what you really want?

S: It means you must be in touch with your own experience. The view that you formulate must not just be an abstract theory divorced from or irrelevant to your own needs. It must be formulated with reference to the state of your own mind.

Kovida: Could you say your view would be more like your gestalt?

S: Perhaps.

Kovida: If your gestalt unfolds presumably there must be a view (unclear)

S: I think view suggests a sort of higher degree of conscious formulation. The gestalt is more something that sort of guides you or pushes you from behind or which is imminent in your activity whereas the view is made thoroughly explicit.

Kulananda: A philosophy is something you formulate.

Kovida: But wouldn't your formulation arise having observed your gestalt?

S: You could say that, yes, you could say that by studying your mind you sort of come to understand the pattern of your own mental functioning and you formulate your view taking that into consideration. It's no more than that because you're not going to pander to it. But you have to take that into consideration, you have to relate your view to that. It has to be a view which is accessible to or relevant to that particular kind of mental functioning. So having done that to win progress one must meditate upon the view that follows the path and according to this verse the most important part of the path is meditation presumably in the sense of both samatha and vipassana. That is to say both calm or dhyana experience and actual insight or wisdom. And then one must act to reach the consummation. It's as though perhaps - this is not to be taken too literally - but it's as though act is distinguished from meditating, though meditation surely is also a kind of act or at least a kind of activity.

Kulananda: You've actually got to do something to finally break through. You can't just meditate.

S: No, I'm saying you shouldn't take it too literally. It's not that [51] meditation isn't activity and once you've meditated you've still got to act. No, I don't think one should take it in that way because meditation is a kind of activity. But it may be that the full meaning has not come across in the English translation. Or rather it's not enough just to meditate, one must keep on meditating, one must keep on practising, one must keep on acting in all sorts of ways including meditation.

So one must observe the mind to gain a decisive view. Perhaps the word decisive is the link between the mind and its gestalt and the view. Well for what is it decisive? It becomes decisive in the sense of making an actual difference and being something practical and relevant when it is related to your actual mental state or your particular pattern of mental functioning, in other words your gestalt. To win progress one must meditate, one must act to

reach the consummation

\_\_\_: He almost seems to be saying that meditation might just not be enough.

S: It doesn't make clear though what the nature of that act is but clearly it does suggest that meditation isn't enough but again probably one should not take that too literally especially if meditation is understood as including insight as well as calm, vipassana as well as samatha.

\_\_\_: If we were to change the word act here (the verse would read quite well)

S: Perhaps one can say that meditation refers to the internal transformation but there's got to be an external transformation too including the physical body and everything that it does. That can't be left outside.

All right, on to the last verse.

'Perfection of Mind is the Accomplishment; the Fourfold Body of Buddha is a presence and Realization. He who knows one knows all.' This seems a bit ambiguous. Perfection of mind is the Accomplishment; I think consummation and accomplishment are much the same thing. Accomplishment is no doubt 'siddhi'. Perhaps this needs a word of explanation. The Vajrayana tends not to speak so much in terms of enlightenment but in terms of 'siddhi' and siddhi of course has got a double meaning. Siddhi means sort of psychic powers on the one hand, supernormal powers, but it is also used as a synonym for enlightenment itself. Enlightenment, as it were, being the supreme supernormal power. But the suggestion very definitely is of a sort of magical faculty but the Vajrayana does think of enlightenment in these terms and therefore it tends to think of the enlightened person not as the Bodhisattva or as the Buddha but as the siddha or Mahasiddha with Padmasambhava being the most prominent example of the Mahasiddha, exercising all sorts of supernormal powers and these supernormal powers become endowed with a sort of symbolic significance as one can see from the life of Padmasambhava. So perfection of mind is the accomplishment, so the highest [52] supernormal power is the complete transformation of one's own mind. It's a little odd that body isn't also included but perhaps it's just the exigences of the verse. The fourfold Body of Buddha is a presence and Realization. The fourfold body being as I said before Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya, Dharmakaya, Svabhavakakaya. So this becomes a presence and realization, not something external to oneself but something internalised. Something which one actually is, not just an objective ideal. He who knows one knows all. It's not clear what this refers to. It could refer to the four bodies. If you know one body you know all. After all the Dharmakaya or perhaps the Svabhavakakaya is the foundation of them all. Or one could take it in a more general sense. If you know any one thing thoroughly you know everything because everything is interconnected. Quite literally any one thing. It is sometimes said according to some schools of Buddhist thought that everything reflects every other thing in the universe so that if you know one thing deeply you know everything because you can see everything in one thing. As I said you see the ten thousand dharmas in one dharma. This is the philosophy of the Avatamsaka school especially.

Clive: What kind of object do you think it's advisable to know thoroughly. (Laughter)

S: It doesn't matter. They would say if you know a grain of dust thoroughly you would know everything. You would understand that the grain of dust was void etc. Not only that, you

would actually see - this is the teaching of this school - every individual thing reflected in that grain of dust, if you went deeply enough into it you could understand everything else that existed. In other words one is not to think in terms of separate things, that is to say things which are absolutely distinct from other things and have to be understood by themselves, as it were.

\_\_\_: It sounds like Blake.

S: Hmm. The world in a grain of sand. (Pause) But do you think there's any particular reason bearing in mind the context and the people to whom Milarepa is speaking or rather singing, is there any particular reason for this last verse which is after all the last one, the sort of concluding note that he strikes?

\_\_\_: It almost suggests that you don't need to go on discussing instructions but just do them.

S: Because it then goes on to say 'Hearing this song their misunderstandings were all cleared.' It didn't say anything about misunderstandings at the beginning but clearly their debate was based on probably misunderstanding on both sides. So hearing this song their misunderstandings were all cleared.

[53]

Clive: In all these texts as soon as the guru actually speaks then the disciples are either immediately enlightened or at least they understand what he's just said.

S: Usually they do but the difficulty is that only too quickly one forgets. This is what people say who come on retreat. They can sometimes forget what it's like even to be on retreat, not to speak of forgetting anything that they've learned on retreat. They can forget what the actual experience of being on retreat at all is like. So you can find disciples becoming enlightened when the Buddha or the guru says this, that or the other but strange to say maybe a few days later you find them in a very unenlightened state. So it wasn't full enlightenment that they experienced but a sort of flash of understanding or illumination which was perhaps not the real thing in terms of permanent insight.

But anyway going back over the whole thing now do you get the sort of general drift of it or do you think that there is a general drift?

Abhaya: The emphasis seems to be on the personal experience.

S: And also on transforming the without into the within and in this way overcoming intellectual alienation.

Kulananda: Perhaps there are some activities from which one should just refrain.

S: Like?

Kulananda: Like thinking abstractly.

S: Or debating.

Clive: You can be debating the Dharma.

S: Well this is what the two disciples were doing at the beginning, they were debating. Debating in fact the teachings of Naropa and Medripa which must have been quite advanced teachings, certainly Tantric teachings. But I think it's very easy for people in the West, even for people in India because I've met many of this sort, just to get hold of certain ideas, certain conceptual formulations and just go on refining and refining on them and going round and round on the same circle of ideas and never getting out of that on to anything of a practical nature. The Indians in fact are particularly good at this. It's a bit like - I'm not quite sure of the right analogy - but it's a bit like a wheel going round and the ratchet never grips, it keeps slipping. When it grips it grips and pulls and turns something but it never grips, it keeps slipping so it just goes round and round and round, it never grips, it never turns the other wheel. The conceptual (mind) goes round and round, it never grips into anything practical and starts turning that. You could say quite a lot of people are [54] like that intellectually, they're just like ... it's a sort of intellectual revving up that takes place going on all the time. They thoroughly enjoy it but they never actually get started and never actually move forward. You find this with intellectual people. You can really feel them going round and round and round and round but the ratchet never engages. They just make another turn, another revolution or they just rev up a bit more, a bit louder, they compete in their revving up but they never actually do whatever they were supposed to do, put it in gear and move forward, move off. So presumably this is what these two disciples were doing on that particular occasion. So Milarepa was sort of saying get the ratchet engaged, start practising or continue practising. He says listen to my song and then you can carry on with your debate so that sounds rather ironical now because if they listen properly to his song they wouldn't want to carry on debating.

\_\_\_: He's just bringing them back isn't he?

S: It was a long debate don't forget. The Jetsun says, 'First listen to my song, then continue your discussion.' He must have said to himself 'if you can'. He's quite direct with his disciples but he's got quite a sense of humour too.

Any point there that needs any further going into?

Abhaya: Thinking about that last line, 'He who knows one, knows all.' In a way it's saying just take a little facet of the teaching and just concentrate on that and don't worry about anything else. It implies if you do that and concentrate on one little facet of the teaching it implies all sorts of others so before long you'll know quite a lot anyway.

S: Yes, because if you know one you know all. You don't escape knowing all just by knowing one. That's the whole point of it.

Clive: In a sense if you really study, let's say the Heart Sutra and nothing else and you realize what it means ...

Abhaya: I was thinking like in terms of study, if you decide to study the Heart Sutra so you take that (translation) and it starts 'The Bodhisattva of Compassion' ...

S: Ah, so here you've got what's a Bodhisattva, what is Bodhi? What is a Sattva? How many

different kinds of being? What is compassion? What is the relationship between compassion and upaya? When he meditated deeply. Following the English translation - what's meditation? Then you go into all the dhyana states etc. etc. (Laughter)

It's therefore said that the different sutras and the different formulations of the teaching are not, as it were, laid side by side so that in order to know the whole dharma you have to know all of them separately and independently and then sort of add them together, but each [55] one of them contains the whole Dharma in a particular way. Each one of them, as it were, is a fresh formulation of the whole Dharma, it's not a part of the Dharma.

Abhaya: Does that mean that if in his reflections or studies the disciple suddenly really understands something clearly then everything else sort of slots into place? He understands without actually having to go into these.

S: Yes. If the book is read to him, as sometimes happens in the case of illiterate disciples they know at once what it was all about even though they hadn't studied it.

Clive: If you see the Dharma you see the Dharma in everything.

S: Because it's the same Dharma. It's not another bit which you have to study separately.

Abhaya: That suggests that in some sense you would know it already. It lies within rather than without.

S: No. Because the Dharma is, let's say, the formulation in certain terms of the Buddha's experience, but it's as though the Buddha's experience is in a manner of speaking fully contained in every separate formulation, not that he's given a bit of his experience in this one and a bit of his experience in that one and a bit of his experience in that. It's as though each one of them in its own particular way from a particular point of view contains the whole Dharma. In other words you can find your way from that particular formulation to the Buddha's total enlightenment, not just to a particular aspect of it.

Clive: So with everything.

S: If one takes this final line literally, yes. The whole of existence is contained in every part. In other words the very distinction, the very difference between part and whole just falls to the ground.

Abhaya: How does that work out symbolically rather than conceptually?

S: It's even described in those sort of terms. For instance you take up a single flower say in the Pure Land and you see that there's millions of Buddhas sitting inside it and whole universes (chuckles). It's the same sort of principle exemplified there isn't it? (Pause) We get a good analogy of this just from what we see under the microscope. You just look at a cell and you can see all sorts of things there. Look at a leaf or the leg of an earwig or whatever. It's not that you just come to a stop. You can go on and on and on, more and more complex and beautiful structures one within another.

Kulananda: Space can expand throughout the universe.

[56]

S: Yes. Whether it's magnification of a tiny part of a cell or insect's leg or whether it's a cross section of the heavens millions of miles across, sometimes it's very difficult to tell. They look much alike.

Anyway let's leave it there.

DAY TWO

S: All right, page 577.

Subhuti: "Then the Jetsun told Rechungpa that if one determines to practise the Dharma, he should practice like this; whereupon he sang:

"Listen my son, the Illumination Holder.  
To practise the Dharma you should know these things:  
That your Guru who produces merit,  
The embodiment of all the Buddhas,  
Is the Dharmakaya in Itself.  
Rechungpa, are you thus convinced?"

S: So Milarepa's already sang two songs and then the text continues, 'Then the Jetsun', that is Milarepa, 'told Rechungpa that if one determines to practise the Dharma, he should practice like this; whereupon he sang;' In other words it seems that the song is about how one should practice the Dharma if one has determined to do so. In other words it introduces the subject of the determination to practise the Dharma. What is really meant by determination to practise the Dharma and how one should practice it if one so determines. So this is what this song is all about. So he says, 'Listen my son, the Illumination Holder. To practise the Dharma you should know these things: that your guru who produces merit, the embodiment of all the Buddhas, is the Dharmakaya in Itself. Rechungpa, are you thus convinced?' First of all he says listen. This is obvious. We've gone over that sort of ground a lot. We've dwelt on the importance of receptivity and the fact that in the days of the Buddha himself the disciple was called the sravaka, the hearer, the listener, but there's no need to go over all that ground again. Then again he says addressing Rechungpa, 'My son,' that is to say my spiritual son, my heart son - somebody who is, as it were, born of my teaching, born of my instruction. We went into this a bit last time so no need to go over that point again. But then we come to something that hasn't been touched on as yet, not in connection with these songs, and that is Illumination Holder. He addresses Rechungpa as the Illumination Holder. What do you think that means? Do you think it represents any original Sanskrit term? It does as far as I can make out. It's the Vidyadhara. Does anyone have any idea what vidyadhara means?

[57]

Abhaya: Vidya means knowledge.

S: Vidya is knowledge, awareness and dhara is holder. So it's the knowledge holder or the illumination holder. It's the term which is usually given to the Vajrayana initiate, one might even say the quite advanced Vajrayana initiate. Let's first of all look at the second part of the term. Holder - one who holds. We have expressions like vidyadhara, knowledge holder or illumination holder and Dharmadhara, the holder of the Dharma, or you have also the term



vinayadhara, holder of the vinaya. So it is holder in the sense rather of upholder, in the sense of one who has mastered. So the vidyadhara is the upholder of illumination, one who has mastered illumination, that is to say vidya. We've gone into the meaning of vidya in some previous occasion when it was suggested, I think following Guenther that vidya was not so much knowledge as awareness, even appreciative awareness. Awareness which was of a thing in such a way as not to look upon it as geared to any particular purpose. In fact when you speak in terms of awareness of reality there's no question of your looking upon or gearing that reality to any particular purpose because it transcends that. It can't be used for anything just as, I think it's in the Tao Te Ching, it is said that the great tree is so big that it can't be used for any particular purpose. It's too big to be used as a pillar for a house and so on. So it's the same as regards reality itself. It's too big to be used for any particular purpose. So awareness of reality and this is what vidya essentially is, is not an awareness of it as useful for any particular purpose, not even the purpose of your own individual enlightenment. So it's a purely appreciative awareness. In a sense an aesthetic awareness. You're not going to use reality for any particular purpose and this is what is conveyed or connoted by this term vidya, it's knowledge or illumination in that sort of sense. So the Tantric initiate, the Vajrayana initiate, is the possessor, the holder, the upholder, the master of that sort of knowledge. In other words he's reached quite a high level of spiritual development and Milarepa is addressing Rechungpa as such. In other words by addressing Rechungpa as vidyadhara or illumination holder what do you think Milarepa is saying? What do you think he's recognizing?

Subhuti: Rechungpa's attainment.

S: He's recognizing his attainments. He's recognizing that he's come a long way but he's still saying to him 'listen'. He's still got quite a lot to learn. He's still got quite a lot to experience. He hasn't gone all the way, if one can even speak in terms of going all the way. There's still, he still has to practise the Dharma. He hasn't finished practising it. So he says listen my son the illumination holder, to practise the dharma you should know these things. So what things? The song consists of a whole list of them. 'That your guru who produces merit, the embodiment of all the Buddhas, is the Dharmakaya in itself. Rechungpa, are you [58] thus convinced?' So who is Rechungpa's guru? Obviously it's Milarepa himself who is referring to himself here in the third person. So 'That your guru who produces merit.' Why does Rechungpa's guru, i.e. Milarepa, produce merit or in what sense can he be said to produce merit? For whom does he produce merit? What is merit anyway?

\_\_\_: Couldn't it be seen as sort of virtues in that Rechungpa's own spiritual attainments ...

S: Yes. Merit or punya has got a sort of double meaning in a way. The two meanings are closely connected. There is punya or merit in the sense of the positive experiences, the pleasant experiences that befall you as a result of previous skilful actions, whether of body speech or mind. Sometimes the term merits is applied to the skilful actions themselves because ultimately they are productive of merits. So you've got merits as the effect of skilful actions and then merits as the skilful actions themselves. In that sense of course you can speak of the merits as virtues or as good qualities. But there's also another aspect of the matter which is that it was widely believed in India and also of course in Tibet, believed by both Hinduism and by Buddhism, that an exceptionally holy person, like Milarepa or a group of exceptionally holy people were what is called a 'field of merits' - we've gone into this on some occasion or another. So what is meant by a 'field of merits'? You get it in the vandana with

reference to the Sangha.

Subhuti: If you venerate them or make offerings to them you make merit for yourself. It's a meritorious action.

S: But not just that because you make merit for yourself whomsoever you make offerings to, particularly the holy person, the guru or the Sangha is a field for merits in the sense that anything offered to them or any skilful action performed with reference to them is productive of all the more merit. This was a deeply ingrained belief in ancient India and still is in Buddhism in the East. That for instance if you offer food to an ordinary beggar who just comes begging to the door there's a certain amount of merit that accrues to you. That is a skilful action and you reap the result of that skilful action, you acquire merit. But supposing a monk comes to the door, you make exactly the same offering to him and more merit accrues to you because he is a more holy person than the beggar, the ordinary beggar. Supposing say a Stream Entrant comes to the door, you offer food to him and there's still more merit. Supposing an Arhant comes to the door - more merit still. So there is this belief in Eastern Buddhism. What do you think is the rationale of this, how do you think such a thing is possible?

Andy Friends: To be able to give something to a highly developed person you have to see them for a start. Just the action of giving must mean you have this faith.

[59]

S: It isn't actually said in so many words that when you say give food to an Arhant that you recognize that he is an Arhant and with full faith in him or devotion for him as an Arhant you give the food. That is not actually said but probably it is implied. That the nature of the action itself varies according to your consciousness of the nature of the recipient. It isn't that if you just happen quite mechanically and unknowingly to give to an Arhant, that's just your good luck and an enormous amount of merit accrues to you. The increased amount of merit is no doubt due to your enhanced mental state, your more skilful mental state brought about by your consciousness of the fact that you are giving to an Arhant, that is to say a person of extraordinary attainments. You could even give a... make a sort of parallel, a very worldly sort of parallel. Supposing for instance, this is the sort of thing that happens, it's from a quite different context but it may serve to illustrate to some extent - supposing on the occasion of some opening ceremony somebody has to make a presentation to whoever is performing that opening ceremony, maybe the Queen is performing it. So maybe someone is asked to step forward and offer the Queen a bunch of flowers. So what will be their mental state. It will certainly be a much more aroused mental state or even emotional state, thinking that they're making the presentation to the Queen, even though the bunch of flowers is exactly the same as they might have offered to anybody else, so the emotional, as it were, rewards of that are very much greater. So in the same way you may offer, it is said, the same rice and the same curry to an Arhant as to an ordinary bhikkhu or an ordinary beggar but the mere fact that you're conscious that you are offering it to an Arhant of all people means that you offer it with far greater feeling, far greater emotion even, far greater devotion, and therefore, inasmuch as the mental state is very much more skilful, very much more positive, the merit that accrued to you as a result of that action is correspondingly greater. That would seem to be the rationale of this particular belief, but it does of course assume some consciousness at least of the nature of the recipient. So this is the sort of belief or attitude that Milarepa has in mind when he says that your guru who produces merit, that is to say if you make offerings to him, or if anyone

makes offerings to him, that is to say Milarepa, conscious of who and what he really is, then merit will accrue to him or to her on account of their action. So, 'that your guru who produces merit, the embodiment of all the Buddhas, is the Dharmakaya Itself.' You mustn't forget that here we're in the context of the Vajrayana and the Vajrayana speaks in terms not only of the exoteric refuges as they're called, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, but also in terms of the esoteric refuges which of course are the guru, the deva and the dakini. So what is the rationale behind this? We've gone into it on previous occasions but it might be good just to remind ourselves of it in this context. What is the difference here between an [60] exoteric refuge and an esoteric refuge? These are the English translations. It's more like outer and inner refuges. There are many other refuges also but we won't go into those. So the outer refuges are the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the inner refuges are the guru, the deva and the dakini. So what is the basis of this distinction?

\_\_\_: One is more an ideal. The other is where it actually impinges upon you.

Abhaya: It's more like your personal experience of the nearest thing to those exoteric refuges.

S: Yes, in your present experience. Because what does Buddha represent? Buddha has a general significance, you might say a universal significance, even a cosmic significance. Suppose you see the Buddha only in the context of ordinary history, then one might say well within that context the Buddha is the most developed person, he's the most developed person so far as humanity as a whole is concerned. But the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, being so to speak, dead and gone you don't have any contact with him, any personal contact. There's only a historical memory, you only read about him in books. He comes to represent a general ideal. But what does the guru represent? The guru represents the highest human development with which you are personally in contact. So in that sense there is an analogy between the position which the Buddha occupies in the wider historical context, even cosmic context, and the position that the guru occupies in your personal context. It may be of course that the guru is as enlightened as the Buddha himself, in that case so much the better for you. It may be that he is not. But in either case just as the Buddha represents the highest point of reference so to speak in the broader context, the guru represents the highest point of reference in the personal context. So therefore at least analogically the guru, so far as you're concerned, is the Buddha. The guru is, as it were, your private Buddha. The guru is the Buddha as he appears within the context of your personal life, and of course Milarepa goes a bit further than that, he says that the guru is the embodiment of all the Buddhas. That is to say whatever the Buddhas might be within all of their own particular historical and cosmic contexts all that your own guru is to you. That he's the highest point of reference for you as far as your own actual experience goes, your own actual contact with people goes. Leaving aside what you read about or hear about. But a little more. He says that your guru who produces merit, the embodiment of all the Buddhas, is the Dharmakaya in itself. Why do you think Milarepa goes as far as that? Because after all in a way Dharmakaya is contained in Buddha because the Dharmakaya is one of the three kayas of the Buddha or of a Buddha. There's Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya and Dharmakaya, so if you have Buddha you have the three kayas. You could say that Milarepa is just bringing out the content of Buddhahood [61] more clearly, more fully but maybe it isn't just that, maybe there's a clue, so to speak, in the way in which Guenther for instance renders the word Dharmakaya. It's sometimes rendered body of truth or body of reality but do you remember how Guenther renders it at least sometimes? He renders it as authentic body and he points out that we mustn't take this word body too literally. It's not as though the Buddha has got three bodies or even three personalities or even three anything.

Maybe it's easier to approach it via the mundane analogy. What in the Buddha is Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya Dharmakaya, in the ordinary unenlightened human being is what?

Clive: Body, speech and mind.

S: Body, speech and mind. So if you are in contact with someone bodily, just bodily, are you really in contact with them? Supposing you can just see them with your physical eyes or touch them with your physical skin do you really experience them, are you really in contact with them or not?

\_\_\_: To a limited extent.

S: Only to a limited extent. But then supposing they speak, supposing they enter into verbal communication with you, any kind of communication. How well do you know them then?

Abhaya: It's getting deeper.

S: It's getting deeper. But then supposing you can, as it were, see into their mind. How does that compare with the previous contact, the previous communication? Supposing there's a direct contact of mind with mind without anything mediating between. What would you say of that? You could say then that you were in contact with the person himself and supposing you were to have contact or deeper and deeper contact with that mind, so that you were to go to the very limit of that mind. You would say that then you really were in contact with that person. So what would you be in contact with? You could say that you were in contact with the very essence of him. You could say that you were in authentic contact and you could say that what you were in contact with was their authentic body. That aspect of them which was more authentic so to speak than just their physical body, more authentic than their verbal communication. That aspect of them which was their mind, which was the real person, the real individual. So it's the same with regard to the Buddha but transposed, as it were, to the transcendental level, the transcendental dimension. When you're in contact say with the Buddha's physical body that's only a limited contact. If you happened to live at the same time as the Buddha and you see the Buddha physically present that's only a limited contact even if you hear the Buddha teaching that's still quite limited. But if you can so to speak enter into the Buddha's own mind then that is the real contact, that is a genuine contact, that is the authentic contact and you are then in contact with the Buddha's authentic body, [62] that is to say with the Dharmakaya. So it's as though Milarepa is saying it's not just that Milarepa looks like a Buddha, that he just talks like a Buddha, that in the depths of his being he is a Buddha. In other words if Milarepa, if the guru is actually to be the highest point of reference or the point of highest reference so far as your own particular personal contact is concerned then you've got to be in contact with him at the deepest level or his being. In other words his Dharmakaya and of course you've got, as it were, to be convinced that that Dharmakaya is there. That there is this deeper and more authentic level, one might say, for you to communicate with and for you to be aware of. In other words Milarepa is saying that your guru who produces merit, the embodiment of all the Buddhas, is the Dharmakaya in itself. In other words it isn't enough just to believe in a general sort of way that the guru is your highest point of reference and so on within your particular personal contacts, there must be an actual awareness of that deeper level within the guru and an actual communication with it. It isn't enough that you just give the guru so to speak that formal position within your personal

world. So 'Rechungpa are you thus convinced?' So Milarepa's saying quite a lot here because the context is or the subject matter really is determination to practise the Dharma, that if one determines to practise the Dharma he should practice like this, so that's the overall situation, that someone - in this case Rechungpa, is determined to practise the Dharma, so how should he practice? This is what Milarepa is telling him. He's telling him that in order to practise he needs a certain kind of conviction. In other words he needs a particular kind of conviction about the guru, because after all this is a traditional Buddhist context, particularly it's a Vajrayana context. So obviously if you practice the Dharma you've first of all got to learn the Dharma and in order to be able to learn the Dharma you've got to have a guru. So it isn't enough, as it were, to have a guru in a purely formal sense. It's not enough to give the guru the sort of official position of being the highest point of reference within your particular personal context, your particular personal world, but one has actually got to have the conviction that there is, as it were, this deeper level within the guru, the Dharmakaya level, so to speak, and that the teaching is coming from there and that through the teaching as it comes from that particular level, you are in contact with that level. In other words in order to practise the teaching you have to be convinced of the authentic source of that teaching, that the teaching comes from the Dharmakaya. In other words that the teaching comes from a completely authentic point. Now this introduces another question. It ties up a little bit with what we were saying earlier on about the merits. It isn't that the guru is the Dharmakaya itself in a sort of what I'd call official sense, it's not enough just to say oh well yes the guru is the Dharmakaya itself and what ever, the teaching he gives comes from that source - that isn't enough. One must be convinced so one can be convinced [63] only by experiencing that for oneself. So this means that when it is said that the guru is the Dharmakaya in itself it doesn't mean that being the Dharmakaya is a sort of attribute that the guru has in a purely one-sided objective way to which you have to give a certain kind of, as it were, official recognition. When it is said that the guru is the Dharmakaya in itself what it really means is or what Milarepa really means is that for the guru to be the guru there has to be a certain relationship between him and the disciple. In other words in this case between Milarepa and Rechungpa. So when it is said that the guru is the Dharmakaya itself it doesn't mean that the guru literally has an authentic body so to speak which the disciple doesn't have, it refers to the authenticity of the communication between the disciple and the guru and that the objective pole so to speak of that communication is indicated by saying that the guru is the Dharmakaya in itself. In other words what it really means is there must be a communication between Dharmakaya and Dharmakaya and Milarepa is you could say a fully actualized Dharmakaya and a partially actualized Dharmakaya. So Milarepa is asking Rechungpa whether he is really prepared to enter into this sort of communication, whether he really believes in the possibility of that sort of communication, that is to say Dharmakaya to Dharmakaya. Not that the guru has a Dharmakaya in a literal sort of sense. The body of authenticity or authentic body as Guenther calls it is not just a separate kind of body which the guru has. It's not a sort of entity. It refers more to the particular kind of relationship which exists between - in this context - the guru and the disciple. The guru has the Dharmakaya in the sense that he actually is capable, fully capable, of that kind of authentic relationship. The disciple doesn't have the Dharmakaya in the sense that as yet he's not fully capable of that authentic kind of relationship. But is he convinced that the guru is capable of it even if he isn't so that there is some meaning and some sense in him trying to enter into that kind of authentic relationship or communication with the guru because the guru is already capable of it. Do you see the sort of emphasis I'm giving? In other words it's not really an ontological statement that is being made.

Kovida: It's a description of relationships. It's like a higher level of relationship.

S: Yes. In Buddhism there are quite a number of, as it were, pseudo-ontological statements but they're only pseudo-ontological, they're not really ontological statements. They don't tell you really anything about the nature of the object in an ultimate metaphysical, as it were, scientific - inverted commas - sense. They tell you more about the nature of your attitudes towards that posited object. It may not be actually an object.

\_\_\_: Doesn't that also bring to light why Rechungpa's called the Illumination Holder? In terms of appreciative understanding because if he wasn't of that sort of calibre then there'd be very little chance of him [64] being able to ...

S: It may suggest that in a broader sense, yes, because he already has reached a high level of spiritual development. He is capable of seeing Milarepa so to speak as the Dharmakaya. He is capable of seeing in Milarepa - I was going to say the possibility but it's really more than a possibility - for Milarepa it's an actuality - of authentic communication. So if you are capable of authentic communication it's as though there is something there in you which is authentic. You can speak of that as the authentic aspect of your being or if you like your authentic body. So if you do not believe that authentic communication is possible with somebody, not at all possible despite any effort that you may make, it means that what you are saying is that they are not authentically a person, not authentically an individual, that they themselves are not authentic. So if you say that somebody is authentic or you believe that somebody is authentic it means that you cannot really enter into communication or relationship with them except authentically. (Pause) So it's as though Milarepa is saying before Rechungpa can really learn anything from Milarepa there must be a certain kind of relationship between them. It must be an authentic relationship, it must be a relationship based so far as Rechungpa is concerned, on a recognition that Milarepa himself is an authentic individual. More authentic let us say than Rechungpa himself and that in as much as he's a more authentic individual than Rechungpa whatever he says to Rechungpa will be based on that authenticity and therefore will be something which Rechungpa can practice. It will be the Dharma. You could say the Dharma is the utterance of the authentic person. The Dharma is not itself an entity though it may appear to be because historically it comes down to us crystallised in the form of particular teachings, but the Dharma originally was the Buddha's utterance to his disciples under certain conditions. So the Dharma was the authentic utterance of the authentic individual you could say. It's not this or that particular teaching, this or that particular doctrine, it can be anything depending on circumstances. So Rechungpa has presumably determined to practise the Dharma. So it's not that he has determined to practise this or that teaching, this or that doctrine though it may turn out to be such, but it's more that he has this authentic relationship, this authentic communication with Milarepa and Milarepa's communication with him is authentic, that authentic communication is the Dharma and that Dharma is what Rechungpa is going to practise. So unless he believes or unless he is determined to practise the Dharma, unless he really wants to base his life on what is authentic and practice what is authentic he's not going to see Milarepa as an authentic individual and in the same way unless he sees Milarepa as an authentic individual he's not going to hear the Dharma from him because he won't be open to the authenticity of the Dharma or he won't realize the authenticity of the Dharma if he doesn't realize the authenticity [65] of the person giving the Dharma. They're all interconnected. So in other words it's not a question of learning a set doctrine from a particular person but it's more a question of an authentic relationship, authentic communication, and an authentic effort to practise whatever has been communicated in that

way because we aren't very much here within the Vajrayana context.

Kovida: Practising the Dharma meaning keeping, as it were, that level of communication open all the time. Is that what practising means?

S: Practising isn't just keeping it open all the time but also acting upon it.

Kovida: In what sense?

S: In the sense that ... say, Milarepa is an authentic individual, he has an authentic relationship with Rechungpa, at least from Milarepa's side it is completely authentic, from Rechungpa's it is partially authentic. So there is an authentic communication between them. The content of that authentic communication we call the Dharma. So it is not enough for Rechungpa to be open to the communication, he must also be determined to practise it. In other words practice whatever is pointed out. Within the context of that communication something may be pointed out, for instance that Rechungpa has a certain weakness. That particular weakness may be disclosed within the context of their communication and the remedy for that weakness may be disclosed. So if Rechungpa is really determined to practise the Dharma then he will start practising to get rid of that weakness, to apply the correct remedy.

Kovida: I thought for a minute that the actual Dharma was the same as the communication, that there is a content to the Dharma.

S: It isn't mere communication. Communication is never mere communication. You don't just communicate, you communicate something. So Milarepa would communicate about, say, what Rechungpa needs to do to develop further, he might communicate about a weakness which is holding him back. So Rechungpa's practice of the Dharma will consist in the acting upon the content of that communication, whether it is to cultivate something or get rid of something or avoid something or search for something and so on. So, 'Rechungpa are you thus convinced?' I don't know what the Tibetan word is here in the original but conviction sounds all right. The importance of conviction is being pointed out. This is going to come at the end of each of these verses, 'are you convinced?', because if you're not convinced you're just not going to do anything about it. You must be convinced that in Milarepa you have an authentic individual, you must be convinced that his communication is authentic, that the content of that communication is authentic. That what he says really is so, what he says about you, what he says about Rechungpa is really so. That if he says that Rechungpa has a certain weakness that needs to be got rid of, well that is so and that that is what Rechungpa has got to [66] do. If he hasn't got that sort of conviction there's no practice of the Dharma. It just becomes a meaningless chat, an exchange of views that no one is taking very seriously. So he says, 'Rechungpa are you thus convinced?' If there isn't that sort of conviction then nothing happens. It just goes in one ear and out the other. That's why you find people reading books on Buddhism, books on Tibetan Buddhism, books on Zen, listening to talks, even sitting in meditation but nothing happens because there's no conviction in this sense. One could say no faith but I think conviction is a better word here.

All right, let's go on then.

\_\_\_:

"You should know his instructions  
Are superb, nectar-like antidotes  
That cure the Five Poisonous Desires.  
Rechungpa are you thus convinced?"

S: What are the Five Poisonous Desires? Maybe 'desires' is not a good term. I think the original Sanskrit would be the Maha-Klesas, the great defilements or even the Five Poisons as we more generally call them. What are they?

Abhaya: Distraction, hatred or anger.

S: And usually ignorance and conceit. Sometimes I think conceit is replaced by jealousy. So these are the five great defilements and from the Vajrayana point of view they have to be transformed into the five knowledges or the five wisdoms, the five awarenesses which of course are the knowledges or awarenesses symbolized by or embodied in the five Buddhas and the mandala of the Buddhas. So one has got craving, anger, distraction, ignorance and conceit - the five poisons. So these five poisons are envisaged as being present in everybody and then there are antidotes to these poisons. In terms of meditation practice what are these antidotes? The antidote for distraction is the mindfulness of breathing; the antidote for hatred is the metta bhavana; the antidote for ignorance is the contemplation or recollection of the twelve nidanas; the antidote for conceit is the six element practice and the antidote for craving is asubha bhavana or the recollection of impermanence or death, all these three - they represent the same practice in a way with different degrees of intensity. So in other words very often the practice of the Dharma is thought of in terms of the application of a certain remedy to a certain disease or the application of a particular antidote to a particular poison. This is one way of looking at the spiritual life. You could say this is a rather negative way but it's a way which is quite common in Buddhism. The more positive way of looking at it is thinking of spiritual life in terms of growth and development rather than in terms of the elimination of poisons or the elimination of disease. So if one thinks in terms of getting rid of the five poisonous desires then [67] of course one thinks in terms of nectar-like antidotes. So it's as though the Dharma in the sense of the content of the guru's authentic communication to or with the disciple takes the form of instructions as to how to get rid of the five poisonous desires. It's not about anything general or metaphysical but about how the disciple is to get rid of these particular things which are holding him back or, one could say more positively, what he has to develop in order to grow, what qualities he has to cultivate in order to grow. So 'Rechungpa are you thus convinced?' Are you convinced that the guru's instructions really do constitute antidotes for the five poisonous desires from which you are suffering. In other words are you really convinced that the Dharma works - this is what Milarepa is saying. Unless you are convinced that the Dharma works you won't really practice it - you'll only go through the motions. So in this particular context it's a question of are you really convinced that you are suffering from the five poisonous desires, are you really convinced that these are something that you need to get rid of, are you really convinced that the Dharma as the nectar-like antidote for these poisons will actually help you to get rid of them and are you convinced that that is the actual teaching that you are getting. If you haven't got that sort of conviction you won't practice the Dharma with determination. So this question of conviction is really important. If, for instance, you're not really convinced that meditation does change your mental state well you won't practice it with determination. So Milarepa in this song is hammering home this whole question of conviction. Do you really believe it? Do you really believe that such and such an action is unskillful and that sooner or later you are going to



suffer or do you really believe that such and such a practice put into operation will help you to grow? Do you really believe that or do you take it as a sort of fairy tale that you don't have to take very seriously and you pay a certain amount of lip service to it but since you haven't got that real conviction you don't really do very much about it. So it raises the question of what one really believes and you can always tell what a person really believes by the way he acts. You notice that people believe all sorts of different things, they can believe in God or not believe in God. They can be spiritualist or materialist, they can be theists or atheists, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims. If you look at their behaviour usually it's pretty much the same. There's this extraordinary difference of belief but the actions seem more or less identical. So you can judge from that the belief doesn't have all that much effect upon action. In other words the real conviction is not there. The Buddhist might speak in terms of metta bhavana - all right, he believes in metta bhavana and the Christian might speak in terms of loving your neighbour but when it comes to it more often than not they behave in pretty much the same way. You could hardly tell which was the man who believed in metta bhavana and which the one that didn't or which the one that believed in love your neighbour and which didn't. Their behaviour is much [68] of a muchness. So this suggests that conviction is lacking. If you meet, say, the average Buddhist he's not radiating metta in a noticeable way. If you meet the average Christian he's not usually turning his cheek or turning the other cheek (Laughter) in a very noticeable way. It's easy for people to pay lip-service to different ideals but the real conviction is usually lacking and you can tell that because the behaviour, the contact doesn't bear out the conviction. So therefore Milarepa's asking 'are you really convinced?' or are you just fooling yourself and thinking that you're fooling me too. So the only proof or let's say evidence or manifestation maybe would be better or real conviction in some outward expression, a whole way of life. So that's why, for instance, one might say in the FWBO we have to be very careful that we're not talking about a new life and a new society all the time but in effect just be living like everybody else. Sometimes there's not all that much difference in the way that people live inside the Friends and the way they live outside the Friends. There's some difference and that is good but perhaps not enough difference. After all, within the Friends say, let's take a very common example, people are vegetarian and outside they're not. Well at least there's that little difference but you go to some Buddhist countries and not even that difference exists between the Buddhists and the non-Buddhists. Very often the only difference is and it's considered very important, the difference in dress. In India the Hindu wears their dhoti and the Muslim wears the lungi and the Sikh wears his turban. These are the things that come to be considered important. In a Buddhist community, a Buddhist society, the bhikkhu wears his yellow robe and the upasaka wears his white robe. These are the important differences but in actual life and behaviour there may be no difference at all but people are misled by purely external differences and attach too much importance to this. So the bhikkhu is the one who wears the yellow robe and the upasaka is the one who doesn't, who wears the white robe, and the one is taken as a bhikkhu and the other is taken as an upasaka regardless of what they're actually doing. The upasaka may be meditating all day but, no, he's just an upasaka. The bhikkhu may be running a business in a quite ordinary sort of way but he's still a bhikkhu because he's wearing a yellow robe. In that way people are misled by appearances. So it's very important just to see how much one is actually practising and how different one's life actually is and that will give you some idea of what degree of conviction you have. This is, as I think everybody knows, one of the first things that I noticed when I came back to England and the English Buddhist movement in London in 1964, that apart from the fact that people came to the vihara or to the Buddhist Society once a week for a lecture or something of that sort there was no difference whatever between them and everybody else. No difference at all. They said that they were

Buddhists and the others said they were something else but the only outward sign of their being Buddhists was the attendance at a weekly lecture. Well that's all right as a beginning but most [69] of them seemed to think that that was all there really was to it and they could just be a Buddhist on that particular basis. So real conviction with regard to Buddhism makes a change in the whole way of life eventually and that's the sign that real conviction is there. Therefore Milarepa says, 'Rechungpa are you thus convinced?' Let's go back a bit to this question of the five poisonous desires and the nectar-like antidotes. It's clear that, say, speaking simply in terms of meditation, that the practice of the metta bhavana does help one to neutralize, get rid of say hatred but to what extent is it advisable to look at the spiritual life predominantly or even exclusively in those sort of terms? When, say, one is trying to communicate with people outside the movement for instance. What place is there for this sort of approach? Is it a question of convincing people that they're suffering from the poison or the disease of craving and distraction and that they need the medicine, the antidote of the Dharma?

Sona: It seems as though you have to take the other approach, you have to sort of inspire people but then sooner or later you do actually have to point out that there are certain unskilful actions and there are antidotes to these actions but initially it has to be inspiration.

S: So they feel inspired, that means they want to do something, they want to do something very skilful for the sake of an ideal but then they become conscious that certain things are holding them back, these being the five poisonous desires broadly speaking. That these need to be got rid of before they can implement their inspiration. So I think probably within the present day context it isn't advisable to start off pointing out to people the existence of the five poisonous desires and exhorting them to get rid of them because people's attitude to the five poisonous desires may be quite different. They may think that the five poisonous desires are in fact the five nectar-like desires. They might say 'well sure I get angry, sure I hate other people, that's natural, it's right, it's proper. Man is an aggressive animal and craving is right, that's what gives you your pleasure in life, what would life be without craving?' So if you just attack people on that level you don't get very far. They'll agree with you but their evaluation of the situation will be quite different from yours. So you have to inspire them, that is to say inspire them with an ideal and then perhaps as they try to realize that ideal they can see for themselves that there are certain factors within themselves which are incompatible with that ideal, which are holding them back and which therefore they have to get rid of. Then they start seeing those enemies, those poisons and start looking for the proper antidote. That would seem to be the general point.

Sona: It can be very depressing otherwise.

S: But the question also is how do you inspire people. What does that inspiration consist in? It's OK to say go and inspire people but how do you inspire them? What is going to inspire them do you think?

[70]

Chris: Your example might inspire them.

S: Yes.

Sona: It seems actually that in the present day one has to first of all get people in touch with

their emotions and in doing this this in a way is a form of inspiration. If something moves within them there's a releasing of energy and then you can sort of start pointing your finger to the moon and create inspiration towards an ideal.

S: Yes, one's got to, as it were, put them in touch with their emotions and then try to lead the emotions to higher and higher levels by pointing out more and more refined objects.

All right next verse.

"His deeds and acts are those of  
The Nirmanakaya.  
Son, are you thus convinced?"

S: What is the Nirmanakaya? In ordinary terms it's the sort of historical personality of the Buddha or of any enlightened being. Guenther interprets it in an interesting way. He interprets it as something like your actual being here and now. It represents the fact that you exist concretely at a particular point in space and time. To be in contact with the Buddha's Nirmanakaya means simply to be in contact with the Buddha at a particular point in space and a particular point in time. But you're not in contact with the Buddha just as a general ideal or as a memory. So his deeds and acts are those of the Nirmanakaya, that is to say what you see Milarepa doing at this particular point in time, this particular point in space where you yourself are in contact with him, these deeds and acts are those of the Nirmanakaya, that is to say are those of a Buddha. That it's not a question of being in contact with Milarepa's mind, so to speak, his Dharmakaya, through what he's saying, through the teaching but also through what he actually does. In other words you could say in a manner of speaking through his example. So it's as though he's saying don't think that I'm teaching you only when I'm actually opening my mouth and saying things, I'm teaching you all the time through what I do, through my actions. You find this of course especially with regard to the Zen masters. In fact they do this in a manner of speaking quite consciously. They know it's very easy for people to get tied up with words and have a very interesting discussion, say, about freedom, liberation and all that but not actually do anything about it so they try to bypass all that and they in some cases just teach by certain quite dramatic actions so that the disciple doesn't get a chance of entangling himself in all sorts of theoretical discussions. So his deeds and acts are those of the Nirmanakaya. So when Milarepa you might say is just scratching himself don't forget it's a Buddha who is scratching himself, so his scratching [71] himself will have a meaning because it's an expression of his authentic being let us say, it's an authentic communication. So when he scratches himself take it quite seriously. What does it mean? (Laughter). It may seem that he has a moral lesson in the obvious sense but don't forget that even the least significant action in a sense has got a significance.

Andy: The way he does it.

S: One could say that. (Laughter)

Clive: He might just have an itch.

S: Yes.

Clive: Like he's got an itch so he's got a body and ...

S: Yes, you can take it like that. But it's as though in the case of Milarepa, in the case of the Buddha, in the case of the guru, he's never off duty. Because that would suggest that there's a sort of Buddha part and a non Buddha part, that there was a sort of half-realization, as it were. So whether he's enlightened or whether a person is enlightened or whether he's unenlightened at any given moment it's the whole of the enlightened personality or the whole of the unenlightened personality or only relatively enlightened personality. So the guru is not the guru only when he's sitting up there on his throne and actually teaching the Dharma out of a book, so to speak, but if he is a Buddha or is a guru at all he's a guru or a Buddha all the time regardless of what he is doing because the same state of consciousness presumably is percolating through to every thing that he says and everything he does. It's better perhaps to see Milarepa scratching himself than to hear some unenlightened guru teaching you the Perfection of Wisdom sutras (Laughter). You could go so far as to say that.

Sona: You seem to have changed the definition of guru today. In the past you've spoken of the guru as being someone who helps you to see but here it seems to be the level's sort of moved up - I know we're talking about Milarepa - but presumably one can apply this whenever one uses the term guru. Now we seem to be talking about the guru as the enlightened being.

S: It isn't really a difference because if the guru is one who helps you to see it suggests that he sees already so at least he is more enlightened than you or, as it were, more Buddha-like than you or in relation to you he is enlightened, he is the Buddha, he's the highest point of reference for you within your particular world.

Sona: But presumably something like ... say your guru if he wasn't enlightened it wouldn't have the same significance. It could just be that he's a bit unmindful.

S: Oh yes. So it's a question of whether one takes guru or Buddha as something absolute or something in reference to or in relation to you. Because [72] in a way what I've been saying this morning is that it's not a question of anything absolute. It's not an entity. When you say the Buddha is enlightened you're not really making an ontological statement strictly speaking, that the Buddha objectively occupies a certain absolute position. You're making a statement about the Buddha in relation to you, that is to say that the Buddha is more enlightened than you, perhaps it's not possible for you to know that the Buddha or whether the Buddha is absolutely enlightened, even if such a thing is possible, to be absolutely enlightened. All that you know is that he's more enlightened than you. So that therefore if he, for instance, scratches himself it is more significant than if you were to scratch yourself. So, therefore, Milarepa says his deeds and acts are those of the Nirmanakaya, that is to say they are imbued with the greater degree of significance than your deeds and acts and therefore you can learn from them. Not just from the verbal teaching. So once again Milarepa says, 'Son, are you thus convinced?' He draws attention to the importance of conviction. Because if you aren't convinced that the guru's actions or deeds and actions are those of the Nirmanakaya or have a higher significance than your own you won't pay much attention to them.

All right next verse.

Abhaya:

"The minds ever flowing thoughts are  
Void, intrinsically groundless;

[They seem] to rise, yet they ne'er exist.  
In unwavering mindfulness  
You should have a firm belief.  
Rechungpa, are you thus convinced?"

S: The minds ever flowing thoughts are void, intrinsically groundless. This involves understanding what is really meant by Void, what is really meant by Sunya or Sunyata, Voidness. The minds ever flowing thoughts. One has, as it were, a flow of thoughts, a succession of thoughts, a stream of thoughts and this flow or this stream is going on all the time. They seem to rise and yet they n'er exist. So what does this mean? I think one can probably best approach this by way of the three kinds of truth. I went into this some time ago in connection with Suzuki's 'Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism'. This is a Yogachara division, that there is the absolute truth usually called (Paranishpanna) but don't bother about the Sanskrit, the relative truth and the illusory truth. Truth is a rather misleading term here. It could also be translated 'reality'. Illusory truth, you could say or illusory existence or illusory reality is that which is perceived to exist but which does not exist in any sense at all really. An example which is given, say, is an hallucination or you see spots before the eyes. Actually there is nothing in front of the eyes. It's a purely subjective experience. There's nothing corresponding to the spots objectively speaking. This is [73] illusory reality. Then there is what is called conventional reality or conventional truth. This is (Paratantrasatya) and that is to say something exists, yes it's out there, it's experienced, it's real but it's not absolutely real and it's not absolutely real because it arises in dependence on causes and conditions. Then there is that which is absolutely real which doesn't arise in dependence on causes and conditions, which doesn't arise at all in fact. So this is the (Paramathasatya). So you've got (Paramathasatya, Paranishpannasatya, and Paratantrasatya). These are the three. Paratantra is the relative, the conditional, that which arises in dependence on another. Here we're concerned with the middle one, that is to say the Paratantrasatya. Things as being conventionally real, but as being not absolutely real but at the same time not absolutely unreal. So according to Buddhist teaching, the whole of phenomenal existence including our own minds, including our own flow of thoughts, is not absolutely unreal, it is only relatively unreal or relatively real. In this sense it is Void, it is void of absolute reality but not absolutely non-existent as an illusion is. So the minds ever flowing thoughts are Void. They've no absolute reality. They're intrinsically groundless, they have no absolute ground within themselves. Their existence is dependent upon the existence of other things. The existence of those other things is dependent on the existence of still other things. So for this reason the minds ever flowing thoughts are void. They do rise. The interpolation here says they seem to rise - that is the two words in brackets - well seeming can be a bit ambiguous here. They seem in the sense that they rise, they seem to rise only in the sense that you may think that it is something absolute that is arising. But they do arise in the sense that something which is not a complete illusion actually arises. The phenomena of the Paratantrasatya cannot be dismissed as completely illusory. There is an arising but it is not an absolute arising because that which is absolute doesn't arise. If it arises it by definition is not absolute reality. It is only conventional but there is a distinction nonetheless between the conventional and the completely illusory. So you, with your conventionally existent mind can frame an idea which has only an illusory reality. You can also frame an idea which has a conventional validity. If, with your conventionally valid mind, you form an idea which itself has conventional validity then it is possible for you to escape, so to speak, from your conventionally real mind and experience, so to speak, the mind which is absolutely real, that is to say, attain enlightenment. But if of course with your relatively or your conventionally real mind you form a thought

which is absolutely illusory such as that your mind itself has an absolute existence then of course you only entangle yourself further in that conventional existence. In other words you never attain enlightenment. So conventionally valid ideas are those which reflect something of the nature of absolute reality. Illusory ideas are among other things those which posit [74] for conventional reality the attributes of absolute reality which in fact conventional reality cannot possess.

Abhaya: So that's another distinction from the ... the illusory.

S: Yes. Here to superimpose upon the conventionally existent, the attributes so to speak of the absolutely existent, is an illusory process. The illusion consists in that, though it's not the only form of illusion. In that form the technical term is viparyasa.

Clive: So the illusory mind working on certain ideas in the conventional mind creates an illusion of absolute. The substance it uses is the conventional ...

S: It's not that the substance it uses, as you call it, is absolutely unreal. It's conventionally real but it unfortunately invests itself with attributes which it does not in fact possess. For instance, it says that a certain experience, a certain conventional experience, using conventional in the philosophical sense here, has say an absolute value, is an experience of absolute happiness but it cannot be, so that is an illusory statement. The idea itself is an illusion. That, for instance, the contact of sense object with sense organ is capable of giving you absolute happiness. That idea is an illusion.

Abhaya: But the first one is referring to like hallucinations.

S: Yes, you could say the hallucination is given more by way of an example. Sometimes of course, though here there's a bit of confusion, sometimes the same example is used for the illusory as for the conventionally existent but in a different sense.

Abhaya: A magician.

S: Yes right. So one example that is often given is of the rainbow. It is said that conventional existence is like the rainbow, it cannot be described as completely existent, it cannot be described as completely non-existent. In the case of the rainbow, when you go up to it and try to reach it and touch it, it disappears. So in that sense it isn't really there but you see it. In that sense it is there. So it hovers so to speak between existence and non-existence, between absolute existence and absolute non-existence. So conventional existence is neither absolutely existent nor absolutely non-existent. Neither absolutely real, you could say, nor absolutely unreal. But it is, so to speak, capable of generating the completely unreal, if you can use such an expression, if it wrongly evaluates itself and thinks of the attributes of the absolutely real as being transferred to itself.

Clive: It also suggests that an understanding of the absolute reality can't be achieved by the conventional mind.

S: It's not that it cannot be achieved by it but that one must not mistake the attributes of the absolute reality for attributes of conventional reality. [75] Of course the biggest illusion of all according to traditional Buddhist teaching is the conventional mind on account of, say, the

continuity of its experience should posit as actually existing as an absolute reality a permanent unchanging mind, ego, soul consciousness and so on and start organizing its beliefs, experiences and reactions around that illusory self or soul or ego. This raises questions of the nature of individuality and so on but I think we'll go into this at a separate time. It's a very big question. I'm sticking for the moment just to the traditional exposition. Though it isn't very difficult to make the connection because one mustn't think even in terms of the individual as representing something fixed and finite. The individual, one could say is essentially growing and developing. So the idea of individuality is quite incompatible with the idea of a permanent unchanging soul or self or consciousness. So, philosophically, so to speak, Buddhism doesn't say that the world or that the mind or the empirical personality is unreal in the sense of being absolutely unreal but only that it is conventionally unreal in the sense that it arises in dependence upon causes and conditions and does not, so to speak, carry its cause or condition or ground within itself. So, therefore, Milarepa says the minds ever flowing thoughts are void. This is what is meant by void in this context. Intrinsically groundless, groundless in the sense of having no ground within themselves. They seem to rise, in fact they do rise but yet they n'er exist. Even the yet is not really correct. They do not exist in the absolute sense because they do arise. So 'In unwavering mindfulness you should have a firm belief, Rechungpa are you thus convinced?' So in what way does mindfulness come in here. Why should one have an unwavering mindfulness in this connection?

\_\_\_: If one was truly aware and truly mindful then one would see that those things were independent and arose rather than ...

S: So this applies especially to the mind, to the minds ever flowing thoughts. If one is unwaveringly aware then one sees an ever flowing stream of thoughts. One sees whether in strict logical sequence or by way of loose association you see one thought arising in dependence on another. Or you see a thought arising in dependence on a feeling which arises in dependence on a sensation which arises in dependence on a sense organ. You see one thing arising in dependence on another but you never actually see a fixed unchanging ego or soul or entity of that sort. You see nothing fixed, nothing unchanging, so in order to be able to see in that way, to see the relatively real as the relatively real you have to maintain an unwavering mindfulness. So Rechungpa, are you thus convinced. So are you convinced that you need to have an unwavering mindfulness in order to be able to see the relatively real, especially your own relatively real mind, relatively unreal mind, as such. You notice these last three verses have referred to mind, to action and to speech. Referring first of all to the guru as embodiment of all the Buddhas. [76] Then Milarepa speaks of his instructions, that's speech, his acts, that's deed and then he speaks of mind. So if one looks at the content of this verse in more practical terms it means, say, looking at oneself, especially at the mind or at one's mental attitudes and not seeing anything fixed and permanent, not seeing anything that cannot be changed. You see how it has come about, you see that your present mental attitude, your present mental state, has arisen on account of certain causes and conditions and therefore you see, you realize, that if those causes and

(BREAK IN RECORDING)

...arising in dependence on causes and conditions you do not see the mind as capable of being changed.

Clive: It's quite useful to think about the actual thoughts or feelings as the mind as opposed to

their being a product of the mind.

S: Well, according to the Theravada, mind itself is nothing more than the sum total of individual mental states whether thoughts, feelings, sensations, acts of volition and so on. That is not really the last word on the subject but certainly it's a useful way of thinking of the mind - that you are, so to speak, the sum total of all those thoughts and feelings and impulses which you think of as yours. They are changing all the time. They are changing in dependence upon changing causes and conditions so they can be developed in any way that you wish. You observe that if you do this or think that then such and such corresponding change takes place in your mind. We say in your mind but what it really means is that a certain set of thoughts or feelings or mental attitudes is replaced by another set of thoughts or feelings or mental attitudes. So it means that the whole possibility of any kind of spiritual progress is based upon the possibility of the mind actually changing.

Abhaya: You said that's just a Hinayana way of looking at it. In fact would you say that there is any point in seeing the mind as a ground in which all this happens. That would seem to be misleading.

S: Well that gives the mind a sort of metaphysical quality. I think one can do that with caution ...

Abhaya: What would be the point in doing that? That is only a way of speaking in fact philosophically when from the Buddhist point of view there is no sort of ground. There is only this ceaseless, changing core.

S: What I meant by saying it wasn't the last word on the subject was this. That actually one experiences the flow as a continuous flow. If you divide the flow and think of the flow as actually a succession of bits rather than as just a flow, well that may be very useful - this is in fact what the Hinayana does. You think of the mind, or rather you reduce the flow to a succession of discrete mental states and when you have reduced the flow to this succession of discrete mental states then you [77] have, so to speak, even literally, a limited number of mental states which then you can proceed to study and understand and to operate with and this is in fact what the Hinayana does in the Abhidharma. But the question which arises is as to the nature, even as to the validity of that original act of dissection, because does the mind, does the flow, really consist of a series of discrete mental entities because if the Hinayana isn't careful this is what it amounts to saying. So you can proceed in this way provided you understand that the initial act of dissection is in a sense a purely arbitrary process and that the flow is in fact a continuous flow. So what happens is that, or the difficulty is that, if you posit a succession of discrete mental states, if they are discrete, how are they going to affect one another? You have a sort of psychological atomism. How are you going to join them together? If they're all separate you've got to find some way of joining them together so that they can cooperate and function together. So if they are separate the question arises, well, what connects them? So having separated them you then have to try to connect them and it's in order to sort of connect them that you posit either a sort of common principle that runs through them all, the analogy being that of a thread through a whole series of beads or a common ground which supports them all, here the analogy being that of the earth holding up the trees and houses - all highly metaphorical thinking, but you can see the reason for that. Having divided that continuous flow into so many discrete bits you've now got to find some principle of unity and it's in that way that we bring in this ground and so on and so forth. But



inasmuch as the act, the original act of division was an arbitrary one so is the act of unification. It's also an arbitrary act. So you could say that just as the dividing of the flow of the mind into discrete mental states is only useful for certain practical purposes, not ultimately valid (although the Hinayana believes it's ultimately valid), in the same way the positing of a thread of unity or a ground of them all is also of certain practical value but not to be taken as having any ultimate validity.

Abhaya: It's almost as if all you can say is that the urge to find a unity or connecting link is almost like a desire of the mind ... it's like one of these parts of the thread, one of the beads if you like, wanting to become predominant, wanting to ...

S: Sometimes one tries to create unity by promoting one of the beads to be the thread, as it were. For instance, mind. With a certain kind of mental state you sort of absolutize it as absolute consciousness and make everything in here in that, well it's all right, it does make a sort of philosophical sense but it isn't absolutely true. So if you take the Void, voidness in the absolute sense, it is a sort of metaphysical continuum within which distinctions of existent and non-existent are not to be made or which cannot be made.

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S: Distinctions between existent and non-existent are not made because in the case of the flow of the mind it's as though you split it up into discrete bits which you join, as it were, end to end. But so then you've got entities, that is to say, the mental states which are existent, but they're separated, as it were, by intervals of the non-existent. So you reduce the continuum which is neither existent nor non-existent to a succession of mental states which represent an alternation of the existent and the non-existent. So in order to unite that series of existents you sort of promote one of the existents to being the thread of connection or the ground, as it were, but it has got no more right to that position than any other of the segments. The real ground is the void itself, if you can speak of it as a ground, which is not another existent but neither existent nor nonexistent. The great mistake is that we think of the void as an existent, the void as Guenther points out is only an operational concept. If you think of it as being really a ground in the metaphysical sense, well you're not really thinking about it as the void at all. You're thinking about it in the same way as you're thinking about one particular segment of the flow which you've, as it were, promoted to being the thread of the beads or the ground of all the things that it supports. So you should not think of the void as an entity. The void has got no metaphysical status, no ontological status. That's what I was getting at when I was saying that in effect the Dharmakaya has no ontological status. So it's not a thing that you've got to see in the guru or a thing that you've got to recognize, got to relate to, it's a quality of the relationship itself between you. So the Hinayana divided the flow of thought, flow of consciousness, into all these bits which were then dealt with in the Abhidharma. The problem was of course then to find a means of connecting the bits. So that is done illegitimately when one of the bits is promoted to being the unifying factor and all forms of materialism or all forms of idealism commit this sort of mistake. Materialism makes the unifying factor matter, idealism makes the unifying factor the mind, the higher consciousness, absolute mind etc. etc. But Buddhism points out that you have to go back to the point where you committed the original mistake and not chop the mind up into bits any more. If you haven't got a mind which is divided into bits you don't need any connecting factor and if you come back to that point then of course you have an insight into, or realization of, voidness in the sense of the undifferentiated reality which cannot be differentiated into existent and

non-existent.

Clive: At that point then you're faced with the endless stream of thoughts.

S: Yes and no. Yes and no. Because it's a different kind of stream. Instead of being a stream which is going round and round in a circle it's a stream that is going round and round in a spiral towards an infinitely distant point.

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Clive: Why is it doing that?

S: To go back to the terms in which we've previously discussed the question, the conventional mind is not investing itself with the attributes of either the absolutely unreal or the absolutely real. It is seeing things as they are. So whatever conventionally real thoughts that it forms reflect the nature of the absolutely real so that it is tending more and more in that direction hence going up the spiral and not searching round in the circle.

Clive: So you never actually cease the endless stream of thoughts.

S: In a sense, no. This is at least what the Yogacara says or the Vijnanavada, that the stream of thoughts continues but they say it is a purified stream, that is to say a stream of thoughts which has been purified from the five poisonous desires or, alternatively, because it's the five poisonous desires that are responsible for the cyclic process. So if the stream of mind, the stream of consciousness is freed from the five poisonous desires it's no longer circling but it's still proceeding. You can only proceed spiral-wise in an increasingly more positive manner.

Clive: Can you still be caught up in your thoughts on a spiral or by virtue of the fact that it's on a spiral were you able to see the thoughts in relation to a greater ...

S: Well it depends how far up the spiral you are because there's what I call the spiral proper which is beyond the point of no return and the spiral which is this side of the point of no return which is sort of part of the spiral and also part of the round. So if of course you've gone beyond the point of no return you'd not be generating any more reactive thoughts but the momentum of your old reactive thought would not be completely exhausted. If any reactive thought did arise it would be seen as such and, as it were, nipped in the bud. So the important thing, the thing that Milarepa is asking Rechungpa if he is convinced about, is of the function of unwavering mindfulness. He's asking is he really convinced that with the help of an unwavering mindfulness he can really see the conventionally real nature of the conventionally real thoughts, and in this way develop insight and thus make spiritual progress. In other words, is he really convinced of the value of mindfulness as a means of switching to the creative mental process. One could say that the whole emphasis of Buddhist philosophy, to use that term, is on seeing things as processes rather than as entities but language reifies one can say, to the extent that one speaks at all one reifies. That's the whole structure, the whole subject-predicate structure of the sentence is reificatory one could say. Maybe Abhaya would care to explain that. The reificatory nature of the subject-predicate structure of the sentence. (Laughter)

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Abhaya: Because of the nature of language one always has to speak of things in terms of

subject and predicate therefore that very process has a reifying tendency because you've got to think of the two as discrete ...

S: And the subject as unchanging because it's got to stay unchanged long enough to give you time to predicate something of it. But its nature may be actually that it is not changing at all. According to Buddhism that is the case.

Chris: Do all languages work in this way?

S: All languages work in this way. It arrests the flow or seems to arrest the flow or makes you think that you can arrest the flow. Give an example like 'the bird flies' or even 'the bird is flying' - the bird is the subject, the bird is what you're talking about and you're saying that it is flying. So at the moment of flying is the bird separate from the act of flying? No it is not a bird flying, it is a flying-bird. It should be one word. You shouldn't say the bird, here he is just sort of sitting here, is flying - predicate. You should say 'flyingbird'. What you perceive is flyingbird. You do not perceive the bird is flying (Laughter). You perceive flyingbird or birdflying but we split it up, 'the bird', static unchanging subject of sentence - and - 'is flying', predicate. So you make a split between the unchanging subject and the changing, in some cases changing, predicate. But there's not that division in reality at all. There's just one process in which you can't really distinguish predicate from subject or subject from predicate and in which there is nothing static. So this is what we mean by saying that speech by its very structure, the sentence by its very structure, reifies.

Clive: Children do that, don't they? I don't think it's just because of their simple language. They sort of experience the thing as a whole.

S: So what happens you see, having sort of separated the bird from the flying, you start thinking that the two things are actually different and that is where the illusion comes in. Even flyingbird is not an absolute reality but it is a conventional reality but the bird is flying, you could say represents, if you take it literally, an illusion.

Sona: If you do change it round to flyingbird it seems to indicate the bird is always flying.

S: Yes, it becomes an entity in motion, a process in motion rather than just a process.

Sona: There's no escape route.

Abhaya: You could express this sort of thing perhaps poetically, like patterns and rhythms. Poetry's good from that point of view.

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S: Yes, poetry does overcome that dichotomy to some extent. Some languages overcome it more than others. There are some so I've read 'Primitive' - inverted commas - languages in which I'm told the noun is not separated from the verb. One of the great characteristics of the English language is that the parts of speech are interchangeable. That a noun can be used as a verb and a verb as a noun especially in poetry. This helps very much. It is said - you'll have to take this second hand as I haven't studied the subject personally - that Shakespeare's language is especially remarkable for its transposition of the parts of speech. He was especially good at that and this is what gives his language its richness and flexibility among other things. In a

way that hadn't been done before he used certain nouns as verbs and certain verbs as nouns and adjectives as nouns and adjectives as verbs and so on. To 'finger' something. You're using a noun as a verb, I don't know whether Shakespeare was the first to use that expression. He was I think the first to use 'scarf' as a verb. He says in Hamlet somewhere, he robe 'scarfed' about him. He's using the noun scarf as a verb. So Shakespeare does this sort of thing constantly.

Kovida: In study once I noticed that towards his latter plays he uses more and more verbs than nouns. The number of verbs increases dramatically. Studying certain literary figures as they grew older they used more verbs.

S: But using verbs as verbs or...

Kovida: As verbs. Describe action rather than nouns.

S: It's very difficult to use of course just verbs. A verb requires a subject. You can't carry on too long without actually introducing some kind of subject for your predicate. If the parts of speech become interchangeable to the extent that they do in Shakespeare's language or in English generally to some extent, that would suggest that you're less so to speak deceived by the absoluteness of the distinction between subject and predicate.

Abhaya: So the individual by skilful use of language can actually change the nature of language. Nouns weren't used as verbs but a skilful writer can start doing that.

S: Or the imaginative writer. So in that way the harm inherent in that kind of sentence structure can be undone. You can turn the sentence structure against itself even. Also you can do the same sort of thing by the use of figures of speech. By the use of metaphor and simile but that's a big subject, we need not go into it now. It's for that reason that poetic language can very often get closer to reality, to use that expression, than the language of prose. It's closer to the continuum you could say which is not to be explained entirely in terms of existence and non-existence or subject and predicate.

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Clive: There's nothing to stop you from using prose in that way. Can you use prose imaginatively in that way.

S: You can but I think it would generally be said that that was on its way to becoming poetic prose as it's called. Poetry doesn't necessarily have to have rhyme and metre. You can speak of something as ... or as poetry even, even if it doesn't have regular metre or rhyme, if it just has that heightened imaginative sense and uses more figures of speech, more metaphor, more simile and maybe interchanges the parts of speech more freely than is usually done in prose. So it means that Milarepa is saying that the mind should not be misled by its own creations. You've done certain things, you've engaged in certain operations just for a certain practical purpose but then you start taking the products of those operations as having a value of their own. You start reifying them.

Abhaya: To come back to this idea of the continuum. A few months you were talking - I can't remember in what context - and you said that when you really look at it there is no continuity at all. When you go into it and you were sort of speaking against the whole idea of continuity

in any sense so how does that fit in?

S: I don't remember it but I think I must have been speaking of continuity simply in the sense of the succession of the bits and you could say that the Gestalt is in terms of space what the continuum is in terms of time. It's as though if you have something existing in space it doesn't in fact consist of a number of little pieces joined together like a jigsaw puzzle. The division of something say in space. Gestalt means a shape so even though it's used metaphorically as applied to the mind the basic idea is of something configured, something occupying space. If you divide something which occupies space into parts that division is a purely arbitrary process. So the Gestalt represents the thing in itself, to use a Kantian term in a non-Kantian way, as it exists undivided. Suppose you take the human body. You divide it, say, into certain parts, does it actually consist of those parts? It doesn't because that particular division into those particular parts is quite arbitrary, and why is it arbitrary? Because it doesn't have to stop there. You can divide the body into organs. All right you take an organ, you can subdivide that, you can subdivide any subdivision of that, you can go on ad infinitum. There's no end to the process so the process is arbitrary in the sense that you don't have to stop anywhere. If you stop anywhere that's an arbitrary act and the division which arises from the fact that you have stopped there and not anywhere else is an arbitrary division. What gives the thing in itself, so to speak, that is to say the thing as undivided in any arbitrary way, is what we call the Gestalt. When we're thinking of parts laid side by side or the continuum, when we think in terms of parts succeeding one another in time.

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Clive: They succeed one another only in the order that you ...

S: Yes, because there are no things, discrete things succeeding. There is only one completely continuous process. You take a ruler. A ruler is marked off in twelve inches. Does the ruler in fact in truth or does a foot consist of twelve inches? No, it can just as well consist of twenty something else or a hundred something else or three something else. We tend to think of a foot as actually really made up of twelve inches, but those twelve inches represent an entirely arbitrary superimposition upon the reality of the one foot of the ruler.

Abhaya: That suggests that the whole of conventional reality is arbitrary.

S: Yes (Laughter). The arbitrariness is the illusion or the illusion is the arbitrariness.

Lalitavajra: Actually it's a process of abstraction.

S: It's also a process of abstraction, yes. You, as it were, abstract your twelve inches from the one foot. You could just as easily as I said abstract twenty other units, you could fit twenty units into a foot just as easily as you fit twelve or a hundred or a million or ten thousand million. So how can you say that a foot really consists of twelve inches and nothing else, nothing but twelve inches. A foot is twelve inches but that's the way we usually talk.

Clive: You can say that it's not not twelve inches.

S: It's not not twelve inches, no. In the sense that it is possible to divide a foot into twelve equally long units, it is possible, that's all that you mean. Not that a foot does consist of absolutely that. As if say what is a foot? A foot is that which consists of twelve inches as

though each of the twelve inches is a little building block and you need those particular building blocks and only those building blocks to produce your one foot, this is the way we usually think.

Abhaya: In a sense it is in terms of language because that's what we have all agreed to call a foot. If we redivided this area into twenty parts we'd call it something else.

S: You see we begin to appreciate something of the relativity of these things when we change over say to a metric system except that of course you don't just divide the foot in another way but you're dividing something else.

Abhaya: It's very interesting that a lot of carpenters can't, when given metric measurements in shops, they just can't take it. They've got this almost dogmatic ... they learnt in feet and inches.

S: It's part of your world you see. If things like that start going your world starts collapsing around you. They sort of instinctively (know where are you going to stop). But a concrete solid thing like an inch or a foot [84] or a gallon is no longer an inch or a foot or a gallon. They don't think of these things as arbitrary marks superimposed upon a reality but as the reality itself. They think there is such a thing as an inch. A foot actually consists of twelve inches. So if you haven't got inches to play with you haven't got a foot. You can't have a foot without inches.

Subhuti: What's the world coming to?

S: What's the world coming to?

Sona: What's quite interesting is the way that mathematics is being taught in schools now because with the advent of the computer children are taught using different systems such as the binary system and the decimal system and other systems. It seems quite useful that children learn in this way.

Clive: The best example of that is when the amount of pennies in a pound changed from 240 to 100.

S: It's as though you had fewer pennies, not so much that people thought that the value of the penny had increased. It's more that it was decreased because before you had 240. Now you've only got 100. They thought in that way because they thought of the penny as the fixed unchanging little building block of the pound. You superimpose upon reality a sort of grid. A grid of a certain pattern and you operate in terms of that grid. You perceive things in terms of that grid. It's possible to change the pattern of the grid and still have a grid but that changing the pattern of the grid makes people very uneasy because it makes them realize that the pattern of any grid is purely arbitrary and is in superimposition on reality and not reality itself.

Clive: A few weeks ago you did say in dependence upon this, that arises, but that doesn't necessarily have any relation to this.

S: Yes because even the dependently arising is only conventionally true. It's not even that there are any actual things that arise, not that there are not any things that arise because that

particular grid is also a possibility.

Clive: I'm not quite clear.

S: How can one put it?

Subhuti: Arising and not arising are grids in a way.

S: Arising and not arising are grids but there are grids which enable you to dispense with grids and there are grids which involve you in further grids. So the Dharma is intended to be a grid which frees you from grids or frees you from dependence on grids. The ultimate grid is the grid which cancels itself out.

\_\_\_: A raft.

S: A raft. Yes.

[85]

Clive: But when saying in dependence upon this, that arises, but that doesn't necessarily have any relation to this. What does that mean in this way?

S: I think it's Nagarjuna who says that Sunyata, the truth of the void, is meant to eradicate wrong views but if you become attached to the teaching of sunyata that itself becomes a wrong view. If you become attached even to the teaching of sunyata well what will free you then because the means of freedom itself has been perverted to a means of unfreedom.

Clive: Does this fit in with positive attachment?

S: Positive attachment is that attachment which can become the basis for non-attachment or the development of non-attachment but ordinary attachment or negative attachment is that attachment which can only become the basis for further attachment. Or to change the context a bit there's a section in the awakening of faith where Asvagosha, the supposed author, says we use words to become free from words until we reach the pure wordless essence. Again it's the principle of the raft.

Clive: Thinking that you can be negatively attached to something like sunyata, that seems a contradiction.

S: No, you can't become attached to sunyata but you can misunderstand a verbal formulation of sunyata in such a way that that becomes a means of attachment. For instance, even when you expose the true nature of the subject/predicate structure you do so in sentences with a subject/predicate structure. So this is using illusion to get rid of illusion. This is making use of the raft but it is also possible to take even that subject predicate structure of the sentence which exposes the illusoriness of the subject predicate structure of the sentence in such a way, that is to say, so literally, that though you understand the meaning verbally you don't really catch it essentially and you're no better off than you were.

Subhuti: So you can use the concept of sunyata in a very dogmatic and rigid sort of way.

S: Yes indeed and you can even think of sunyata and speak of sunyata as a sort of entity, a metaphysical ground of all being and even equate it with the Godhead etc. etc.

Chris: It seems quite dangerous to read teachings that you're not ready for in that you might spoil your means of escape.

S: Yes indeed. So this is what I mean by you must take the Buddha's statements poetically rather than scientifically. This is what I'm getting at.

Clive: Paradox is much used.

S: Yes, because you cannot take a paradox literally because literally it's nonsense. It's self-contradictory. So you are therefore compelled to ask yourself what it really means. You can't take it at its face value.

[86]

Clive: So paradox is constantly pointing towards something other than the words.

S: Yes. A paradox always points beyond its own terms. Let's go on. But before we go on let's just remind ourselves of the fact that it's unwavering mindfulness that sees all this and you should have firm belief in unwavering mindfulness because it has this capacity and if you want to practise the Dharma you've got to be convinced that mindfulness has this capacity - that it is able to enable you to see the mind's ever flowing thoughts as void. As intrinsically groundless.

Kovida:

"The pleasures that heavenly beings love  
Are subject to change and transience.  
Firmly believe that in Samsara  
True happiness can ne'er be found.  
Rechungpa, are you thus convinced?"

S: So what is meant by true happiness? True happiness is happiness which is complete, absolute and which never ends. So Milarepa is asking Rechungpa are you convinced that that sort of happiness cannot be found in the samsara. If you are not convinced that it cannot be found in the samsara you can't practice the Dharma. If there's some sort of lurking suspicion or hope in your mind that true lasting real happiness can be found in the samsara then you can't practice the Dharma. Practice of the Dharma is based upon the conviction that you can't find absolute happiness anywhere in conditioned existence. In other words you're convinced you can find it only in what we call, using the word, the transcendental. So if you've got a lurking sort of feeling or even a suspicion or doubt that yes, maybe you could be quite happy with wife and family and just a job and that's all you really need, if there's a lurking suspicion you can't really practice the Dharma really energetically. If you've a lurking suspicion of 'if only you had enough money', 'if only you were a millionaire' well you could be really happy then. If you really have even a suspicion that that might be possible you can't really practice the Dharma because you're not really convinced that true happiness is only to be found outside the samsara. You think well maybe it could be found inside the samsara and you can only be really practising the Dharma, which means directing oneself towards the



transcendental, if one is convinced that happiness can't be found anywhere else. If you're convinced that some thing is in fact hidden somewhere in side this room you won't go and look for it in another room with complete conviction. So you may think maybe I'm not very happy but maybe it's just that I haven't got enough money, if I just had enough money and a really good car and a really nice house and could just go away on holidays whenever I wanted I'd be really happy then. If you've got that sort of lurking feeling you can't practice the Dharma with determination. Or if you think [87] my wife's not up to much but if only I had a really beautiful lively intelligent dakini-like wife I could be really happy then. Or if I was only better-educated. If only I'd been to university, if only I knew so much more. If only I was a better conversationalist and more brilliant and more popular well I could be really happy then. Or if only I was famous, if only I was a TV personality or even a pop star or a famous footballer I could be really happy then, or if I was a famous artist and had highly successful exhibitions in big galleries every year etc. etc. I could be really happy then. So if you see the possibility not just of a certain modest amount of happiness but a real true lasting happiness anywhere within the samsara well you can't practice the Dharma with determination. So Milarepa starts by saying the pleasure that heavenly beings love are subject to change and transience. So he's saying not to speak of earthly pleasures even those enjoyed by the gods are transient. The fact that they're transient means they're not perfect, they're not complete, they don't amount to true happiness. It can't be found in the samsara at all. It can't even be found in heaven not to speak of our world. So if you're not convinced of this you can't practice the Dharma with determination. What do you think is peoples' real attitude in this respect? Do you think they actually consciously think that true happiness can be found in the samsara?

Voices: Yes.

S: You think they do?

Abhaya: At least they keep their options open.

S: Yes, it's keeping your options open. I don't think that it's that they believe that if you asked them they'd say that absolute happiness could be found in the samsara. They'd say no of course it can't, it can't be found anywhere, this is what they would say. But you can find some happiness in the samsara and if you can't find it here you're not going to find it anywhere else. So from the point of view of the Dharma it comes to much the same thing, that they concentrate on finding it in the samsara because they believe if any kind of happiness at all is to be found it's only here. But it's as though their attitude is as though they do believe that true happiness can be found because if they lose it sometimes they are upset as though they had really lost everything which means they must have invested an enormous amount in it and overvalued it to suffer in the way that they do usually when they lose it. Somebody's dog dies and they get really upset. So what does that suggest? Not that they'd just been fond of the little animal but they invested so much of emotion in it. If somebody's wife or husband leaves them and they're completely demoralized and they just collapse. So it isn't that they had simply seen the possibility of a certain amount of happiness with that person. It's as though they really thought in terms of true happiness, absolute happiness with that person. [88] Not that they'd actually perhaps consciously enjoyed that state while they were with that person but that seems to have been their unconscious attitude judging by their reaction when they lose that person. Then Milarepa says "The pleasures that heavenly beings love are subject to change and transience. Firmly believe that in Samsara true happiness can ne'er be found. Rechungpa, are you thus convinced?" So this is another example of seeing the attributes of

the unconditioned, to change the terminology slightly, in the conditioned. You invest a mundane thing, a samsaric thing, with the attributes of the transcendental. You think that you can find true happiness in samsara whereas it can be found if it can be found at all, only outside the samsara. How important do you think is the search for happiness? Do you think people really do go searching for happiness consciously or is it more an unconscious thing, a more unconscious tendency. You do tend to go in pursuit of what is pleasurable, not that you sort of have a definite conscious idea well I'm going to go after pleasure but it's as though the movement of the whole being, the whole organism, is in the direction of the pleasurable and to avoid the painful and unpleasant. That's the nature of the animal organism. In a way it's a not unhealthy one. Perhaps one should be a bit careful here about pleasures in relation to happiness. You're not necessarily closer to happiness by depriving yourself of mundane pleasure. It's as though the organism needs to be kept in a healthy condition even for the realization of true happiness. You don't come necessarily nearer to true happiness by getting further away from pleasure or just by getting further away from pleasure. You certainly do have to see the limitations of pleasure.

Clive: Could you say that the emphasis laid on enlightenment being true happiness is again an operational concept in order to stir something deeper in people. The actual experience of enlightenment may not ... you couldn't experience it as happiness because it would be something completely ...

S: Well you could even say it would transcend the concept of happiness. The idea of happiness is a sort of super pleasure, it is a bit of a carrot, as it were. I have noticed that in India the concept of absolute bliss is a quite meaningful one for people. That people who take up the religious life often think in those terms - that they are in pursuit of absolute bliss and they think that if you're leading a spiritual life with any degree of success you'll be wallowing in bliss or sometimes they use the expression revelling in bliss or swimming in the ocean of absolute joy. (Laughter) So therefore they attach great importance as regards spiritual teachers and gurus and swamis to them being sort of beaming and happy. It could simply be that they're doing rather well out of it and they're eating well and being very popular and famous and having lots of disciples so they can afford to look happy and smiling, but the official version is that you are revelling in divine bliss (Laughter) and you're expected to [89] because Indians think in those sort of terms very easily if not predominantly. So a sort of stern faced guru is not at all to their taste or a serious looking guru. They like one who is happy and beaming and plump and sort of radiant. He must be the real thing because he's realized absolute bliss. So this is what they often go after, this absolute bliss. This is a very meaningful concept to them. It might not be so meaningful to people in this country who might think more in terms of truth or understanding things.

Let's go on.

Sona:

"All things with form are momentary and fleeting,  
Like flowing water and incense smoke, like lightning  
In the sky. Know that leisure in this life is rare.  
Rechungpa are you thus convinced?"

S: This is much the same as what has gone before but the application is rather different. It's

not just that things are momentary, things are fleeting in the sense that they make up complete continuum and that one is not to divide the continuum into bits. It's more that since everything is fleeting life itself is fleeting. Your opportunities to practise the Dharma may be fleeting. So don't waste those opportunities. Make the best use of your time. Make the best use of your leisure. Leisure in this life is rare. Leisure here meaning leisure to practise the Dharma. You don't always get that opportunity. Because in another sense you always get the opportunity because there is no circumstance under which you cannot practice the Dharma. But in a sense and in another sense some circumstances are more favourable than others because some forms of practice are more intense and more valuable than others. For instance, if there's a lot of noise, well, you can practice the Dharma - you can just be patient but that doesn't help you as much as it would if everything was very quiet and you were able to practise meditation. It might under some circumstances if you were a naturally very impatient angry person but I think normally it wouldn't help you so much, it might make you worse. So don't forget what Milarepa is basically saying because he is referring to determined practice of the Dharma. So he's saying in this verse you cannot really practice the Dharma in a determined fashion unless you know that leisure in this life is rare. In other words, without a sense of urgency. This is what he's getting at. Unless you've got a real sense of urgency you can't practice the Dharma with determination. If you think I've got lots of time, I can meditate any time I like, I'm young, I don't need to spend all that time in meditation now. I can have a good time and practice the Dharma later on. I've plenty of time for that when I'm a bit older. If you think in that sort of way there won't be any urgency in your practice of the Dharma. So know that leisure in this life is rare. Rechungpa are you thus convinced? This is the sort of, as it were, classical way or classical method of creating a sense of urgency. Do you think this works for people nowadays?

[90]

Subhuti: It has a tendency to make people rather anxious. Like with this talk of nuclear warfare and ...

S: Yes, they don't pull their socks up and think well I've just got to get enlightened before that happens.

Lalitavajra: I think it ... Doesn't it really depend on the person's emotional state because if you apply it to people (who are trying to develop) this approach could have that sort of urgency.

S: Maybe one can say about this what one says in connection with inspiration. That you shouldn't try to give people a sense of urgency unless they are emotionally positive, unless there's also inspiration. What did the question of inspiration arise out of - people seeing their own weaknesses. So it's as though they should be enabled to see their own weaknesses only within an overall context of inspiration. So in the same way one could perhaps say that one could try to inspire people with a sense of urgency only within the overall context of emotional positivity and inspiration. Otherwise they just can get very depressed and start feeling helpless and hopeless. So if you were just to go around Britain giving lectures on the imminence of nuclear disaster it would not be likely to bring people any nearer to Buddhism. It might bring them nearer to Christianity because Christianity has a different sort of message, that God will save you so you can go around saying there's going to be a terrible nuclear disaster and it's only going to be averted if there's some radical change in human life and in your life. You can't do it yourself but God can do it for you, just let God do it for you, just believe in God and the nuclear disaster will be averted. Or in that way since you've got that

sort of message you could perhaps induce people to believe in Christianity in this sort of way, but not in Buddhism because to believe in Buddhism means not to trust that the Buddha will put things right for you but to work on yourself.

Sona: It occurred to me that you could take the approach of like a survival kit, that Buddhism will give you a survival kit to survive by becoming more of an individual.

S: Well Buddhism does that anyway because it sees existence itself in a sense as a nuclear disaster. (Laughter) The nuclear disaster happened a long time ago. People don't see it then.

Clive: A nuclear family disaster.

S: A population atomic explosion. So the sense of urgency from a Buddhist point of view is not to be created in that kind of way which makes things rather more difficult. I was reading in the paper the other day that people in Algiers, I think it is where they've had that terrible earthquake recently, have been saying that it was the will of God and they've been asking what they did wrong to merit this sort of punishment. That maybe they weren't [91] strict enough in their Islamic practice etc. etc. For instance, in the Middle Ages, if anything went seriously wrong people started asking themselves wherein have we done wrong. We must have offended God and sometimes they came to the conclusion that what had made God angry was the fact that they'd permitted the Jews to survive so they turned on the Jews and started exterminating them. This sometimes happened. It was displeasing to God that they had tolerated the Jews. This had been a weakness on their part so they attacked them and maybe wiped them out in some cases. This happened in Spain with regard to the Inquisition and the (Morriscoes) I think they were called. They were people of Jewish and even Muslim descent who had converted to Christianity but who were suspected of secretly practising their old religion and the Spaniards believed that when some disaster happened God was punishing them for not being strict enough with these people and not making sufficiently sure that they really were Christian so the Inquisition would set to work again and weed out those who were suspected of keeping up the secret practice of Judaism or secret practice of Islam and burn them at the stake in the hope of satisfying God. So this is the sort of thing that happens when you have that sort of concept of God or any sort of concept of God really.

Sona: That happened right across Europe didn't it?

S: Yes. I'm not sure to the exact degree that it happened in connection with the Plague but that was the general tendency, that if there was any great natural disaster or even a terrible defeat in battle it signified that God was displeased with you and he was displeased with you for something you'd done or not done and this is also the reason for those bands of penitents who went around flagellating themselves. It was to appease the wrath of God. I think this happened at the time of the Plague. They punished themselves so that God wouldn't punish them any more. One has even found this with children. Children sometimes are so afraid of the parent that if they've done something wrong they will punish themselves and then go and tell the parent I did this but I punished myself because they are so afraid of forfeiting the love of the parent. I read in a magazine some years ago - this was shortly after I returned to Britain a story which I couldn't believe was true but it was authenticated and it had been investigated and it was this - that a little boy was in the habit of wetting the bed and his parents told him if you do it again we shall cut it off and he was so terrified that next time he wetted the bed he actually castrated himself with a kitchen knife and then took his penis in his hand to his

parents and said don't be angry with me I've cut it off. I couldn't believe that but apparently it was a true story. So this shows what degree of guilt a child can be made to feel. So this is in a way what the Christian is doing. He's saying please God don't be angry with me, don't punish me any more. I've cut it off, whatever it happens to be, I've [92] punished myself sufficiently, don't punish me any more. This is the basis of at least some kinds of self-mortification and self-torture in the religious or pseudo-religious context and so you get a big dose of this in orthodox Christianity and people identifying themselves with the figure of the crucified Christ bleeding away and all the rest of it. So it's a very unhealthy streak in so-called religion. All this came from urgency. So we have to be careful that in creating in people a sense of urgency we just don't discourage them and make them feel the whole thing is just impossible. So it's creating a sense of urgency that should be done within a context of emotional positivity and inspiration.

All right last verse.

Clive:

"That all on earth will die is certain ...  
There is no escape: for Beyond-death strive.  
Rechungpa, are you thus convinced?"

S: So he's asking Rechungpa if he's really convinced that he's going to die because often people aren't, strange though it may seem, not even convinced that everybody will die because if everybody will die of course that will include them but they're not really convinced. In other words they don't really see this or they ignore it or just pass it over. It's very easy to do this. Virtually everybody does it. Very few people really think that they are going to die so in that sense also there's no sense of urgency but again even with regard to this recollection of death as it's called, one must be a bit careful. Even the Buddha had to be careful because people can take it wrongly, they can just become very discouraged and very depressed, very pessimistic.

Clive: It's as if you accept the fact of death in relation to your inspiration.

S: So in a way Milarepa is asking Rechungpa to consider whether he's really convinced of the truth of certain things because, yes, Rechungpa wants to practise the Dharma, he wants to practise it with determination but you can do that only on the basis of a certain conviction. A conviction in certain things or of the truth of certain things. So Milarepa is asking you mustn't take that conviction for granted. According to the Vajrayana the guru is the embodiment of all the Buddhas, the Dharmakaya in itself, but are you really convinced of that? In the same way the guru's instruction is supposed to be an antidote for the poisons in you but are you really convinced of that? The guru's acts are supposed to be the acts of a Buddha, are you really convinced of that? It's only through unwavering mindfulness that you can see the true nature of conventional existence but are you really convinced of that? In the same way there's no true happiness to be found anywhere in the samsara not even in heaven, are you really convinced of that? And, similarly, all things with form are momentary, fleeting; leisure in this life is very rare, there's no time to be wasted, are you [93] really convinced of this? And, lastly, everyone will die one day, there's no escape, so once again there's a sense of urgency. Are you really convinced of that? This is what Milarepa is putting to Rechungpa all the time. It's easy to pay lip service to all these things but after all we're within the context of the

Vajrayana here. Here it's for real. So this is what Milarepa is asking Rechungpa. Does he appreciate this? Does he take it for real? I quote sometimes what the Protestant writer Kirkegaard once wrote I think it was. He said the whole of organized Christianity is based upon one big assumption and that is that God is a fool. It's sort of based on the assumption that people go along to the church on Sunday and listen to the sermon and the preacher says all the right things - love thy neighbour, turn the other cheek etc. etc., but they know that they're not going to do those things and even though he's telling them to do those things he also knows that they're not going to do those things and they all know that none of them take it seriously but they believe at the same time that God doesn't know this, God doesn't realize what is happening. God thinks they're all good Christians so he said they think God is a fool and he's deceived by this show, deceived by this game, this charade, he's taken in by it. He's looking down and seeing all those people worshipping in church and he's so pleased to see all these good Christians on a Sunday gathered in church and listening to the sermon and taking it all in but it isn't like that. No it's just a social game that they are playing. No one has any intention of actually putting the gospel precepts into practice and the very man who's preaching them knows also that no-one's going to take what he preaches seriously. He knows he doesn't take it seriously himself but they think that God doesn't know this. So they think that God is a fool. So it's very easy to pay lip service to things, not to be convinced. It's very easy to say, O yes, life is transitory - death is certain - mindfulness is always useful etc., but actually to act in accordance with that is very, very much more difficult.

Clive: With the Christians, especially with the preachers, is there not some other element, some seriousness, some awareness that beyond all that there must be ...

S: Kirkegaard was talking about organized Christianity in Denmark in particular in his day. We have to take his word for that things were as bad as that, perhaps they were, but perhaps there was the odd Christian here and there. But if you look at it, how many of the people who call themselves Christians do take any part of Christianity, certainly the teachings of Christ and the gospels, seriously. But you can say the same thing about the vast majority of Buddhists. They don't make any real effort to practise metta bhavana or to be mindful, but they pay lip service to those things because those things, those ideals, or those practices, have attained some sort [94] of respectability within their particular group. So they want to make themselves acceptable to the group by paying at least lip service to those ideas or those ideals even if they don't personally practice them. Some people even say well that's better than nothing, that at least you recognize in theory even if you don't recognize in practice. The point is whether you even really recognize in theory. It may be merely lip service pure and simple and that's certainly a very dangerous position to get into. But it's the position or almost all born Buddhists, born Christians and born anything else. The only bits of their respective religions in the case of Christianity and Islam that they seem to really get into with any enthusiasm are the very negative bits like burning people at the stake and chopping off people's hands for theft. They seem to be rather more into those sort of things than into things like turning the other cheek. So it's interesting also to enquire why people feel the need to pay lip service but it's mainly I think because of the need to win the approval of the group even at their own expense. We know from the confessions and show trials in different countries that people will even accuse themselves of things they haven't done in order to get back into the good basis of the group and not to be rejected and isolated and cast out any more. It's an aspect of the need to conform. So one has to ask oneself, is one really convinced of the truth of this, that or the other, or is one merely pretending to be convinced in order to please certain people. This is something that we have to look out for very carefully within the Friends

especially when someone wants to, say, join the Friends as they call it or get ordained or be given ordination as they say and they're doing all the right things but they may be doing them in some cases just because they want to please you - you in the plural - as a group, not because they are genuinely committed to those ideals or are really convinced of their necessity. They may have simply found a group of nice people and they like those people, they want to be with them or to belong. So they'll go along with anything that the group asks them to go along with. They don't really mind whether it's vegetarianism or non-vegetarianism or God or no God - they don't mind. They're willing to do anything that the group asks, they just want to belong to that group and that's what one has to be careful of. In India one can even find this. People even come along and ask to be taken into a Buddhist monastery or temple and be ordained and they even say I don't mind what I believe, I'll believe anything that you tell me to believe, I just want to stay here, I just like it here. I don't mind what I believe, I'll believe anything you want me to! (Laughter) In India they are as naive about it as that, they don't think it very important what they believe. You find a nice place to stay. That's why sometimes I used to get a bit indignant about Hindus, especially getting themselves converted to Christianity just for the sake of material advantage but they didn't see it like that at all. The material advantage was available, why not take [95] it? (Laughter). You're giving up your own religion in order to take up Christianity just for the sake of that material advantage I'd say. 'What does it matter, Christianity, Hinduism, it's all pretty much the same. What difference does it really make? I don't mind going to church. After all it's not bad, it's the same God that everybody worships so what does it matter and I get this job or this money into the bargain.' (Laughter) They just see it in that sort of way so they don't mind what they believe. If there's something to be gained they'll believe anything you ask them to believe so it's quite easy to convert them but also it's equally easy to unconvert them because someone's only got to come along with a bigger amount of money and he can bring them back. So, actually, basically of course they are Hindus because that is a basically Hindu point of view - that it's all the same. So in a sense you never convert them to Christianity even though they're going along to church and all that. The danger is that the children will be really converted, in fact they would not be Hindus as all, they'd be Christians from the beginning and the Christian missionaries in India, they weren't fooled, they knew all this. They used to say, and they even said to me, we don't mind, we know that these people aren't Christians at heart but we don't mind. We know that their children will be because they will have been brought up entirely under the influence of the church. They will not be able to go back. So this came from hypocrisy and the absence of conviction on the part of the pseudo-spiritual group. The conviction is an individual thing so Milarepa is asking Rechungpa if he's got conviction, is he convinced otherwise he can't practice the Dharma with determination.

We'll leave it there I think for lunch.

\_\_\_:

"One day some patrons of Nya Non arrived. They invited Rechungpa to accept hospitality in their village for a time, and the Jetsun gave him permission to sojourn there for a fortnight. Other Repas also went to the village for alms.

In the meantime Tsese, Ku Ju, and other patrons from Drin came to visit Milarepa. When they saw him sitting there with his penis freely exposed, they were shamed and horrified, and feared to go near him. Finally Tsese approached and offered him a covering cloth.

Whereupon all the visitors gathered round him and said, 'Oh Jetsun, the manner in which you expose your naked body and organ makes us worldly men feel very embarrassed and ashamed. For our sake, please be compassionate and considerate enough to cover it.'"

S: Right. Let's deal with that prose introduction first. The point that obviously arises is why should they have been, as they say, shamed and horrified just because Milarepa was sitting there without any clothes on? They say 'Oh Jetsun the manner in which you expose your naked body and organ makes us worldly men feel very embarrassed and ashamed. For our sake please [96] be compassionate and considerate enough to cover it.' Now what is the reason for their reaction? Is it that they were very decent minded people and Milarepa wasn't?

Sona: Was it that they were expecting a holy man to conform to certain norms?

S: Yes, but that still raises the same question, why should they expect the holy man to conform to those particular norms. It is a fact, and I've observed it myself, that the Tibetans from an, as it were, social and cultural point of view, do disapprove of nudity quite strongly. They do consider it a quite indecent sort of thing. Maybe that feeling is strengthened by the fact that for purely climatic reasons at least nudity is fairly uncommon in Tibet. I believe also the Chinese have got the same sort of idea, that from the point of view of Chinese culture nudity is quite indecent and it apparently was the case in the Buddha's time in ancient India because there was the incident in which I think (Vissaka) asked for permission to supply the nuns with bathing dresses because the nuns at that time, presumably like the bhikkhus, were taking their daily dip in the river without any clothes on and she actually says 'nakedness O Lord is disgusting', and she seems to have been expressing a common view. So even though, yes, religious nudity as one can call it was known to some extent to the ancient Indians, on the whole, at least in ordinary lay society, it was considered an indecent and offensive thing and that is much the same as the present day Indian attitude. As a very exceptional thing they would recognize religious nudity but nudity in the course of ordinary life is completely unacceptable. The reactions of Indians would be the same. They feel shamed and horrified or embarrassed and ashamed. This is not with regard to nudity as between the opposite sexes but even nudity in the case of members of the same sex as here with Milarepa. They would feel shamed and horrified or embarrassed and ashamed. So why is that?

Abhaya: One can't really think of any reason except the social or psychological conditioning with regard to sex. But it isn't relating to the social conditioning.

S: What do you mean?

Abhaya: The Tibetans, you say, have this social thing of not looking at nudity because of the climate and because they maybe feel that that makes them feel uncomfortable.

S: That would mean that they would be less likely to encounter it which would reinforce an existing conditioning of another type, a more psychological one.

Abhaya: And there's all those psychological hang-ups about sex.

S: One says 'hang-up' but are we not maybe jumping the gun a bit. In a way prejudging the issue a bit. Maybe we ought to sort of try and sort out [97] the psychological facts.



\_\_\_: Is it something to do with manliness?

S: But then what should be wrong with that?

Sona: Can it not just be that there is a sort of a physiological thing. By seeing a naked body if you are a healthy human being it should have the effect that it stirs something inside you and if you're coming into contact with that sort of feeling when you're trying to do something else it's not going to help.

S: That's true.

Sona: And therefore there's a sort of taboo put on it to keep it away.

S: That is true but again on the other hand it is said or it is reported that amongst those peoples where nudity is customary it does not have that sort of effect, this is what one is told at least. I don't know to what extent that is correct.

Sona: What were you thinking of in particular? Primitive places?

S: Yes, only primitive societies, but of course you could say that there every aspect of life including the sexual, is so strictly regulated by custom and tradition that general nudity just doesn't have that sort of effect but in another kind of situation where custom and tradition are not so strict, well that in fact would be the case probably as you say.

Abhaya: It must be because or obviously related to the fact that he is a guru and a holy man and actually seeing the nakedness of a guru, even the physical nakedness, is just too much for them.

S: In what sense is it too much? He's an old man. One might say what does it matter that he's without any clothes on. Why should it affect them in that way. They especially mention exposure of your naked body and organ. It's as though the sight of the penis especially upsets them, this seems pretty clear.

Sona: It's interesting also that men are saying that.

S: Yes, one could understand it more in the case of women but not in the case of men.

Clive: Maybe they can't reconcile the fact that the great guru whom they are devoted towards and represents the ideal of enlightenment and is someone whom they're supposed to revere has actually got a physical body, not to say a penis and he exposes it freely. In seeing that it sort of confuses them. They can't relate the two.

S: It could be partly that. But maybe there's some key to it in what they say about 'make us worldly men feel very embarrassed and ashamed.' Is there any sort of clue there? You might think well, why should it make worldly men [98] embarrassed and ashamed? You might imagine it making spiritually minded people embarrassed and ashamed but worldly men, surely they ought to be able to take worldly things in their stride, as it were.

Clive: It may mean that Milarepa's nakedness shows up the two extremes. It shows up the

worldliness and it shows up the transcendental and they can only relate to the worldliness of it.

S: It would seem to me that what it seems to represent is that the sight of Milarepa's nakedness especially his naked penis which it says is freely exposed reminds them or brings to their clearer consciousness things that they usually prefer to leave maybe at the most on the periphery of consciousness. That is to say their own specifically sexual activity. This is something they don't care particularly to think about. This is something that they're a bit ashamed of. It's a bit animal. So they don't allow themselves to become conscious of it. It's just something that happens and they conceal their nudity and they conceal that particular part especially underneath layers of clothing so it's as though officially it doesn't exist, it can be ignored. Though everybody really knows it's there, everybody knows what these things are but no one sort of talks about them. There's a sort of tacit agreement that one doesn't talk about these things. They just go on but nobody says anything. No one's reminded about them. So seeing Milarepa innocently naked reminds them of something which they are unwilling to face in a sense, unwilling to recognize. Recognize at least in a straightforward, sensible sort of way. It seems to be bound up with that.

Clive: This (reminds them that) they're animal.

S: It reminds them of their own animal nature. I don't think it's that they feel any sort of inconsistency between what the guru is supposed to be and the fact that he is naked because they say be compassionate and considerate enough to cover it. It's for their sake. They realize that, that they're asking him to cover himself. The reminder which the sight of the naked Milarepa gives them, the reminder of what they themselves are really like, is too painful. Here they are, very devoted and coming to see Milarepa and making offerings and asking for teachings but what about the other side of their lives, they don't care even to think about that or to be reminded of that at that particular moment. That is so sort of gross and crude that they just feel very uncomfortable about being reminded of it in front of Milarepa by Milarepa himself.

Sona: Presumably in a primitive society where there are lots of naked bodies the members of society were more in touch with their animal side perhaps. Were there any cultures, more developed cultures where (it also happened)?

Kovida: The Greeks.

S: Well the Greeks in history as far as I know are the only people who gave a sort of cultural dignity almost to nudity. The Romans didn't. [99] Respectable Romans usually covered themselves and the slaves might go about naked. But among the Greeks nudity had a definite sort of position, as it were. It was, if anything, looked up to rather than looked down upon and the Greeks seemed to have been quite exceptional in that respect. So I think in European culture there is something of a conflict because European culture inherits various traditions. There are various influences at work but broadly speaking it's usually said there are three. There's the classical, especially the Greek; there's the Semitic and Hebraic and there is the Scandinavian or the Teutonic. So you could say probably the classical and the Semitic or the Greek or rather the Hellenic and the Hebraic are the most important and in this respect they differ completely. The Jews like the Arabs seem to have felt very strongly about nudity and it was quite indecent and so on, though in ancient Egypt they could be regarded as Semites and

there was a certain amount of nudity certainly among the lower classes but the Jews have always been very much against it. It's not part of their tradition. For instance, when Judea was under first of all the rule of the (Salucid) dynasty which was a Greek dynasty and afterwards under the rule of the Romans and when Greek style gymnasia were established and when young Jews started exercising naked like the Greeks, or a few of them did, there was a great scandal among the Jews, that Jews were exposing themselves in this indecent way like the Gentiles were doing. It was not a proper Jewish sort of thing to do. So we have both these strands in our inheritance. On the one hand the strand of Hellenic culture, the gymnasium and the body building and the nude body etc. etc. Almost a cult of the nude body. On the other hand the Hebraic tradition, the Jewish tradition, according to which exposure of the body is a very shameful thing. So at the time of the Renaissance the Hellenic strand was uppermost, then with the puritans the Hebraic strand was uppermost going more back to the Old Testament than the New. So we probably still suffer from an ambivalent attitude towards sex, towards nudity in this sort of way.

Sona: I can't help but wonder though if it wasn't something to do with climatical conditions. In the inability of the particular race to adapt to those. For instance, in Africa the ( ) don't wear any clothes but then their skin can take the sort of ultra-violet light of the sun whereas in the desert it's extremely harmful for the races that inhabit that part. Whereas in Greece the temperature is slightly more moderate and maybe not so harsh. The further North you get again it gets extremely harsh.

S: Well clearly in some areas the climate just makes nudity difficult but that isn't certainly not the only reason because you get the same differences of temperature say in China but you don't get say the Southern Chinese where it is warmer tending more in the direction of nudity.

Sona: I was wondering about that same case of India that didn't the religion start in the North, near the hills ...

[100]

S: Yes and no, but this is in a way another question because the Aryan tradition, yes, you could say came down from the North West but then there is the Dravidian civilization which is an equally important one. The Dravidian religious tradition which originated in the South.

Sona: Don't the Aryans have the ... wasn't it they that embodied the beginnings of Hinduism and that took over the whole continent eventually. Therefore their customs and these are sort of very basic, have become just ...

S: It's not even clear that those particular customs had any particular connection with the Aryans, because when, for instance, Vissaka made her remark at that time the Eastern part of India was not really very Aryanized and the local cults and cultures were very much in evidence. But nonetheless it seems to have been generally accepted that nudity was disgraceful even among people of the same sex. There is also the incident with regard to the nuns where the nuns were taking their bath in the nude and a band of prostitutes were taking their bath in the nude further upriver and the prostitutes were mocking the nuns and this is what upset Vissaka and drew her attention to the matter. As if to say the nuns, though innocent, in a sense were no better than the prostitutes also bathing in the nude in that shameless sort of way. So it's as though there's a sort of what we would call more respectable sort of middle class strata in Indian society that didn't like the idea or nudity. I don't know

whether this is too extreme - this is a bit speculative - but what was Vissaka's background? She came from a (Seti) family, that is a merchant and banker's family, she came from the trading caste. So could we say that these nuns, they didn't seem to feel it wrong to bathe in the nude. I don't know what their background was. They might have been (Sakya) women. So just as in the same way in England or in the West there was sort of religion and the rise of capitalism, associated with a puritanical streak etc., was there not that same sort of link up possibly in ancient India? But these more, as it were, puritanical and anti-pleasure tendencies developed more among those people who were concerned with the making of money. This is only very speculative but it might be interesting if someone followed this up and tried to find if there was any real parallel.

Sona: Another speculative idea is that possibly it's a caste distinction that the rich people can afford to wear clothes and the poor can't so the poor are always trying to emulate the rich therefore ...

S: Well in ancient Egypt it would seem that slaves and very poor people went naked or nearly so and the upper classes wore clothes but again in a very selective sort of way. The upper part of the body even in the case of women often not being covered but they certainly did wear quite elaborate clothes but of course in Tibet this doesn't hold good because there everybody has to cover themselves for climatic reasons. But no doubt there is [101] here the sort of association of nudity with something quite ... they're afraid to go near Milarepa at first. So it would seem to me that that sort of strong virtually emotional reaction can only be because the sight of Milarepa's nudity brings to the forefront of their consciousness something that they try to keep very much in the background of it. So his, as it were, innocent animality reminds them of their far from innocent animality. Probably, one could say even in modern times, one has to distinguish between a natural nudism and an exhibitionistic nudism. It's quite easy to sort of pretend that one's all very innocent and natural whereas one may simply be a bit of an exhibitionist or it may be even sort of mental exhibitionism. You must just be intellectually convinced that nudity is a good thing and sort of carry it out for those sort of reasons and be quite out of contact with yourself physically.

Sona: It seems to be becoming more and more popular nowadays isn't it, nudity. Now even in England there are beaches set aside for nude bathing.

S: I think that's probably on the whole a somewhat murky area.

Kovida: We went down there at the convention to a beach which happened to be a nudist beach and the thing that struck me was that there were two quite young parents who were completely naked and their young kid was dressed. It was a really really young kid and I thought that was quite interesting because normally the kids take their clothes off. As if he was reacting to them being naked. All the other people seemed to be doing it just for exhibitionist reasons.

S: And some were sort of prowling around the rocks or following other people with their eyes. There's a very odd sort of atmosphere there. Not at all natural or Grecian or anything like that.

Sona: I went to a naked beach in Stockholm and there it just seemed quite natural. People were just sitting round and you couldn't really tell. There was obviously a certain amount of

exhibitionism but then you'd get that if people were wearing swimming clothes. There was less of it there ... and the children in Sweden. You see many more children naked but parents here seem to dress their children up. You see tiny little girls wearing bikini tops. (Laughter). It is very interesting that some cultures as you said the Greeks seemed to accept nudity quite easily.

S: Because one is speaking about nudity within one and the same sex. The Greeks certainly didn't approve of both men and women together being naked though the Spartans did to a limited extent. Young Spartans of both sexes exercised together in the nude but other Greeks regarded this as quite exceptional and didn't seem altogether happy about it.

Anyway, maybe that's enough on that particular section. Let's hear what Milarepa has to say.

[102]

Kovida:

"When he heard this request Milarepa suddenly stood up naked and sang:

Through wandering long in many places  
I have forgotten my native land.  
Staying long with my Holy Jetsun,  
I have forgotten all my kinsmen.  
Keeping for long the Buddha's teaching,  
I have forgotten worldly things.  
Staying for long in hermitages,  
I have forgotten all diversions.  
Through long watching of monkey's play,  
I have forgotten sheep and cattle.  
Long accustomed to a tinder box,  
I have forgotten all household chores.  
Long used to solitude without servant or master,  
I have forgotten courteous manners.  
Long accustomed to be carefree,  
I have forgotten worldly shame.  
Long accustomed to the mind coming and going  
By itself, I have forgotten how to hide things.  
Long used to burning Dumo-heat,  
I have forgotten clothing.  
Long accustomed to practise non-discriminating Wisdom,  
I have forgotten all distracting thoughts. Long used  
To practising the Two-in One Illumination,  
I have forgotten all non-sensical ideas.  
These twelve "oblivions" are the teachings of this Yogi.  
Why, dear patrons, do you not also follow them?  
I have untied the knot of dualism;  
What need have I to follow your customs?  
To me, Bodhi is spontaneity itself!"

S: 'Through wandering long in many places I have forgotten my native land.' Does Milarepa mean literally he has forgotten his native land? What do you think he means here? He no

longer thinks of it as his native land? He no longer identifies himself with it?

Clive: He's not attached to it.

S: That's easy enough to say but it's actually very difficult isn't it? It isn't just a question of your native land but in the abstract it's a whole network of associations and customs and things that you feel used to or things that you are used to or that you feel at home with. It's a particular way of behaving, a particular way of dressing, a particular way of speaking, it's a particular way of living, a particular kind of food [103] that you eat. I was, for instance, noticing (Siri) yesterday. I don't know whether you noticed. He wasn't very comfortable with a knife and fork, you see. At home he certainly uses his hand to eat with and he wasn't, I won't say not happy with, but not used to the cereals for breakfast. In Ceylon they have stringhoppers, quite a different sort of thing. So it's not just that ... you haven't necessarily forgotten your native land when you just become a little less chauvinistic. You may be not very chauvinistic but you're just used to a certain way of living which is the way of living of the country in which you were born and brought up and unconsciously at least you're very attached to that and uncomfortable when you can't live in that particular way or according to those particular customs. So that isn't easy to overcome, that sort of conditioning or that sort of attachment even. You can really overcome it only by actually living under different cultural conditions for a while. I remember when I've known Europeans arrive in India and the first time that they see people eating with their hand they think it's a horrible dirty custom and it makes them feel quite upset. They almost feel like vomiting when they see people eating with rice all over their hand and eating in that sort of way but after a while they get used to it. Probably food is one of the things that it's most difficult to change. So Milarepa says he's been wandering long in many places, he's had experience of many different parts of Tibet and he's forgotten his native land. He no longer identifies himself with the particular region. This is natural but at the same time it is very much a conditioning that you are very much a territorial animal. It's not only that you think of yourself as, say, English, you think of yourself as coming from the North or the South or from the Midlands or from the North-east or from the South-west or from a particular town. You associate yourself very closely with that particular region, that particular area. You're ready to stand up for it against all comers. When I used to refer to Kovida as having come from Glasgow I'd be immediately corrected that no he hadn't come from Glasgow, he came from Dumbarton (Laughter) which was quite different from Glasgow, in fact it's several miles away. (Laughter). The people there were totally different. They didn't even speak the same language.

Kovida: It's true.

S: Then 'Staying long with my Holy Jetsun', that is with my teacher who is in his case Marpa, 'I have forgotten all my kinsmen.' So much the same thing there. I think in modern times in the West this sort of link or tie with the kinsmen, the blood relations, isn't probably as strong as it is in many traditional cultures. Not that that is necessarily a good thing because often it means just alienation but in the East still, certainly in India, people are very conscious of their blood ties and feel very strongly connected with their blood ties, their blood relations. They do regard [104] themselves as belonging to that extended family and it's very important to them. They work for that, they live for that, they make sacrifices for that. Even they sacrifice everything else to that. Everything is done to extend and aggrandize and enrich the family. That's the basic focus of loyalty. So you're submerged in that. If you get, for instance, a job in a government department your first thought, apart from keeping your own job, will be to get

into that same department as many of your own relations as you can and you'll always favour your own relations of course. If you have an opportunity you won't even think of trying to select the best person if the selection is in your power. You'll automatically select a relation regardless of his qualifications. It's your duty almost to push as many of your relations in as possible. That's what you're expected to do. That's your first loyalty. Not to your department or not to the service, not to any abstract notions of justice or equality. Your first duty is to your family, your blood relations, to do as much as you can for them. It doesn't matter so much if you have to do other people down in the process. They just have to look after themselves. You're looking after your family. I think we don't always appreciate the strength of these sort of ties. So 'staying long with my Holy Jetsun I have forgotten all my kinsmen.' In other words, the spiritual relationships are now more important to me than the biological ones. My closest relationships are those with whom I have spiritually something in common. He mentions only his guru but there's also the fellow disciples. The disciples of the same guru as well as, of course, his own disciples. So 'staying long with my Holy Jetsun I have forgotten all my kinsmen.'

'Keeping for long the Buddha's teaching, I have forgotten worldly things.' You can actually meet people like that who have spent so much time studying the Dharma or thinking about the Dharma or meditating on the Dharma or practising the Dharma that they just have forgotten worldly things. They don't know how to do all sorts of worldly things. Milarepa claims to have been in that state.

Clive: Is there any advantage in being in that state?

S: I think probably it's necessary for everybody for some time because otherwise you can't really know whether you're attached to worldly things unless you've actually got away from them and even forgotten about them for a while. Like making money. Maybe it will take you a long time to forget how to do that. Maybe that's quite difficult though under modern conditions because there are so many things that one needs to know even in order just to survive or to get about.

Clive: In a way you could presumably do it by going on a solitary retreat that was genuinely solitary.

S: After all even when people have a month's solitary retreat they don't find it all that easy as they say to get back into things. It's almost as though they'd forgotten how to do them. Not [105] exactly they'd forgotten how to do them but they'd lost the knack or the inclination to do them. It's more like that perhaps. So you could say you haven't really been away long enough on a solitary retreat unless when you come back you feel a bit awkward with regard to worldly things. Even maybe making a telephone call, you're a bit awkward at it. You've got a bit out of the way of doing things of that sort. Or going shopping you feel a bit lost. You don't quite know where to go or what to do. This is a sort of extreme that one doesn't want to encourage but I remember a very innocent old monk from Thailand came to Calcutta on pilgrimage and he came from some remote little village in Thailand and he'd just been immersed in the usual sort or bhikkhu things. He didn't even know how to cross the road. He was about 55 and there he was in Calcutta on pilgrimage and he just didn't know how to cross the road. So he couldn't go out without two young more worldly monks, so what used to happen was he would have one young monk on one side and one on the other and when they said go he shut his eyes and they would run across the road. (Laughter) He just sort of hoped

to get to the other side. So this isn't exactly spiritual innocence. This is more just inexperience but you see the sort of thing I mean in a way at least analogically. So keeping for long the Buddha's teaching I have forgotten worldly things.

'Staying for long in hermitages, I have forgotten all diversions.' Probably by diversions he means in this context things like horse racing, maybe cock-fighting, chess or mahjong. So this is what happens if you stay for long in hermitages, you forget diversions because you don't have any need for diversion. You're thoroughly absorbed in what you are doing. You don't feel the need of any sort of distraction to keep you going so you just forget all these games and entertainments and so on.

'Through long watching of monkey's play, I have forgotten sheep and cattle.' Well monkeys are wild creatures. He's been so long living in wild places, living in the jungle or near the jungle he's forgotten about domesticated animals and what they look like and how to look after them and how one milks them and shears them and slaughters them and all that sort of thing.

'Long accustomed to a tinder box I have forgotten all household chores.' All he's got is a little tinder box, that is to say a flint and steel to light his fire just of sticks just to boil his one pot of nettle soup. So he's forgotten all about household chores of furniture, and keeping everything clean and tidy and looking after your stores and making sure the rats don't get at them and repairing the roof and sweeping the floor. He's just living in his cave with his single pot and just a few sticks for his fire and a tinder box and he just goes and gathers some nettles whenever he feels hungry and boils them. He's forgotten about ordinary domestic arrangements.

'Long used to solitude without servant or master, I have forgotten [106] courteous manners.' In society there are certain conventions. How you behave with people, how you speak, how you welcome them, how you ask them to come in, how you ask them to be seated, whether they'd like a cup of tea. He's lived on his own for so long he's forgotten all these sort of things. He doesn't know how to behave in a way which is socially acceptable. So here he is coming a bit close to the topic about which he's really addressing them. So do you think this is a good thing? To be sort of, as it were, oblivious of worldly manners, customs, conventions. What does this mean? Should one just ignore them?

\_\_\_: I think it depends on the context.

S: Does it?

Sona: Sometimes it can be quite unskilful can't it and cause a reaction in people.

S: Yes, well you could say that Milarepa had been unskilful but obviously he knows how to handle the situation. I think what it is is that you must be able to, as it were, withdraw from the group norms, group behaviour, customs, manners, etiquettes, and be quite free from them yourself and if you do follow them or conform to them you do so entirely as a skilful means, not because you identify yourself with that particular group or feel any pressure to conform. It may be that you need to go through a period of, as it were, unconventionality. Even flouting accepted manners and customs for a while at least.



Clive: Would you say that ( ) actually go against customs or just to go away to a place where it doesn't enter into it.

S: Well initially you need to go away I think to a place where you could just ignore those customs because you just weren't in contact with other people so the question of observing certain manners and customs just didn't arise and then when you did meet other people you would tend not to observe those customs, as it were, quite naturally rather than not observe them in a reactive sort of way. But one is so much under the influence of the group in various ways that sometimes you have almost deliberately to free yourself or to react even against the group just to make sure that you are not really under the influence of the group when you do in fact go along with their customs even in principle as a skilful means. Also it sometimes can happen that what Milarepa calls courteous manners have become so artificial that they preclude the possibility of any real communication or any real human contact and that if you want to have that you just have to break through these artificial manners and customs. I was recalling the other day a little experience of my own when I was in Kalimpong. I upset a certain lady who invited me for afternoon tea with some other people because at that time I wasn't eating after 12 o'clock so I refused a slice of the cake that she'd made specially for the occasion which she [107] took very badly. She seems to have thought I was just being very impolite, very rude in refusing a slice of the cake that she had specially baked for the occasion. So I was very much in her bad books and I wasn't invited again. It was not that I wanted to be rude or to offend her but I was just sticking to my particular principles. She didn't appreciate that.

Or you could say that I'd lived so long out of that sort of society that I was in fact oblivious to the fact that one had to conform in that sort of way. Because she was a European woman whereas an Indian woman in a more traditional context would have understood at once that if you had that religious rule then that was to be respected and she wouldn't have dreamed of being offended by them not having her cake. She would have just quietly sent some along the next morning so you could have it before twelve o'clock. But the European woman had quite a different attitude. I think I was a bit surprised because I'd almost forgotten what it was like to move in European society, not that I ever moved in it to any extent. (Laughter). So 'long used to solitude without servant or master, I have forgotten courteous manners. Long accustomed to be carefree I have forgotten worldly shame.' After all I live by myself he's saying. I've not had to bother with things like clothes or what other people think so I've forgotten worldly shame. I behave in front of other people just as I behave when I'm on my own. And he says 'worldly' shame. It's not that the shame that they feel at the sight of a naked Milarepa is spiritual. He's saying it's a worldly shame, that is to say it's on account of their own worldly attitude, that is to say on account of their own gross animal natures that they don't like to be reminded of. 'Long accustomed to the mind coming and going by itself I have forgotten how to hide things.' In other words he's been all the time watching the comings and goings of his own mind. He's seen skilful states, he's seen unskilful states. He's accustomed to acknowledging them and being quite open to himself about them. He's not accustomed to covering up anything which is shameful or supposedly shameful. So these people are asking him to cover himself up but he's not accustomed to doing that. He's accustomed to facing things as they are. It's as though he's saying to them well if you do feel deeply a shamed just ask yourselves why that is. Don't try to cover up shameful things, just face it, just recognize it for what it is and maybe do something about it. Don't try just to hide away the more bestial side of yourself and pretend it doesn't exist. Just see it, just observe it and make up your mind what you've got to do about it. In Buddhism originally this whole question of

not hiding anything, not covering anything up so to speak was very important. The Buddha himself mentions this on more than one occasion, that the Bhikkhu especially doesn't hide anything from anybody. The ideal is that one should be completely open about everything which of course is very difficult. Milarepa was experiencing difficulty about being open in this simple straightforward physical sense. The first thing people ask you is to cover yourself up, not to show yourself as you really are either literally or metaphorically. They want you to join in the game of pretend. It's like the Emperor's clothes. It's as though everybody's in the same position as the Emperor really, none of them are wearing any clothes but everybody pretends that everybody else is wearing clothes. It reminds [109] me of a little passage in a book about D.H. Lawrence which I was reading. Apparently, it gets a bit complicated but apparently Lady Ottoline Morel had said something nasty about Freda Lawrence. (Laughter). Freda Lawrence heard from somebody that Ottoline Morel had said something nasty about her so she wrote Ottoline Morel a nasty letter saying why did you say that nasty thing about me. Ottoline Morel was very angry that the person to whom she had said that nasty thing had gone and told Freda so Ottoline Morel denied that she had said that nasty thing and then the writer of the book says that according to her code if you hadn't said it officially you hadn't said it, it didn't exist and that was the code of that sort of society. If you hadn't said something, as it were, officially or you denied that you'd said it, you hadn't said it. So people should base their relationships with you on that official basis, on what you had said officially, as it were. Not on what you said unofficially behind their backs. That was regarded apparently as being rather not very refined or not very cultivated or civilized to confront somebody with what they'd said about you unofficially. But officially they hadn't said it so you are supposed to accept the official version and your relations were supposed to be official, as it were. You were supposed to sort of back-bite one another but that never was allowed to come out into the open. So this was quite interesting I thought, whereas Freda with all her faults was a woman who liked to have things right bang out in the open but Lady Ottoline Morel just couldn't understand that. To her it seemed crude and uncivilized and she couldn't understand how Freda could not accept her denial that she had said something even though she'd actually said it. According to her civilized code, if you'd said something and you were asked if you'd said it and you said no you hadn't said it, well when you said that you hadn't said it that should be acceptable as the truth officially even though everybody knew it wasn't the truth. So we're a long way from Milarepa's attitude. But you find this in families, that there are certain things that are not acknowledged, don't you? That no one is supposed to talk about and if you try to raise it you're told, 'Oh no we don't talk about that.' You find, for instance, that some one is illegitimate, that isn't talked about or that someone once went to prison perhaps - nobody ever mentions that, it's always carefully skated around. It never is brought out into the open, it's never admitted into the sort of collective family consciousness. Or if you sort of happen inadvertently to have referred to it there's a sort of silence and after a very uncomfortable minute someone changes the subject. (Laughter) It's as though someone had let off a bad smell. (Laughter) Everyone knows but nobody refers to. (Laughter) But this is what it's like, isn't it? So Milarepa doesn't agree with that sort of attitude. Of course one can't say everything all at once, one knows that and it must be a real communication not just a blurting out of things in an insensitive sort of way. So he says, 'long accustomed to the mind coming and going by itself I have forgotten how to [110] hide things. Long used to burning Dumo Heat, I have forgotten clothing. The Dumo heat is the heat generated internally in meditation. They are probably wondering why he's not bothering with clothing and that's the reason, he doesn't need clothing. He keeps warm without it. So 'Long accustomed to practise non-discriminating Wisdom, I have forgotten all distracting thoughts.' The thoughts that they are indulging in are distracting thoughts really. They are not based upon wisdom. Wisdom he

says is non-discriminating. He doesn't discriminate between what is shame and what is not shame or nakedness and non-nakedness. 'Long used to practising the Two in One Illumination, I have forgotten all nonsensical ideas.' The Two in One illumination is the Yuganadha which is non-duality at the highest level, the non-duality of wisdom and compassion or wisdom and skilful means or samsara and nirvana, the conditioned and the unconditioned or existence and non-existence as we were talking about in the morning. In other words, he does not abstract from the undifferentiated continuum of the void any particular pattern, any particular grid so to speak, any particular duality such as shameful and not shameful. So therefore he's quite unable to see things in the way that they see them. He has forgotten all nonsensical ideas. So 'These twelve 'Oblivions' are the teachings of this yogi'. These twelve apparent forgetfulnesses, 'Why dear patrons do you not also follow them?' What he's saying is you're trying to teach me, let me teach you. This is very often the attitude of worldly people towards spiritual people that they are supposed to revere. They try to get you to do things their way rather than they learning to do things your way. 'I have untied the knot of dualism; What need have I to follow your customs?' Here he puts it very pointedly. 'To me Bodhi is spontaneity itself!' The word for spontaneity is Sahajja which means the spontaneous, the natural. Literally the born together with, the carnate. So, 'to me Bodhi is spontaneity itself.' This is quite interesting. Enlightenment consists in being completely spontaneous. This is one of the great characteristics of the Vajrayana. Of course sometimes the followers of the Vajrayana were sort of pseudo-spiritual or pseudo-spontaneous as you find people nowadays being sometimes. That their spontaneity was only a sort of calculated reactivity like some of those people who put nudity on the stage. It's not that they're being spontaneous or being themselves. It's more that they want to shock Mrs Grundy or shock Mrs Mary Whitehouse. So their activity is not spontaneous. They've very much got their eye on her. They've very much got their eye on the public. As someone once said some writers and artists write and paint as though they've got one eye fixed upon an infinitely horrifyable public. So it becomes like a little boy saying 'look mummy, how naughty I'm being!' and she sort of screams, 'Oh how naughty you are, how wicked, how terrible, don't do it' and he gets extra pleasure out of doing it just because she says he's not to. Well that is not being spontaneous. But this is what a lot of our so called spontaneity or artistic freedom amounts to [111] nowadays. He says here that 'to me Bodhi is spontaneity itself.' Bodhi or enlightenment or illumination is just, as it were, acting quite straightforwardly without compromising with group attitudes or dualistic notions straight out of your own enlightened mind. That's the real spontaneity. So that sort of spontaneity obviously is very rare. So if somebody was to go around naked nowadays the chances are they would not be exhibiting the spontaneity of their Bodhi. They'll either be following a current fashion or just doing something to shock people or perhaps just being completely shameless. Maybe they would have sunk below the human level in a sense. But Milarepa-like nudity is probably quite rare, quite difficult.

Clive: There is a sort of just healthy nudity in which people aren't being exhibitionists.

S: But this is when it's sort of incidental if you see what I mean. It's not that you are sort of in the nude for the sake of being in the nude. It's incidental to doing something else. The doing of something else requires you, as it were, incidentally to be in the nude so you don't bother about it but you don't make a point of it.

Subhuti: You don't set up a club to do it.

Clive: In the context of a beach it's not absolutely necessary that you're completely nude to

sunbathe but you are nude because it seems silly to wear just six inches of clothing when you can be completely naked. It's only when you meet with a reaction from someone else that it becomes apparent that your nudity is something other than what it really is.

S: But maybe to some extent you have to bear in mind other people's reactions especially if they're in the position to call the police and maybe have you prosecuted or even imprisoned. You may not think it's worth all that hassle just for the sake of a few minutes nudity on the beach.

Let's read the rest of the song.

Subhuti:

"The Dharma of you worldly people  
is too difficult to practise.  
Caring for nought, I live the way I please.  
Your so-called 'shame' only brings deceit  
And fraud. How to pretend I know not."

S: So Milarepa says very ironically 'the Dharma of you worldly people is too difficult to practise.' He's being very ironical here. He's saying, as it were, it's too difficult for me this Dharma of yours, of covering up what is shameful and pretending it isn't there. This is too difficult a Dharma for me to practise. 'Caring for nought, I live the way I please.' He's speaking here of course from the level of Bodhi. I don't care for anything mundane. I don't care for worldly distinctions or ideas. I live the way I please. This is not of course the hippy-like doing his own thing. [112] It's on quite a different level. He's said already that Bodhi is spontaneity itself. It's only Bodhi in fact which is the true spontaneity and he's able to live the way he pleases because that way is the Dharma in the highest sense itself. 'Your so-called shame only brings deceit and fraud.' How is that? How does their so-called shame bring only deceit and fraud? But they're not really decent. It's as though they're sort of pretending that they're very decent sort of people and they don't like this shameful nudity but the fact is they're not really decent people. There's an aspect of them which is far from decent, which is in fact quite indecent, quite bestial and their covering of that up is only an attempt to hide that fact from themselves. So there's fraud. They're just pretending to be what they're not. They're not in the least decent. They're very indecent he's saying so they might as well acknowledge the fact and do something about it. Do you think Milarepa's point of view is altogether justified? Do you think it's all right for Milarepa but it doesn't really work for society at large? Do you think Milarepa is really saying that they should be as he is? Do you think he's really saying to them that they ought to go about without any clothes on in the same way that he is? Do you think he's really saying that?

Lalitavajra: Only in the symbolical sense.

S: Only in the symbolical sense. But he's definitely not wanting to allow them to force him to conform to their standards and their attitudes. He's very firm about that. There was another famous incident in the Life of Milarepa where his sister was very ashamed to see him without any clothes and brought him a beautiful blanket to cover himself. So he makes little coverings for all the different parts of his body and she's really outraged at him spoiling this beautiful blanket. He says he just doesn't understand because if one part of the body is shameful and

needs a little covering then all the other parts must be shameful too and need their little covering so that's what he's done so what's she grumbling about. (Laughter) All the different parts of his body had sort of pockets that he's fitted on to them. But quite apart from climatic reasons you actually have people going about in the nude. Would it indicate a sort of Milarepa-like innocence? It wouldn't obviously so probably it wouldn't be desirable but at the same time people must recognize what is really there so to speak and what they are really like and at the same time of course not insist that someone like Milarepa does things their way or observes conventions which have got meaning only for them if in fact that. Do you think people in England are unduly inhibited in this way?

Clive: I think quite a lot of people go too much the other way. They cover up nudity for wrong reasons through inhibition. So it might be good for them to actually express all that just to get them to accept their animal sides.

[113]

S: Is it as simple as that do you think?

Clive: Probably not.

S: But is it accepting one's animal side? We've talked about it in that sort of way as regards these Tibetans but is it just that? Or is it really that, accepting your animal side? Is that what it represents for people?

Clive: I think it's the shadow. They project their shadow on to the body. It's the scapegoat of quite a lot of negative ...

S: Do you think so?

Kovida: I think it's very much a social thing. It upholds all the social bonds that you have. To be naked in some way makes a lie of all the social things that you accept.

S: Because you can tell a lot from somebody's dress. It's a sort of language isn't it, the way that they are dressed especially on more formal occasions. So if people don't wear clothes there's very often no way of distinguishing between them. You can't tell whether they're rich or poor. If you're in the nude well you've nothing to pin your medals on. (Laughter). Well have you? So I think it's not just a question of the nudity but of not wearing your uniform so to speak and therefore not being recognizable. In other words, it means an abdication of social identity.

Kovida: You don't know how to relate to the person you meet because you don't know what social level on which to greet them or treat them.

S: Because even primitive peoples who don't have any need to dress owing to the climate and who maybe even don't particularly cover the sexual parts, they wear a kind of dress or at least decorations nonetheless as a means of indicating rank and social position and so on.

Kovida: Paint even.

S: Paint even or tattoos. So they may not bother about not having any clothes on but they'd

probably feel quite uncomfortable without their tattoos. It used to be said in the old days that a respectable woman felt uncomfortable in public unless she was wearing her hat and gloves. They are still commenting on the conservative ladies not wearing hats any more. It's as recent as that. A respectable woman wore a hat in public and gloves usually.

Sona: Reading one of D.H. Lawrence's books I'm suddenly reminded about how uncomfortable men were if they didn't have their jackets on. I remember Srimala's grandfather who arrived (...unclear...) jacket on.

[114]

S: There is that aspect of nudity too. That without clothes there's, I won't say no social identity, but your social identity is very much reduced or it becomes difficult to ascertain. Also, of course, I think in nudity there's an absence of disguise in the sense that when you're dressed you probably look more presentable than you actually are because most people nowadays are physically not very presentable and have either got pot bellies or they're round shouldered or they've got skinny legs or they're knock kneed or they don't have any chests etc. etc. or in the case of women they've got breasts that flop right down to their waists or enormous buttocks etc. etc. So when clothes are not on all these, as it were, physical imperfections are revealed. I think this is one of the reasons why nowadays a lot of people may not be very happy with nudity because they're not very proud of their physical appearance. They are conscious that it leaves a lot to be desired so to speak. I'm speaking even of young people, not necessarily older people. (Pause) It is perhaps interesting that the Greeks who in a way idealized nudity should also have gone in very much for physical training and all that kind of thing so that they not only went about in the nude on certain occasions but were quite presentable even, in that respect. It's probably just as well we don't have much nudism in view of the fact that considering the way most people would look in that state it is just as well that they are decently covered.

\_\_\_: Maybe it would encourage them to look after their bodies.

S: Anyway, any particular point about anything we've done this afternoon. What's the overall feeling that you get from this song of Milarepa in reply to their objections to his nudity?

Chris: They're not prepared to make any sort of compromise.

Subhuti: Freedom.

S: Freedom. Hmm.

\_\_\_: There's quite a lot of contrast. What he's saying seems just totally different from what he was telling Rechungpa.

S: Well in this morning's song he was addressing Rechungpa who is a committed follower, who is quite spiritually developed already. Of course in this song he is, as it were, justifying himself, even defending himself to nominally religious people who are trying to get him to behave in a way that is acceptable to their ideas. So in the case of Rechungpa it's as though he's encouraging him because they're both on the same path. So in the case of the worldly people he's not encouraging them at all except to follow him and to do what he is doing. He's totally disagreeing with their present attitude, at least as regards himself.

[115]

Kovida: They can't even see him naked and others see him as (unclear).

S: It's like the famous story about Allen Ginsberg. When he was giving a lecture somewhere in California and he was talking about Zen and all that sort of thing and he happened to use the expression the naked truth and then someone in the audience asked him 'What do you mean by the naked truth!?' So he was so enraged at this apparently he stripped all his clothes off on the spot and he said, 'This is what I mean by the naked truth!' (Laughter). It's a true story because when he came to see me in London shortly after it happened I asked him about it and he said, yes, he actually did do that. He told me the story.

\_\_\_: He was enraged at such a fatuous question?

S: Yes, as though you could give a definition of the naked truth in just a few words. So it was as good a reply as any. Being Allen Ginsberg it must have gone down really well.

Subhuti: It must have been quite a sight. (Laughter)

S: Yes indeed! Even the thirty year old Allen Ginsberg I think wasn't very presentable in that sort of way. It would have come across much better had he been a young Apollo or something like that. The point that he's underlining here is that if one is on any sort of spiritual path one has to be so careful not to compromise. Yes there is such a thing as skilful means etc. etc. but one must be careful it really is a skilful means and not an actual capitulation because the pressure of the world, the pressure of the group, even the positive group, is on the spiritual community and the individual all the time to do things their way. In a sense if you want to function you can't escape it but you have to realize what you are doing. For instance, if you have an FWBO at all, OK, you can't really avoid having that as a legal entity. That means you have to do it in accordance with certain laws, in accordance with certain rules. You can't do it exactly your way. You might try to do it more your way which is actually what is happening at the moment because we're making certain submissions to the Charity Commissioners, but it's quite a struggle. We have to put up quite a fight to do things, even to organize things practically and legally in accord with your ideals. The existing laws require you to organize yourself in accordance with society's idea not in accordance with your ideals. Your ideals have to be bent if necessary to fit their ideas. So you have to put up a struggle. So we get so used to running along these sort of tracks that we don't really realize what we're doing. We think that we're going our own way and doing things in our own way but actually we aren't. You can't even put up a building without getting planning permission. You can't cremate a dead body in the open. There are all sorts of restrictions. Maybe in some cases they are a quite necessary and reasonable restriction but very often [116] they aren't quite that or they're that and something else. They're also a sort of imposition upon you of ideas that you don't in fact accept. One of our Friends in Helsinki at the moment is undergoing a jail sentence because he won't do his National Service or anything equivalent, he's refused even that. So here is a straightforward confrontation, a straightforward conflict and it's so easy to compromise. I remember when I was in Colombo, when I was in the Army, one of the things that sort of really shocked me at first was people pulling rickshaws. I just wouldn't ride in these. I thought it was so bad to have somebody else pulling you but after a few months it happened that it was quite inconvenient always to walk so sort of very gingerly I got into one of these things. I was careful to select one which was being pulled by a young strong looking man and not by an old weak looking man which was often the case and I kept telling him to go slowly but he

didn't understand me because I didn't know the local language and he kept thinking I meant go faster. So every time I said go slowly he went faster so in the end I had to leave him to go at his own pace and not say anything. But then I felt afterwards one very quickly gets used to these things because after a while I was in fact just taking rickshaws without thinking very much about it. But at first I'd been quite shocked and not wanting to use them at all. So it isn't very difficult just to start going along with things, even with things that you don't approve of. In the end you get used to them.

So the message of this particular song seems to be that the individual has to resist the pressure of the group. That seems to be the message. It seems to be what Milarepa is saying. What he was really saying to Rechungpa was that you can't really practice the Dharma without conviction or you can't practice the Dharma in a determined way without real conviction and here he's saying well the individual has to really stand up for himself in the face of pressure from the group, that is to say pressure to conform, to do things the group's way, to respect the group's judgement, to respect the group's values.

I remember when I was in India first I implicitly followed all Indian manners and customs especially Buddhist ones because I wanted to sort of fit in, as it were, and at that time perhaps I hadn't fully made the distinction between a group, even a positive group or traditionally religious group, and the spiritual community. So I made a point of following everything and conforming to everything and doing things in the traditional Buddhist way. I did this practically till my departure from India but subsequently of course I changed my attitude considerably. That one shouldn't conform even to the traditions of the existing Buddhist group or groups just because they were supposed to be Buddhist if in fact they weren't in the interests of the individual's development. Sagaramati was telling me that somebody came to dinner in Manchester who [117] had had very little contact with me many years ago but who belonged to some other group and he said he thought that one of the things he didn't like about the FWBO was that we didn't have enough reverence for the robe as such. So Sagaramati tried to explain our point of view but he still didn't find that very acceptable but I'm sure our attitude is the correct one because respect for the robe has developed in such a sort of exaggerated way as distinct from respect for the individual wearing it that it starts doing serious harm and led to so much falsehood and hypocrisy and so many things of that sort. If you're respected on account of the robe what happens when you take the robe off and go in the nude, as it were? You can't even tell who has a yellow robe and who has a white one which would be terrible in the eyes of some people. In the case of Vissaka to get back to that, who provided the bathing robes for the nuns, she didn't want there to be any ...

- - - BREAK IN RECORDING - - ...

Subhuti: Did the Buddha give his grounds for agreeing to her request?

S: As far as I know not but there are many accounts where the Buddha gives in to public opinion for the sake of peace and quiet. I think it's very difficult to tell which of these incidents really go back to the Buddha and which are, as it were, so to speak, grafted on afterwards, that being a convenient way of introducing, say, some new rule of the Order. That it was against public opinion for them to behave in a certain way so therefore there was a rule that the bhikkhus should not behave in a certain way. But one finds it rather difficult really to imagine that the Buddha conceded so much to public opinion. So whether he did really - that is the historical Buddha - permit Vissaka to provide the bhikkhunis with bathing robes for



that sort of reason or whether this was something that sprang up later and was retrospectively attributed to the Buddha is difficult to say. But rules multiply in the Pali Canon to an extent which is quite incompatible with the Buddha's own early attitudes towards rules as quite clearly shown in works like the Sutta Nipata. There is even a passage where the Buddha is represented as saying that when I began my ministry there were few rules and many Arhants but now (after so many years) there are many rules but few Arhants. So it may have been that there was a certain amount of multiplication of rules during the Buddha's own lifetime but that he himself was not too happy with that. But certainly the degree of conformity with public opinion that later came about, I think does not go back to the Buddha himself. The sort of conformity that you find in some of the Theravada Buddhist countries today where the bhikkhus are afraid to do anything that the laity disapprove of or the government disapprove of, especially even when it's quite in accordance with the Buddha's teaching. In some Buddhist countries like Thailand bhikkhus can be disrobed for very, very trifling offences which are not by any means of that degree of seriousness according [118] to the Vinaya itself. In Thailand, for instance, a bhikkhu who is even slightly misbehaving in public which means maybe not wearing his robe quite correctly or something of that sort can be escorted by the nearest policeman back to his monastery and the government through the ministry of education will require the abbot to disrobe him. In that way the bhikkhus are made to conform completely not just with public opinion but with the policy of the government. So in this way religion just becomes a sort of appendage of the state... The Dharma of you worldly people is just your own custom and convention and all you want from us is a confirmation of that, a blessing on that and you want us to conform. And some religious people are very happy at being asked to conform and to give their blessing. This is their religious function and position according to them. One of the things that used to upset me in Kalimpong was when they had the official independent state celebrations. I've no objection to people celebrating national independence, fair enough, but the local authorities, that is to say the local head of the administration, used to invite representatives of different religions to come and read a few verses from their scriptures on the occasion of the hoisting of the national flag as though religion was completely subservient to nationalism and the government even published a booklet of readings which it deemed suitable for the representatives of the different religions. So you all had a copy of this book and the Buddhist read out a passage from the Buddhist scriptures and the Muslim read out something from the Koran, the Hindu read something from the Vedas. All of course in a way directed to the preservation and glorification of the state. So I never participated in this. I used to excuse myself on one pretext or another but other people felt honoured to be invited to represent their religion on this occasion. As though that was their real function.

Let's leave it there for today just bearing those two things in mind. That in his song to Rechungpa Milarepa says in effect that there can be no determined practice of the Dharma without real conviction about certain things and as against the lay people, the representatives of the group, Milarepa is saying that he will stick uncompromisingly to his way of doing things. He will make no concession at all to the conventions of the group. So he is, as it were, standing up for the individual against the group and that is a reminder that the individual is always subject to pressure from the group. He's always being threatened or cajoled or tempted to conform and he has to resist and insist on being himself. Not in a reactive way but in genuinely the interests of his own development as an individual. That's it for today.

END OF DAY TWO

[119]

S: Top of page 580.

Andy:

"The patrons then made fine, bountiful offerings to Milarepa, and left. Meanwhile, Rechungpa remained in the village, and though he only stayed one day in each patron's house, it was many days before he could return to the hermitage. When he finally came back he found that the door was shut. Rechungpa thought, 'Was it because I stayed too long in the village that the Jetsun became displeased?' And he sang:

S: So though we're not actually told so it seems that the offerings having been made Milarepa goes back to the hermitage. Rechungpa didn't. He remained in the village and he only stayed one day at each patron's house. Nonetheless it was many days before he could return to the hermitage. Presumably because it was a quite well inhabited village and there were many people and therefore he stayed a long time. When he finally came back he found that the door was shut. The door of the hermitage was shut. Rechungpa thought, 'Was it because I stayed too long in the village that the Jetsun became displeased?' You notice the difference between Milarepa and Rechungpa here. Milarepa goes straight back to the hermitage but Rechungpa lingers in the village. (Laughter). He probably thinks that he's being quite conscientious spending only one day at each patron's house but since there were many patrons it's many days before he returns to the hermitage. So what do you think this illustrates, Milarepa going straight back to the hermitage and Rechungpa staying on in the village?

Kovida: Milarepa knew where he was well off.

Subhuti: It's a singleness of purpose.

S: A singleness of purpose. It sort of illustrates getting back to the main thing without any delay as if to say it wasn't wrong that Milarepa and Rechungpa were in the village, Milarepa has given instruction and so on and they've accepted the offerings. So all that having been completed back Milarepa goes to the hermitage but it's as though Rechungpa isn't satisfied. He hasn't got meditating in the hermitage as his main objective yet so he lingers on. In other words, in a sense he became distracted and he forgot what was the main thing. So instead of getting back to it as quickly as possible he just goes on postponing it and goes on staying in the village. So this suggests that one really ought to know or ought to understand what is one's main thing so that one can get back to that as soon as you're freed from other things and not just become involved in other things indefinitely. Also you notice that when Rechungpa does get back he says 'Was it because I stayed too long in the village that the Jetsun became displeased?' This is what he thinks when he finds the door shut. So this suggests that he's a bit uneasy in his own mind. He knows perhaps that he should not have stayed for long and he starts thinking that [120] Milarepa might be angry with him. There's no question of Milarepa being angry or displeased even but that is what Rechungpa thinks because he's aware that he hasn't done perhaps quite the right thing. Anyway, nonetheless he sings Milarepa a song because despite his imperfections he has a certain amount of insight and understanding and he gives expression to that in this song.

Abhaya:

"In the immanence of Dharma  
There's no need to read the stars;  
Those who consult the stars  
Are far from Immanence.

The Great Perfection has no dogmas;  
If an obstinate creed arises,  
It is not the Great Perfection.

In the Mahamudra there is no  
Acceptance or rejection. If there  
Be, it is not the Great Symbol.

In the Experience of Great Bliss  
There is neither light nor shade.  
If either of the two arises,  
It is not Great Bliss.

The great Middle Way cannot be described;  
Nor can it be defined, for if it could,  
It would not be the Middle Way.

I, Rechungpa have just returned;  
Are you, my Father well today?"

S: What is this immanence of Dharma? What does one mean by immanence?

Abhaya: Something that comes from inside one.

S: Do you know which Sanskrit term immanence probably represents? It's a term which is quite important in the Vajrayana especially the later developments of the Vajrayana. It's sahajja. Have you come across this? 'Saha' means with, 'ja' is the root meaning to be born as in (ja ) so sahajja is born together with. Sometimes translated as congenital or conatal. It is that which is born with you. So that suggests something as we would say innate. Something really belonging to you, not something associated with you externally. Something which you bring with you, so to speak, when you are born, which arises when you arise. In other words, an inseparable part of your own nature. In this way it comes to mean your own true nature, your real nature. It also has the suggestion of spontaneity. So the word occurs here twice. In the fourth line when it is said those who consult the stars are far from immanence. The word is used in the full sense and [121] that's why it has a capital 'I' but when one speaks of the Immanence of Dharma what do you think that means? In the Immanence of Dharma there's no need to read the stars. I'm assuming that in the original the word is the same, just as it is in the translation.

Lalitavajra: You don't need to know about your future or what's going to happen to you.

S: Yes, but what is meant by the expression the 'Immanence of Dharma'? In what sense is the Dharma immanent?

Kovida: It's already within you.

S: It's already within you, yes, but what does that mean? The Dharma is within you?

Clive: It means that if you reach the point where you can be spontaneously truthful, that you can see and express the Dharma spontaneously then it's immanent in the sense that the right thing comes up at the right time spontaneously. When it says there's no need to read the stars it means that there's no need to analyse too much because the truth actually comes up immediately.

S: So why do people feel a need to read the stars?

Subhuti: Because they don't experience directly. They need some sort of ...

S: No. Put in a simple ordinary everyday way why do people read the stars? Why do they consult astrological predictions?

\_\_\_: To know the future.

S: To know the future. But why do they want to know the future?

Kovida: To know what's going to happen next.

S: To know what's going to happen next. So what then is the point of saying 'In the Immanence of Dharma there's no need to read the stars'?

Kovida: Just that the next thing that's going to happen to you is the formalization of the Dharma. That's what's immanent.

S: Maybe that's going a bit too fast.

Abhaya: The next step in your own spiritual development. You don't have to look for ...

S: But if you behave in a certain way, if you behave, for instance, skilfully, you know what is going to happen to you, don't you? So you don't need to consult the stars. In other words it's as though the external happenings aren't important. It's the inner happenings that are important. It's your own growth or your own development which is important and you can predict that, so to speak, if you live or if you practice in accordance with the Dharma. But even the Dharma is not conceived of here as something external [122] to you. It's simply the study of your own mind you could say. The Dharma is immanent. Suppose you look at it for instance in terms of the Abhidharma, what is the Abhidharma all about? The subject matter of the Abhidharma is simply your own mind, the workings of your own mind, even the very complicated workings of your own mind. So the Abhidharma is immanent in your mind, the Dharma is immanent in your mind. All that the Dharma is really doing in a very broad general way is telling you how your own mind works. Explaining what is skilful, what is unskilful. What are the consequences of the skilful, the consequences of the unskilful. So one can understand this, one can appreciate this just by studying one's own mind. It's all immanent in one's own mind. One doesn't really have to consult books. So if one understands one's own mind and one knows what are the consequences of certain types of action you know therefore

the future so there's no need to read the stars. This seems to be the general meaning here. So those who consult the stars are far from immanence. Here Rechungpa seems to go a step further. That if you consult the stars it's not simply that you don't understand the workings of your own mind and are therefore unable to predict what is going to happen to you so to speak. It means that you're alienated from your own true nature also. Immanence being here almost a symbol for reality. That which arises with you. But why do you think Rechungpa starts off in this way?

Abhaya: Maybe that's what he's been doing down in the village.

S: Yes, that is more than likely because what sort of services the laity usually require from the monks and the hermits is something of this sort. Some sort of guidance in the affairs of everyday life and very often that involves astrology and prediction. I used to notice this with Dhardo Rimpoche. Whenever I was with him there'd be at least two or three visitors and they'd all want Dhardo Rimpoche to make predictions for them. He had a reputation as being very good with the dice. There are methods of prediction with dice. They throw a certain number or combination of numbers and that has a certain meaning and he showed me several little books that he had where one could look up that certain combinations meant such and such. He didn't even need to look at the little books because he was so practised. Local Tibetans had great faith in his predictions and divinations and he used to do this for them and Tibetans expect this of the monks, especially of the lamas.

Andy: In a sense what people are asking for is just to get a reflection of their mental state. They're just going to someone who is quite evolved and through asking him questions they find out what their state is like and in that way they know what is going to happen in the future.

S: No, they're at least not probably concerned with their mental state. They want to know what is going to happen.

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Andy: To know what is going to happen you need to know what mental state you're in as it was said before. If you're practising the Dharma you'd know what's going to happen in the future.

S: They don't ask about practising the Dharma. They ask about quite worldly things. For instance, the two most usual questions were; one - I'm thinking of selling my wool which has just arrived from Tibet to such and such a man at such and such price. Would it be better to wait and maybe get a higher price or to sell now? That's the answer that they want - or I'm thinking of going down to Calcutta next Thursday. Is there a good day for travelling? These are the sort of questions that they used to ask.

Andy: How would one answer those questions oneself then? Without going to a soothsayer or to a monk? What would one's process of doing it normally be?

S: To try to weigh up ...

Andy: Look at your mental state.

S: No, they would say that there were certain objective factors outside their mental state that they were just completely ignorant of and that through the divination they could find out about those factors.

Andy: That's not the truth, is it? So what they're really trying to get from the person is a reflection of how they really are.

S: No, they're not trying to get a reflection of how they are but of how the objective situation is. For instance, there might be, for instance, if they were trying to sell their wool someone offering them a price now. They don't know if someone is going to come and offer them a bigger price next week. But the stars know, as it were, because that is written in the stars, that someone is going to come along the following week and offer them a bigger price. So they go to the lama to find out whether that sort of new thing is going to happen so that they don't sell their wool or whatever it is this week. So they're not trying to find out anything about their own minds. They're trying to find out about factors which would affect their practical dealings that they'd no way of knowing about other than through divination. This is why they're so dependent on divination or believe in it so much. They believe it's a means of access to information that they can't get in any other way. They take it quite literally.

Andy: I'm just trying to work out what's actually happening. If they were a bit more clever they'd know all they had to do was to become more aware of how you were.

S: That wouldn't help them necessarily in their business dealings. Supposing someone did turn up the next week he would have offered them more money for their goods.

[124]

Andy: But surely the more positive state you're in the better you do business?

S: Yes, but even so, however positive your state you cannot know factors which are independent of your mental state whether positive or otherwise. This is what they believe. I'm not saying this is necessarily true but this is their feeling.

Andy: So there is a certain magical element in looking at the stars you can tell the future.

S: Some people believe that, yes, some people actually believe that. The Tibetans do.

Andy: So really one can't come down and say that there isn't, it is definitely impossible to tell the future by looking at the stars.

S: Well some people believe that it is completely bogus, others believe that it is not. In Buddhism, broadly speaking, in the Pali texts as far as we can tell the Buddha's own attitude was to completely dismiss astrology as having no objective validity at all. As far as we know that is the Buddha's, or was, the Buddha's attitude. As regards the Theravada countries nowadays, the countries, that is to say which followed from Buddhism, the monks do not usually engage in astrology or at least not officially but everybody believes in it. In the Mahayana countries, especially in Tibet, everybody believes in it and the monks, the spiritually more gifted monks, that is to say the lamas, they all practice it. But they all say that its significance and relevance is only mundane, that is to say it has no value for anybody on the spiritual path because it relates to worldly gains. So that if you are concerned with the

spiritual path exclusively you're not interested in worldly gains, therefore astrology has got no meaning for you. It's regarded as a purely worldly art which has a validity but only for worldly people with worldly aims and objects and of course no Buddhists anywhere believe that the stars determine your fate. It's only an influence. The influence of the stars can be counteracted.

Andy: I stick to my original thing that when someone goes to divination they're just using going there as a way of finding out the future ...

S: That may be so but that's not actually what they think themselves.

Andy: No, but I think that's what's happening.

S: Sometimes people find themselves in a position of having to decide but they also feel that they don't have enough information to decide. There's no real certainty foreseeable so they try to derive that certainty from some other source. In this case it's from astrology through the lama or some other means of divination, whatever that may be. They feel, well, they can go [125] ahead now with confidence because they know now what the situation is.

Andy: The lamas have helped them to see themselves. (Laughter)

S: They don't look at it in those terms at all.

Andy: I know they don't but that's what's happening, isn't it?

S: That is a theory of what is happening but again it's not their theory. Because actually, even in a sense, they don't, because they're concerned with what they see as objective facts. Whether, say, another man is going to come along and offer a higher price next week. That has nothing to do with their own mental state.

\_\_\_: They want to know what the future actually holds.

S: They want to know what the future actually holds.

Subhuti: The analogy is with science.

S: Yes, that's why it is sometimes described as a pseudo-science.

Subhuti: So if in your business dealings you need to know the weight of a piece of wood you'd go and weigh it. So it's the same sort of process.

S: The same principle.

Subhuti: You're not really getting to know your own mind by weighing the wood.

\_\_\_: You said that the way of knowing the future is by knowing how you are at the moment.

S: That is with regard to ethical consequences but not with regard to material consequences.

Andy: I would have thought that if you're in a creative state positive things will happen and you'll create a future which will be good, that you'll go forward.

S: Yes, that is true. For instance, whatever your mental state - you may be creative or anything else but, for instance, it doesn't affect the weather. Suppose you want to know what the weather is going to be like, well you can only know it either through science or through a pseudo-science like astrology. You can't predict what the weather is going to be like from your own present state of mind. You can predict what your reaction is likely to be to any kind of weather but you cannot predict the weather itself. If you know your own state of mind and it is positive you say, well, the weather isn't very pleasant, even if it rains hard my state of mind is still going to be positive, you can predict that. But you cannot predict what the weather itself is going to be like.

Andy: I find it hard to believe that you can tell what the weather's going to be like in future if you look at the stars.

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S: They may be completely deluded. That's quite possible. That's why this is described as a pseudo-science and not as a real science. But they believe it as a real science. As I said, Buddhist views are divided. Some Buddhists regard it as a real science, that is to say the Tibetans do. Others regard it as a pseudo-science. Many Theravadins will regard it as a pseudo-science, especially bhikkhus, but the majority of lay Theravadins will regard it as a real science like the Tibetans or the Chinese but all will agree that it has no relevance spiritually speaking. They will all agree that in the immanence of Dharma there is no need to read the stars. That is to say, if you are concerned exclusively or primarily with your own mental state and the consequences of your own mental state that is the really important thing for you and if you're concerned with that there's no need to bother about the stars. There's no need to know what sort of weather you're going to have tomorrow because whatever the weather you know what your own mental state is going to be like. It's going to be positive and that is all that really counts. If one looks at these last few lines, 'Those who consult the stars are far from Immanence', it suggests that to be concerned with consequences of external things in any way is symptomatic of alienation from reality itself. So what do you think that means?

Abhaya: That's an indication of a really severe subject object split when you feel the objective world is a threat or completely separate from you.

S: If you're over anxious about the stars and what is going to happen tomorrow it suggests that you are out of touch with your own experience. That you've no real security within yourself. If you felt secure within yourself it wouldn't matter what happens tomorrow. You wouldn't bother all that much.

Subhuti: Also on an ethical level there's an off-loading of responsibility.

Clive: They go to the lama asking him to tell you whether to (hold) or not is sort of negating your responsibility.

S: No, not really you could say because you only negate responsibility when it is possible for you to have that responsibility but he is consulting the lama under circumstances where he



hasn't got the information. He needs the information in order to decide. That is his position. So that he can then exercise responsibility. How can you exercise responsibility until you've got all the facts of the situation. So he regards the lama through divination, as giving him access to facts which otherwise he could not have access to and when he's got the complete information then he will decide and accept that responsibility. Of course we do know that people in the West very often do consult the stars as a way of evading responsibility because then they say it's all written in the stars. But this is not the Tibetan attitude. The Tibetans are quite self-reliant [127] people. They're quite responsible people but they believe in astrology as a science and it gives them information on the basis of which they can make up their own minds. They look at it in a quite literal factual sort of way.

Abhaya: In a sense that's quite healthy isn't it?

S: In principle they are not wrong, they are not wrong in wanting to postpone a decision until they've got all the available facts, all the accessible facts. In principle they're not wrong (unclear ...) pseudo-science. It happens to be wrong as we think because as a matter of fact consulting the stars cannot give you that kind of information. It's not wrong to want that sort of information but that is not the way to go about getting it. That would be the rational attitude.

Abhaya: We have to be open about that.

S: We have to be open to the possibility of that sort of information actually being available.

Abhaya: So what do you feel about this?

S: I would say personally it is quite possible that the stars, that is to say certain conjunctions of planetary influences, could have some influence on human behaviour. But the Buddhist view would be that that cannot be decisive. To the extent that you are subject or to the extent that you allow yourself to be subject to that influence you are not an individual and it may well be that there's an influence coming from the stars, in a manner of speaking, just as though there's an influence coming from nature as a whole in all sorts of ways just as there's an influence coming from various groups, various other people. That may well be. But it is only an influence. It is not an absolutely determining factor. Otherwise there will be no such thing as individuality. So even if there are such influences at work the individual must resist those influences so far as they obstruct his own individual spiritual development. For instance, supposing the lama tells you tomorrow you're going to commit a murder, if you are not really an individual you say, well, I've got to commit a murder. You might even go looking around for someone to murder because the stars say you've got to murder somebody. But if you're not like that, if you are really trying to be an individual you will, say, perhaps well there is a possibility that I may murder someone tomorrow if I'm not careful. If I get into a state where I lose my temper I get very, very angry, it could be that I murder someone. I must be very careful not to get into that sort of situation. You don't regard it as inevitable, you only regard it as an influence which you must be very careful to counteract.

Abhaya: This is something quite different from what you were talking about last week about actually seeing the future before it happens.

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S: That is something quite different because all this takes place within time. So one could say in the immanence of Dharma there's no need to read the stars, meaning that if you are primarily concerned with the course of your spiritual development there's really no need to know what is going to happen to you externally. That just doesn't matter. It's your mental state which is all important. That is what you're really concerned with. So there's no need to know what is going to happen to you by consulting the stars even if it was possible for you to do so. If you've no worldly interests what's the point of consulting the stars because the stars if they have any effect at all can have an effect only with regard to such worldly interests. The stars might be able to tell you that your house is going to fall down. The stars might be able to tell you that your son is going to die. The stars might be able to tell you that you're going to be cheated in a business deal. If you're not concerned with house and son and business deals well you've no need to read the stars. The stars cannot tell you that you're going to develop spiritually or that you're going to have a good meditation tomorrow or that you're going to develop insight the day after. The stars cannot tell you those things. They relate only to worldly happenings. So in the immanence of Dharma there's no need to read the stars. From your own mind you can tell the course of your own spiritual development. There's no need to read the stars. They can't tell you about that anyway. They can only tell you about worldly good or bad luck. So those who consult the stars are far from immanence. Those who consult the stars are therefore those who are preoccupied entirely with worldly things. They don't want to understand their own nature, their own minds, so they are far from reality, they are far from immanence.

Clive: It's quite interesting that it's saying that in a way you should be concerned with your mental state and external factors aren't important. It seems to me that what your main concern is, your main career if you like, is to develop your mental state and that your plans if any are to do with that and externally you should more or less just leave that to ... More or less the external situation will continually change and evolve ...

S: Also with regard to the weather, supposing you're always trying to find out what sort of weather you're going to have tomorrow or who is going to come and see you, well all that is really quite secondary. If you're really concerned with your own spiritual development. Maybe you could find out all those things through astrology but what's the point if your real interest is in your own mental and spiritual development. You could even look at it more broadly as you don't really need to think about what's happening externally too much at all. If your main interest is your own spiritual development there's no end of these things. You could want to know what is happening in the world or what might happen. For instance, you notice if you follow the radio or you follow the newspapers [129] that, say, before some election there is endless discussion as to who is going to win. Even half an hour before the result is declared there are vigorous discussions as to who might win and trying to work out who is going to win. One might say, well this is completely useless. Just wait half an hour and you'll know. There's no need to speculate. But there's the endless speculation that goes on. So maybe it's this sort of thing that the text is getting at. That you don't need to sort of try to find out what is going to happen, what sort of weather you're going to have tomorrow, who is going to come and see you - all that will happen anyway. You need not bother about it. Put all your energies into your own spiritual life and development. Maybe you need to know just a few basic rudimentary things but nothing more than that. So really it's a sort of warning against getting over involved with external things that don't really concern you and have got no real relevance to your life at the expense of concerning yourself with, so to speak, internal things. I don't like to say subjective things but internal things, especially the state of your own

mind and your own experience, your own life which surely does concern you a very great deal.

Clive: It's people's unawareness of the internal which makes them over-concerned with the external. So many people are like this and this sort of inhibits their movement even in the material sense rather than in the political way. They're so over-concerned with the possibilities that they just never actually make any movement. The external possibilities. Whereas more awareness, more energy of their internal state and more or less just leaving the external factors to fend for themselves.

S: What about the next verse then? 'The Great Perfection has no dogmas; if an obstinate creed arises it is not the Great Perfection.' There's a note on Great Perfection - It's the Dsog Chen or the rDsogs.Pa.Chen.Po said to be the equivalent to Sanskrit Mahasampanna - it may or may not be. Translated as the Great Perfection and the note says it's the Nyingmapa version of the Mahamudra teaching. The Mahamudra also requires some explanation. It's quite difficult in fact to give. The Great Perfection, you could say, or the Mahamudra is just the ultimate spiritual realization from the Vajrayana point of view. That is all one can really say. A point of view that especially stresses the fact that that experience or that realization is beyond thought, beyond expression, beyond any conceptualization, beyond any formalization.

Abhaya: Why is it called mudra?

S: Mudra is a quite complex word. It originally meant gesture but it seems that it came to mean a sort of attitude, an attitude of mind, hence a realization, a stance, as it were. So the Mahamudra is the Great Attitude, the Great Way of looking at things, the Great Realization. It [130] has all those sort of connotations. Therefore it's the sort of Vajrayana equivalent to enlightenment or one of the Vajrayana equivalents of enlightenment but one that stresses, as I pointed out, its sort of non-conceptual character. That is its character of being directly experienced. But the verse here says the Great Perfection has no dogmas. What does that mean in view of what I've said about the Great Perfection? Great Perfection being of course, as the note says, the Nyingmapa version of the Mahamudra, the particular Nyingmapa tradition of Mahamudra practice, so to speak. So the Great Perfection has no dogmas.

Abhaya: It's beyond any formulation at all.

S: Yes, but what is the point of Rechungpa saying the Great Perfection has no dogmas? What does one understand by dogmas here? That's the word. The English word is not to be taken too literally.

Subhuti: A fixed view.

S: A fixed view. Well not even that yet.

Abhaya: A particular formulation of the teachings.

S: A particular formulation. So one has the expression 'the Great Perfection'. There is a teaching about the Great Perfection. The fact that there is the expression 'the Great Perfection' shows this. The fact that you say, well, it is the Nyingmapa version of the Mahamudra. But even this is not to be taken literally otherwise it becomes a dogma. It becomes what the next

line calls an obstinate creed. There's no teaching about the Great Perfection, there's no teaching about the Mahamudra. It's not a teaching. It is not the subject of a teaching. It cannot be the subject of a teaching. This is why sometimes it is called pointing out. We've had this in other chapters. It's sort of indicated. And here you get the sort of Zen-like connections. The note also says I think that Zen (in the highest sense) and Dzog Chen and Mahamudra are all basically the same thing or they come very much to the same thing. It's a sort of non-verbal pointing out of what cannot be conceptualized. So it can't be the subject matter of a teaching. You can't have a sort of systematic teaching about it because the systematic teaching would be intellectually apprehensible or intellectually comprehensible and when you've apprehended or when you've comprehended the teaching you're under the impression that you've apprehended or comprehended or even realized the Mahamudra which would not be the case. There's no Mahamudra teaching, there's no Great Perfection teaching. The Great Perfection has no dogmas. So usually we speak in such terms as saying that the Buddha's spiritual experiences are conceptualized in or given conceptual expression in such teachings as so and so and so and so, but this is not really admitted. It says that there is no conceptual expression, there is no systematic teaching. You [131] can't sort of get to it or approach it through a systematic teaching or through apprehending a systematic teaching.

Abhaya: But isn't this in its own way a sort of teaching?

S: In its own way it is but not in such an obvious way and therefore not in a way that can be so easily misused as the more usual ways. You could say that it points it out by saying it cannot be pointed out. It describes it by saying it cannot be described. But even this is not a teaching about it. In other words, if you're just trying to keep people on experience itself and not allowing them to settle down really in descriptions of experiences and become mentally active with regard to those descriptions and then think that they've got not even an understanding but even a realization of what it was all about when they haven't.

Clive: The only pupil he can teach is a pupil with direct experience.

S: Yes. There's no teaching to be transmitted on the purely doctrinal level. There's no teaching at all. So therefore it says, 'if an obstinate creed arises it is not the Great Perfection.' If there is a teaching that someone is propagating saying this is the Great Perfection teaching and insisting on it and explaining it and giving lectures on it, that's not the Great Perfection, it cannot be anything of that kind. So here of course we obviously come very close to Zen. Zen at its very best of course, not Zen just as a tradition. So then Rechungpa goes on to say:

'In the Mahamudra there is no acceptance or rejection. If there be, it is not the Great Symbol.' What is the connection between this and the last verse?

Subhuti: There's no dogma to accept or reject.

S: That's true but it goes beyond that.

Chris: You can't say that the Mahamudra is this or that.

S: You can't say it is this or you can't say it is that. You can't therefore say that any particular way of life is more likely to lead you to the Mahamudra than another because it isn't any particular fixed thing. There's no particular fixed goal so therefore no particular fixed part.

Therefore you cannot say that this way is right and that way is wrong. Clearly this pertains to a very advanced stage of realization and is not to be applied literalistically on a lower level obviously. If you say, well it doesn't matter what I do therefore, that's not the Mahamudra clearly. But why is Rechungpa bringing this in?

Abhaya: Maybe that's the way he was thinking earlier on. When he's in an unskilful state he rationalizes and says maybe this is a very good way of following the Dharma.

S: But one could look at it like this, that what he's really saying is that he's [132] referring to his lingering in the village. From an ultimate point of view which is mostly Milarepa's, whether you stay in the hermitage or whether you stay among the patrons in the village you are no nearer to, or no further from, the Mahamudra. The fact that you are meditating in the hermitage doesn't mean you're any nearer to it. The fact that you're in the village with the patrons doesn't mean you're any further from it. Because there isn't a fixed state that can be approached by a fixed means. So this is also a useful reminder because it isn't that there is a definite objective fixed path on any level because you have always to take into consideration your mental state. This is what the Mahamudra teaching is saying you could say, if you want to put it into very basic terms and maybe bring it down to a slightly lower level. But you cannot say that the path consists in any definite belief or any definite line of action regardless of the mental state. It is not that staying in a hermitage is the way to the Mahamudra or even to spiritual development. It depends what you do there. It depends what your mental state is. It's not that staying in a village will take you away from it. Very likely it will do if you're not spiritually developed sufficiently. Maybe in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it will but it is not really that the staying in the village by itself does the harm. It is the mental state essentially. Even though that mental state is more likely to arise when you are in that situation but nonetheless the mental state is still the really crucial factor, not the objective situation.

Abhaya: I think that sometimes in our overall way of doing things that mistake is often made. People are over-identifying with objective situations or ...

S: You cannot make sure that you are on the right path by doing the right things. In other words, you cannot abdicate responsibility for your own mental states. You cannot say, well, provided that I go and join a spiritual community and I move into a co-op, I do my two hours of meditation a day then I'm all right then. You may be but you cannot guarantee that. You can't sort of reduce your spiritual life to a certain number of things that you actually do and then leave it there and let your mind, so to speak, do as it wishes. That just isn't possible. So there's no safety, no security to be found in any fixed belief or way of life even though admittedly certain beliefs or certain ways of life are more conducive for most people than others. That is agreed but nonetheless the crucial determining factor, the real determining factor, is your own mental state. So you cannot say if you do this and do that and stay in this situation and not in that you'll be sure of spiritual development. You can't or can't say unless you do this or unless you do that you can't possibly develop. You can't say that.

Clive: You could say that a community and work situation is giving you the freedom to experience positive mental states but whether you do or not is [133] entirely up to you.

S: It can't give you the positive mental states themselves. So you can't just move into a particular external situation and then, so to speak, say to yourself, well that's that now I don't bother about anything any more. Being in that objective situation may help quite a lot but it

only gives you an opportunity. So you can't identify the Great Perfection with any particular dogma. You can't identify the spiritual life, to use our language, with any particular lifestyle, even though certain lifestyles on the whole are more conducive than certain other lifestyles which are less conducive.

Kovida: Is that what the Buddha meant when he said those who by my form do see me don't see the real me?

S: Yes, that is in the Diamond Sutra - yes. So this is why in some of the Vajrayana followers, especially the later movement known as the sahajja movement, sort of deliberately flouted certain conventionally religious or spiritual ways of living.

Clive: There's an actual community called the sahajjas?

S: Well I used to know a few of them. I've written about it in the Survey. But you see there was a danger here too. They were concerned to show, or if you like to demonstrate, that you couldn't sort of make sure that you were following the spiritual path simply by living in a certain way. By the time that they came along Buddhism had after all been around in India for nearly 1500 years, at least well over 1000 years. It had become quite well established. It was a very positive tradition, yes, but some people no doubt had started identifying the spiritual life with certain forms, which that tradition has taken. They wanted to protest against that. Their protest was not an end in itself. So you can't sort of be more sure of leading a spiritual life by following the (sahajja) pattern, as it were. Then you're committing the very mistake that they were protesting against. This happened even in India, even in Tibet, that people did commit that sort of mistake, trying to act like the sahajjas and say look how free I am, how emancipated I am. Whereas what they needed to do was just to get down to some very basic simple practice.

So therefore he goes on to say in this third verse, 'In the Mahamudra there is no acceptance or rejection.' Nothing is good or bad in itself, nothing is to be accepted as good in itself or rejected as bad in itself. You can't be sure that if I accept this and reject that I can be sure that I'm on the spiritual path. There's no such guarantee. Not with regard to external things or beliefs or doctrines. So there's no security in going through the motions. This is what we were talking about in the lecture on 'The Taste of Freedom' where I called it superficiality. Just going through the motions. That cannot ever be a substitute for the real thing. In Eastern Buddhism there are so many examples [134] of going through the motions such as becoming a monk, having your head shaved, putting on the yellow robe. That is going through the motions but it may help you or it may not. Some people regard that as being in itself the living of a spiritual life or following of the spiritual path in itself but it can't be that.

\_\_\_: Does this sort of approach come in with the breaking of the three fetters?

S: The fetter is a fetter of superficiality as I called it in that lecture or just going through the motions, that is to say what we usually call ritualism and this is what ritualism, if that is the right use of the word, really means. It's going through the motions without the corresponding mental state, the corresponding experience. Not only that but thinking that going through the motions is in fact enough, that it is in fact the experience. You're being unable to draw the distinction. It's superficial because you're doing those things on the surface. You're not really doing them though you may think that you are. That's just due to your mental confusion.

Kovida: It's like holding an ice lolly without sucking it and seeing.

S: Perhaps it's not even holding it.

Clive: One should be able to experiment or test oneself to see if one is actually genuinely working. I think if you are generally experiencing your spiritual life you know it but maybe if you're not experiencing it you may think you're experiencing it.

Kovida: You'd know by your mental state.

Clive: I think you'd know if you were experiencing it that you were but if you weren't experiencing it it would be easy to rationalize that you were.

S: I think you'd know sooner or later because you'd have a reaction. Either you wouldn't be able to continue going through the motions or you would only be able to continue going through the motions if there was a corresponding compensation that you could enjoy. Let's go back to this example I gave which is so common in the East of someone who is going through the motions of being a bhikkhu, let us say by wearing the yellow robe etc. etc. If he is only going through the motions sooner or later there will be a reaction on his part. If, for instance, he doesn't want to get up early in the morning, he doesn't want to sit and appear to meditate, he doesn't want really just to stop eating at twelve o'clock. He doesn't want not to be able to talk with women. He doesn't want not to be able to go to the cinema but he's observing all these things externally and he's got no other outlet for the things he really wants to do. Sooner or later there'll be a reaction and then it [135] will become obvious that he was simply going through the motions. That is one possibility. The other is that he develops compensations. For instance, you find that there are some monks who go through the motions, they don't really enjoy that but they enjoy other things. For instance, they may enjoy the respect that they receive and this may become very important to them and this becomes very obvious. It may not become obvious perhaps to them but it becomes obvious to other people what is actually happening. Perhaps it can be pointed out to them that this is what is going on but in any case as I said it is obvious to others. So usually you get either one of these two situations arising. Either you go through the motions and are only going through the motions without any compensation by way of what you really want to do in which case sooner or later you break down or the whole thing breaks down. Or you just compensate for having to go through the motions and appearing to do things you don't really want to do by, as it were, on the side doing things that you really want to do or getting out of the going through the motions the kind of satisfaction that you're not meant to get. There were all sorts of stories about one particular bhikkhu, a Ceylonese bhikkhu, who was very famous for his so-called orthodoxy. I also knew that there were a whole lot of stories that other monks used to tell about him. One was that he was very particular about observing the rule of not sleeping on a high or broad bed, so apparently one day he was on his tour in Sri Lanka somewhere and a very devoted lay person made arrangements for him to stay at his house for the night in a very nice room and provided him with a big comfortable bed so when this bhikkhu saw the bed he said, 'Oh no, I cannot possibly sleep on that bed.' So he made him lift the big comfortable mattress down on to the floor and he made a great show of not using it but according to the story - it's difficult to know whether it was really true or not - other monks peeping through the curtains at night saw him put the mattress back and climb on to it (Laughter) after locking the door etc. etc. But in this way you build up a great reputation by going through the motions and that satisfies you. The first sort of instance happened in the case of someone who was in a way quite

sincere or maybe very much under the influence of custom and tradition and maybe not very intelligent. Sooner or later they can't carry on. It's like that in communities. Someone moves in but they quite sincerely try to fit in but it's just not possible, they're just not ready. They're not really into community life so in the end they just have to leave. But the other possibility would be where someone isn't really living in a community, he just sort of uses the community as his base and his life is quite separate and apart from that. Maybe he doesn't see much of, say, the other community members or he's always out at the cinema and his real life is there. So he may think that he's a community member but actually he isn't. He's evaded the community life. But what this is really talking [136] about is, as I said, that you can't ensure that you're on the right path by going through the right motions. This isn't possible. So here it's put, or it refers to, a quite high level of spiritual experience. The principle holds good all the way through. It's as though Rechungpa or Milarepa is saying to somebody look, you might be a very holy monk, you might be observing all the precepts, you might be a yogi, you might be a hermit living in a hermitage, you might be meditating all the time, but you still in the ultimate sense, or with regard to ultimate truth, can just be going through the motions. So you have to ask yourself, so to speak, at every stage, am I really doing this or am I just going through the motions. Because if you are only going through the motions it may have some value and some effect but obviously it isn't the real thing. It won't have the effect that it could have if you were doing it really wholeheartedly.

Clive: This can actually happen to you. You might have a certain amount of genuine feeling and you can be doing things but there's whole parts of you that aren't involved. As you're carrying out the practice, a regular practice, you start to become aware of parts of you which aren't involved.

S: This must be the normal procedure anyway because this is implied in the whole teaching about the path of vision and path of transformation. It is a gradual process. So what this teaching is getting at and also what the teaching about the second fetter is getting at is that one must never mistake just going through the motions, that is to say doing something with only a part of themselves, never mistake that for doing it with the whole of oneself. One must never think that going through the motions is enough. Or that that is sufficient but if one sees that one is only partially involved and a great part of oneself isn't involved and if one is making honest efforts to involve more and more of oneself that is quite a different situation. The mistake is to be unaware that only a part of you is involved or even to just quite cynically go through the motions and sort of believe that you're really doing it when in fact you're not doing it at all.

Subhuti: Putting in an appearance.

S: Putting in an appearance or keeping up appearances. Sometimes, if you're not careful, if you do this for too long, you almost start believing that you really are it or you really are doing it when you're not. You're only keeping up appearances. You see so much of this in the East.

Clive: People actually believe that in a way they've seen through it.

S: No, they don't even think as much as that but you can meet monks who really think that they're monks. It never occurred to them that they're not. It never occurred to them that they're only going through the motions. But this is quite clear, that that is in fact what they're doing.



They're [137] not the least interested in spiritual life or spiritual development in some cases. They don't even think about it or they just think, if they do think at all, well of course we're monks. If we're not who is? We've got shaven heads, we're living in viharas, of course we're monks. That is the attitude of many of them. It's what being a monk means. Everybody knows that. This is what they will say. If you were to come along wearing your white kesa you can meditate twenty hours out of the twenty four and observe all the precepts strictly but they wouldn't think that you were a monk. They'd think that they were the monks even though they might not be doing any of those things.

Clive: Do you mean that you could be going through the motions and be unaware of it. Something like a solitary retreat would make that obvious to you.

S: To some extent because on a solitary retreat it's up to you. You are free to do what you want to do. External pressures or group pressures, even of a positive nature, are no longer there. There's no one to see. If you sleep all day and don't meditate no-one's going to know. So you are brought up against it and say, 'what do I really want to do?' The danger of course is in this respect that you may be so, as it were, conscious of the presence of the group, the eye of the group still on you that you may do things just because you feel that the eye of the group is still on you, even though you're by yourself, like the eye of God in every place beholding the evil and the good. You may still think the spiritual community is watching you. You may feel that and therefore continue to do all the right things, not because you really want to but because you feel you're still under observation even though you're on solitary retreat. So you have to watch that too. But if you're genuinely on solitary retreat and not feeling that anybody is watching you and then you do suddenly meditate because you want to then you can be sure that you're not going through the motions.

Clive: What's the difference between being in touch with the spiritual community while you're on solitary and feeling that the spiritual community is watching you?

S: In the second case it is sort of threatening. They're not just watching you, you're not simply in contact with them in an inspirational sort of way. You remember them as a group. Basically you're seeing the spiritual community as a group. If you are just aware of the spiritual community as a spiritual community you're only aware of encouragement and inspiration. If you sort of carry the spiritual community or carry the recollection of the spiritual community with you as a group because that's the way you see the spiritual community well then you'll feel it as something a bit threatening and disapproving - why aren't you getting up in the morning, why aren't you meditating - and it will make you feel a bit guilty because [138] you're not doing the right things. But, as I said, that will only happen if you have to begin with confused the spiritual community with the group. But if on solitary retreat you just feel encouraged and inspired to think of members of the spiritual community, well then you are actually seeing them as the spiritual community, but if you just think - suppose they knew that I wasn't getting up early this morning they'd be quite disapproving - then you're probably seeing the spiritual community just as a group. Or if you think I'd better meditate a lot because I'm going to get back to my community and they're sure to ask me how many hours I meditated and I'll have to be able to tell them that I did at least eight hours a day otherwise they'll think I wasted my time, clearly you're then experiencing the spiritual community just as a group.

Clive: Is the pressure of the group the same as the pressure of God?

S: I did say, I think it was an aphorism, that God is simply the most powerful member of the group. (Laughter). So it comes to the same thing. It's a question of power. It's the power principle whether embodied in the group or in the single figure of God. It's coercion. So if you're conscious of any feeling of coercion or compulsion clearly it's the group in some form or other. You are seeing what is not the group, i.e. the spiritual community, as the group. But imagine what sort of conception of God that implies. A God who will damn you on a technicality. (Laughter) Well, yes, on a quibble almost. You just get it a wee bit wrong. A Catholic would say, well, again this is a travesty of the real catholic position and they can quote a doctrine which says if you just have a general faith in the church you don't have to know every doctrine. But then again that is the impression that is given. Unless your faith is really correct in detail you'll just go to hell. Some Irish Catholics believe if they miss mass on Sundays they're in danger of hell. This is not actually the teaching of the church but this is certainly the impression that they are under.

Abhaya: It used to be the thing at church until recently. You miss mass on a Sunday then you were ... like that was a mortal sin. You go to hell when you die.

S: Are you sure of that?

Subhuti: It's not a mortal sin. It's the next one down.

Abhaya: No, no, it was a mortal sin to miss mass on Sunday.

S: Some priests might have said it was a mortal sin out of expediency.

Abhaya: It was a mortal sin in my day!

Kovida: That's what Tejamitra said. He was a Catholic and he was terrified to miss mass.

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Clive: What an inhibition that is. If you have a general faith then you can only do so much and if you want to do more you've got to sort of be more specified ...

S: There's a verse in Robert Browning which I've quoted in his poem called 'A soliloquy of the Spanish cloister' - he says or the monk is supposed to be saying, 'There's a great text in (Galatians)' - this is St. Paul's epistle to the Galatians - 'Once you trip on it entails thirty-six distinct damnations, one is sure if another fails.' (Laughter). This really seems to express the spirit of, at least (Tridentine) Catholicism. You can't escape. If the text doesn't get you in one way it will get you in another and there are thirty-six possibilities of misunderstanding it in such a way that you'll go to hell, just one verse. But this again is a perfect example of the sort of thing we've been talking about. It's superficiality. It's as though in some ways the Catholic church demands superficiality and this no doubt was what Luther was protesting about. He said basically that you couldn't be saved just by going through the motions and paying the money. This was the essence of the Protestant Reformation. This is why he started by condemning indulgences. Because what was an indulgence, an indulgence was a document which exempted you from the consequences of your sins. You could buy your indemnity from the consequences of your sins. You could buy it to make sure before you committed the sins. So this represented a complete externalization of the religious life making it mechanical and commercialising it and this had been carried to such an extreme that an honest

straightforward Catholic prior, as Luther was to begin with, just couldn't stomach it any more. And again in strict Catholic doctrine you did not buy the indulgence etc. etc. but it always works like that. So the Catholic apologists will quote you the strict doctrine but they conveniently forget how the whole thing actually works, in some case it seems almost made to work. I'm trying to remember a verse from some Chinese source that sort of summarizes this. That spiritual life is essentially very difficult therefore people just try to reduce it to a matter of external practice and money. But, anyway, this is the very thing that Rechungpa is talking about except that he is talking about it on a very much higher level. The Mahamudra teaching, if you can call it that, is trying to eradicate this sort of error on the highest level. It isn't ever enough just to go through the motions. Going through the motions can never be made a substitute for really doing whatever it is or really experiencing whatever it is. You could, say, give a very common example and say from marriage you often get this sort of example, that what is a good husband? People might say, well, give your wife your wage packet at the end of the week and you're not obviously unfaithful to her and what more can she expect. You don't actually beat her. That's what being a good husband means but that is defining it, defining being [140] a good husband in purely external terms. Really you're not taking being a good husband seriously at all. This is what it means. You're not a husband in fact. You're really someone who stays in the house and pays the bills. So in all walks of life, not only on the spiritual path but in every activity, there's always this possibility of just going through the motions, especially where human relationships are concerned. Always the danger of just going through the motions and not really doing whatever it happens to be. Not being really involved in it, not really being a husband and not really being a son and not really being a friend and not really being a pupil etc. etc. It's got all sorts of ramifications.

Abhaya: But between the two you may not be going through the motions in that purely superficial sense and you may not be totally involved in what you're doing. There's that sort of in-between stage.

S: This is what I mentioned earlier on, that you recognize that you are not fully involved just by the very nature of the whole process or the nature of the spiritual path in which there is a path of vision and a path of transformation, but you are working on it. You are not just sort of settling down in going through the motions, you're not sort of accepting for good that only say twenty five percent of you is being involved. You are making a genuine effort to involve more and more of you all the time. That will be everybody's position for the greater part of time except just at rare moments, when you are say a hundred percent into the puja just for a minute or two or a hundred percent into the meditation just for a minute or two or a hundred percent into communication. That happens very rarely I think, but at least one can ensure that all the time you are making an effort to involve yourself more and more deeply and more and more fully. You can't reasonably expect more than that but that doesn't mean settling down and accepting, well, I'm never going to be able to meditate with more than twenty-five percent of myself, I'm never going to be able to communicate with more than ten percent of myself etc. It's the settling down and accepting the limitations that is the real obstacle, not the limitation itself.

\_\_\_: This is the importance of stretching isn't it?

S: Yes. Stretching yourself all the time and trying to go a little further all the time. Trying to put just a bit more of yourself into whatever it is that you are doing each time that you do it. Not think well yesterday I got into it twenty-five percent, that's pretty good, OK that'll do for

today as well - No - if yesterday it was twenty-five percent, all right, let it be twenty-five and a half percent today, even that will be progress, but not accepting the existing limitations as final and sort of settling down in them. If you do that actually you'll find that you go back.

Subhuti: In a way a historical perspective is one of the biggest dangers isn't it? That those things which we accept as practices, which we're using to overcome our limitations, become just sort of formalistic [141] observances.

S: You find this. People coming into the Friends and joining in and seeing the Friends as a positive group, as wanting to do, quite genuinely, just wanting to do the right things. That's all right in a sense but if they can't see beyond that then they don't really make the best use of the movement. They don't get really involved with it. It's the same with regard to one of the things we talked about on the last retreat and that is jargon and sort of adopting, verbally, certain attitudes but not really adopting them. You're only going through the motions of adopting them, you're not really thinking in those terms. You're just using that particular language, that particular terminology. For instance, when somebody says you're not being receptive to me and really meaning, or without perhaps realizing it, that you're just refusing to agree with me. But the terminology used is the correct terminology. You're not being receptive. Because everybody agrees that receptivity is positive and lack of receptivity is negative, so you try to put someone in the wrong by accusing them of being unreceptive which you know of course everybody condemns when in fact that is not the case. They may just be disagreeing with you for perfectly good reasons of their own. So here again you're going through the motions in another way. You're going through the motions of using the language of receptivity, which means going through the motions of accepting receptivity as an ideal, when in fact you're not, you're just concerned with beating the other person in argument or putting the other person down which is the opposite of being receptive. But you use that language. So this is what we were going into in one of the study groups in great detail, we had almost a session on it.

Subhuti: You're not committed which means you're not doing what I want you to.

S: Yes, you're not doing what I think you ought to do or you're being very negative, you're not accepting my proposal. So I reduced it in a way and generalized by saying that it was giving a valuation instead of a factual description. For instance, you read in minutes sometimes that someone makes a suggestion and then someone else is described as adopting a negative attitude towards it or being negative about it which presumably means that they disagree. So it doesn't say that they disagreed for such and such reason. It is just said that they were negative about the idea. That sort of statement shouldn't come into minutes because it's an evaluation of what someone said. It's not a report of what was said. They might have given a quite rational objection to that proposal but it's reported as they were negative about it which suggests that they were in the wrong and had an emotionally negative attitude and so on. One has to watch this. Someone even mentioned that these things should be acted out. There was a lot of emotion [142] expressed here because somebody said, well, if you put forward a certain point of view which doesn't agree with the prevailing point of view someone sort of comes up to you and puts his arm round you very gently and affectionately and says, 'Let's go off to my room and have a talk about it. Let's talk it over', as though he were a sort of patient and if you disagreed with what you were being told or what everybody else thought there must be something mentally wrong with you. So you'd be given this very gentle soothing treatment and taken off to somebody's room for a nice quiet talk and be put right. So there was quite a

bit of indignation expressed at this point. It was clear that some people had suffered from these evaluations in the place of factual descriptions. That's by the by but it boils down essentially to the same thing that we've been talking about. Going through the motions either in act or verbally or even, so to speak, mentally. You can mentally just sort of go through the motions. Just when you say something to yourself in your own mind, thinking that you understand it or believe it but actually you don't. It's become a routine performance even in your own mind.

All right, the next verse. 'In the Experience of Great Bliss there is neither light nor shade. If either of the two arises, it is not Great Bliss.' Great Bliss is Mahasukha and it's again another Vajrayanic way of expressing the experience or even expressing the ultimate experience - the experience of enlightenment. It's synonymous with the Mahamudra. But why does it say that in the experience of Great Bliss there is neither light nor shade? What do you think light and shade means here in this connection?

\_\_\_: Dualism.

S: Yes, but even more obviously?

Clive: Isn't it the fluctuations of the Bliss?

S: Yes. If it's greater at one time and less at another it's not the Great Bliss. If it's less in the village and more in the hermitage it's not the Great Bliss. It's still dependent upon conditions. So perhaps he is still, as it were, in a way, getting at Milarepa a little bit.

Subhuti: Trying to defend himself.

S: Perhaps. It could be a sort of game between the two. It could be that Milarepa is not displeased at all or it could be that he just pretends to be displeased. What will Rechungpa say? Rechungpa could be saying something which is quite correct and not rationalizing. As it were, reminding Milarepa, not really reminding him but making it evident to Milarepa that actually he does understand and it may be that Milarepa's wanted to call forth that expression of Rechungpa's understanding so that it may become more clear to Rechungpa himself. That also is a possibility. 'In the experience of Great Bliss there is neither light nor [143] shade.' The Great Bliss is not sort of bright at one time and less bright at another. 'If either of the two arises this is not Great Bliss.' That's pretty straightforward, isn't it? That usually happiness arises in dependence upon conditions. Those conditions may be external or they may be internal but if the happiness arises in dependence on anything that can change the happiness itself will change. So the only real happiness is an unconditioned happiness and the only happiness that is unconditioned is the happiness that arises in dependence, so to speak, on the unconditioned. Then it goes on to say,

'The Great Middle Way cannot be described; Nor can it be defined, for if it could it would not be the Middle Way.' This is not the usual way of thinking about the Middle Way. It's the Madhyamika way. So what is the Middle Way a middle way between essentially on this level, so to speak?

Subhuti: Being and non-being.

S: Being and non-being. Existence and non-existence. The Middle Way here is not only a synonym for the spiritual path but for reality itself, reality as a middle way between existence and non-existence, being and non-being. So therefore it can't be described and if you can't bring existence or non-existence into the picture well what can you say, you can't say anything at all. So the Great Bliss is like that, the Mahamudra is like that, the Great Perfection is like that. They're beyond thought.

Subhuti: Is the Great Middle Way a technical term?

S: I'm not sure about that. I haven't come across the great Middle Way before but usually great suggests sunyata - maha. So it's as though Rechungpa, in the course of the song, is sort of saying, well if you are displeased at my mingling in the village this is really quite inconsistent because the Mahamudra with which we're essentially concerned, the ultimate spiritual realization, has got nothing to do with living in the village, nothing to do with living in the hermitage. It's got nothing to do with any particular (teacher) or any particular practice or any particular path. So if I have spent longer in the village so what, what is there to say about that - nothing - so 'I, Rechungpa, have just returned; Are you my Father well today?' He shows Milarepa, if Milarepa needed to be shown, or was in fact wanting to be shown at all, he might not have been, that he has in fact understood. So perhaps he has advanced a step further on the path, perhaps he didn't just stay down in the village because he got distracted. After all we're not told that he did, so perhaps the reader's being told, well, Milarepa went back to the hermitage. Rechungpa stayed in the village. You are not therefore to think that necessarily Milarepa was the good one and that Rechungpa was the bad one. No. Perhaps there was no difference at all. There is that possibility. [144] As I said, we're not told that Rechungpa stayed in the village because he got distracted so we perhaps shouldn't jump to that conclusion.

Kovida: It is Rechungpa that raises the question though, isn't it? He wonders if the Jetsun has become displeased. So it is somewhere in his mind.

S: We don't know what Milarepa was really thinking. He may have just ignored the whole situation and been immersed in his own ( ). He may have wanted to find out what Rechungpa was really doing, what his state really was and therefore shut the door which might have suggested to Rechungpa that Milarepa was displeased. We don't really know but as I said we shouldn't jump to conclusions and say that Milarepa is right and that Rechungpa is wrong because that would go against the Mahamudra teaching. But there is a definite absolute right and wrong. It could be that Rechungpa did wrong, not that he couldn't have done wrong, it could be that he was distracted and therefore stayed on in the village but it could also have been that he did not in fact experience any difference between the two. The same with Milarepa, the fact that he went back to his hermitage doesn't necessarily mean that he could not have stayed down in the village just as well. He's also concerned with, perhaps in a manner of speaking, setting a good example to other people. That was after all his guru's command that he should spend his time meditating in solitary mountain caves. But, anyway, whatever it is the basic point is clear; one cannot go by externals and to not be satisfied with just going through the motions. ( ) suggests it's very difficult to understand this and to know what people are really doing and where they're really at. We're not even sure what Rechungpa's state of mind was here. He might have been rationalizing. On the other hand he might have been explaining to Milarepa what his state actually was. He might have been in a very high state of realization, in a genuine Mahamudra state, not experiencing any difference

between the village and hermitage, we don't know, not for sure. Even though Rechungpa has sung this song. In the same sort of way it's very difficult to know where another person is at. You might speak to them one day and they might not reply and you might think they're annoyed with you. It might not be that at all - they might not have heard you or they might have been thinking about something very deeply and just not wanted to interrupt their train of thought or they might be angry - you don't know. Sometimes it's very difficult to tell. One can't go just by externals. You might find someone meditating regularly and doing all the right things and you might think they're very calm and peaceful but their minds may be absolutely seething and bubbling with discontent and all the rest of it. You might be completely oblivious to that. So it's again another thing we went into on this study group. It's very difficult to know another person. It's very difficult to know what their state of mind is at [145] any given moment. It's much more difficult to make an overall assessment of them over the period that you've known them, taking into account all their changes. So you shouldn't jump to conclusions about people or generalize about them too hastily. It takes a long time to really know someone. The Buddha himself said when he was asked how to know an Arhant he said, it is not easy to know an Arhant especially if you yourself are not leading a spiritual life. Even if you are, he said you need to live with someone a long time before you know them. And it takes a wise man and not a fool to be able to do it. Sometimes quite, so to speak, worldly people ask, is so and so enlightened or how can we tell whether someone is enlightened. Well they just can't. It's impossible. The question is quite absurd. They're just not in a position to evaluate at all. They can't even know their own state of mind or they can't even know the state of mind of someone quite near to them. How can they evaluate someone who is in that particular state? It's quite impossible. The question is completely unrealistic but nonetheless sometimes people want to know and they ask this sort of question. Any further point arising out of that song?

Kovida: In some ways it raises the point that Rechungpa considers himself equal to Milarepa if he's prepared to raise, as it were, possibilities of criticism or raise the possibility that what he was doing was equally valid but there's just no sort of right and wrong between them. He could be as right as Milarepa. Well that could be and it could be that he was right, it could be that he was wrong in so thinking. Just looking over the page to the end of another song of Milarepa it says, 'His song struck to the root of Rechungpa's hidden faults.' So that suggests that perhaps Rechungpa has been rationalizing a bit or that he was to some slight extent at least going through the motions in talking about the Mahamudra.

All right let's hear the next song.

Kovida:

"From over the top of the door Milarepa sang in reply this song:

There is no Buddha other than one's mind; there is  
No faster Way than Prana and Nadi practice;  
There is no cruelty or vengeance in the Three  
Refuges;  
There is no experience greater than that of the  
Bliss-Void;

No grace is higher than the Jetsun Guru's ...

The refuge and glory of all men.

[146]

By practising the correct instructions  
Conviction will grow in one's mind.  
With complete Realization,  
Those instructions are fulfilled.  
Once a firm resolution has been made,  
Experience and conviction blossom.  
When in one's heart kindness grows,  
One through love can help all others.  
He who sees the Guru as the Buddha,  
Will then receive the great blessing power.

Rechungpa, the quotations  
You have made are excellent.  
If you understand them,  
You will find the Dharma  
There. If not, your remarks  
Are babble and jabber.

How have you been, my son Rechungpa?  
Your old father is well and healthy."

S: So from over the top of the door Milarepa sang in reply this song. This suggests that the door didn't go quite up to the top of the doorway. There was a gap at the top like you find in barns. So 'There is no Buddha other than one's mind.' What do you think Milarepa means here by that?

Clive: There's no external Buddha, there is Buddhahood.

S: All right, supposing a Buddha appears in front of you and says he is a Buddha and suppose he is a Buddha and teaches you, but it's your own mind that has to accept that or not accept that. Your own mind has to decide, well yes, this is a Buddha and therefore I should listen to him. So it's your own mind that judges or assesses at least. So the ultimate authority is the authority of your own mind, even when you think it isn't. The responsibility is yours. You don't have to listen even to a Buddha. So don't think that you can really depend upon anybody else because even if you depend upon anybody else, even if you decide to depend upon anybody else, it's you that's decided to depend on that person rather than on another. So you're depending to that extent on your own judgement, therefore on yourself. You never really depend upon anybody except yourself, if you are an individual at all to any extent. So there is no Buddha other than one's mind. So one can take it in this sort of psychological sense. You can also obviously take it in a more metaphysical Zen-like sense. That in your own ultimate mind, in the depths of your own being, in the depths of your own consciousness you are identical with the Buddha. One can take it [147] in that way too though it isn't of very much value if it's just a matter of words. But in view of the general trend or timbre of the song it suggests, it seems to be that Milarepa is just making Rechungpa realize that the onus is on him, the onus is on the individual. It's the individual who ultimately decides. In a way this continues the line of thought in Rechungpa's own song. Rechungpa was stressing the internal



as distinct from the external. Milarepa's doing the same. It's the internal Buddha that transforms the external Buddha. There is in fact no external Buddha or if there is it's you that makes him the Buddha. You accept him as that. So there in fact no Buddha other than one's mind. 'There is no faster way than Prana and Nadi practice.' What is this Prana and Nadi practice? The Nadis are the nerves, the psychic channels, the channels along which, or through which, Prana or psychic energy flows. But not thinking in terms of specific practices what do you think this means? What is it talking about?

Kovida: Transformation of energy.

S: Transformation of energy basically. The Vajrayana is very much concerned with energy in this (vehicle) the transformation of energy. It's saying that there's no faster way than Prana and Nadi practice. There's no faster way than Prana and Nadi practice. There's no faster way than the way that involves your energies. This is what it's really saying. It's not a technical practice. You do this with your Prana, that with your Nadi. The fastest practice is the practice that involves your energies. One could interpret it like that. It's not a question of whether a particular method is a fast method or a particular method in itself is a slow method. The fastest method is the method that involves your energies. The involvement of your energies is the real thing, that is the real way, the transformation of your energies. But sometimes people ask for a quick method of meditation that will give them enlightenment quickly without their having to make too much effort. In other words, without having to involve themselves very much. In other words, without having to transform their energies so that presents a contradiction in terms obviously. They think of the method as something which picks them up and bodily transports them to a place called enlightenment. This points to the great importance of the energies being aroused. If the energies aren't really aroused no practice will do you much good, even if you do that practice. It'll only be like going through the motions.

And then 'There's no cruelty or vengeance in the Three Refuges;' First of all what does that mean and two, why does Milarepa say it? What is its relevance? What is he saying first of all when he says there is no cruelty or vengeance in the Three Refuges. They're not authority. They don't operate in accordance with the power mode. Cruelty and vengeance are extreme forms of the exercise of the power mode. So these obviously are [148] quite out of place in the teachings. Again it's connected with this theme of going through the motions because you can be or you could feel obliged to go through the motions if you see the Three Jewels in terms of power, as constituting a group rather than seeing them in terms, so to speak, of love. In purely spiritual terms. So it is as though Milarepa is saying in this first line accept complete responsibility yourself, mobilize all your energies and don't look to the three jewels as an authority. This is more or less what he is saying. And then he says, 'There is no experience greater than that of the Bliss Void.' That doesn't really need any comment or explanation, does it? It's so obvious.

'No grace is higher than the Jetsun Guru's - the refuge and glory of all men.' Why do you think this comes in? What's the relevance of that as far as Rechungpa is concerned?

Andy: Personal contact with a teacher.

S: Yes. No grace is higher than the Jetsun guru's.

Kovida: It fits in with the previous line. There's no experience greater than the Bliss Void,

there's no grace higher than the Jetsun guru's, implying that they're in a way the same thing.

S: Yes, but why do you think Milarepa feels the need to say this to Rechungpa?

Subhuti: In a way you get the impression that Rechungpa is not completely open to Milarepa when he comes up to him and he's saying don't project anger on to me, on to the three jewels, and be open to me.

S: Right, yes.

Clive: What does grace mean in this case?

S: It's not grace in the Christian sense, not grace in a sort of arbitrary sense. It's more like the Tibetan term which is (Chim la?) which is usually translated as sort of grace waves or even thought waves. It's the sort of almost telepathic influence which comes from the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, gurus and so on and which can affect you positively if you make yourself open to it. It's a sort of subtle emanation, even a vibration, a positive vibration to use those terms, which comes from the Buddha or Bodhisattva, guru and so on, but which is a kind of active force and which can help one, but only if one opens oneself to it or allows oneself to feel it. It's as though Milarepa is suggesting that Rechungpa has been resistant - perhaps he has - perhaps he has been rationalizing.

Clive: (unclear) ... that Rechungpa is continually putting himself out of communication with Milarepa and that ...

S: Literally and metaphorically. He's always running off somewhere.

Clive: ... and he's always quite often running off with the idea that he's going to find some great teaching elsewhere and Milarepa has to keep reminding [149] him that .. (unclear)

Subhuti: He rationalizes in terms of the spiritual.

S: Anyway then Milarepa goes on to give a sort of real summary of the spiritual path you could say - 'By practising the correct instructions conviction will grow in one's mind.' What is Milarepa saying here? One could render conviction presumably as faith, faith in the Buddhist sense. By practising the correct instructions conviction will grow in one's mind. Conviction of what and how will it grow?

Kovida: Conviction that the practice actually works.

S: Conviction that the practice actually works, yes.

Subhuti: This is the middle term between not practising at all and to the mere observance.

S: Yes. You notice of course Milarepa says the correct instructions. What are the correct instructions?

Abhaya: The Dharma itself.

S: The Dharma itself. The Dharma as an expression of the experience of an enlightened being, that is to say the Buddha, and also adapted to your particular individual needs. So by practising the correct instructions, conviction, that is to say faith, in the validity of those instructions will grow in one's mind. It will grow because one actually experiences the result of the practice for oneself and experiences the results of practising for oneself. And then 'with complete Realization those instructions are fulfilled.' You notice Milarepa says with complete Realization those instructions are fulfilled. Very often you come to a stop half way and say, well, that's enough. But the instructions are in fact fulfilled only with complete realization. Then Milarepa says and this is perhaps even more important, 'Once a firm resolution has been made, experience and conviction blossom.' What does this mean then?

Lalitavajra: It seems almost like Rechungpa's not really made a firm commitment. He's not following it through anyway.

S: But, as it were, in more psychological terms - a sort of general principle. Once a firm resolution has been made experience and conviction blossom. That suggests if you haven't made a firm resolution you don't get very far. So what is this firm resolution and why is it so important? How does it produce this sort of effect?

Clive: It helps concentration.

S: Yes it's a kind of concentration.

Clive: Some people might negatively view it as narrow-mindedness in a way. It's like you have to sort of give yourself an object to go for to [150] concentrate towards, to bring yourself together towards, to achieve and then you can open up again to the possibilities and within that opening up it becomes another objective which you narrow towards.

Subhuti: Firm resolution implies some feeling doesn't it? So the emotions begin to flow.

S: It's also something definite. Something is decided. Firm suggests that. In a way it is something absolute. It isn't contingent in character. You say well I will do this. You don't say well if it isn't too difficult and if I get time, OK then I will do it. No, it is absolute, of an absolute character. Once a firm resolution has been made experience and conviction blossom. It suggests really making up one's mind to do something. If you don't do that, well, in any sphere of life there's no result. If you're halfhearted about it, don't put yourself fully into it, are undecided. Not sure if you really want to do it or not. There's not much in the way of results. So Milarepa is simply applying that general principle to the spiritual life. Once a firm resolution has been made experience and conviction blossom. This firm resolution is the opposite of that vicikitsa translated doubt, which is the third fetter. It's not really making up one's mind to do something. It's allowing oneself to remain in that state of indecision. This is called (paltering). If you palter you will falter. You haven't encountered the word paltering before? It's quite an expressive word.

Clive: Isn't it a small farm animal! (Loud, long laughter)

S: Poultry is from the French 'poule' which is a hen. This is palt-er-ing but the word paltry is not the same as the word poultry connected with farm yards.

Anyway, this word isn't even here in the text! So not having a firm resolution you just palter around but one can see from this the importance of what Milarepa calls a firm resolution. It really means making up your mind to do something, coming to a definite decision and being resolved to act upon that which is very often what doesn't happen and that's why there is no experience and conviction blossoming. You just don't get results in any sphere of life. Or you don't make this firm resolution or you haven't made this firm resolution. It happens very easily. Supposing at some meeting you agree to do something but you just say 'I'll do it'. It doesn't want a firm resolution that you will do it, so usually you, having said you will do it, forget all about it. It's as though you expect someone to come along and remind you. As though it isn't your responsibility - you've said you'll do it so you've done your bit. People quite easily say that they will do something but without a firm resolution that actually they will do it. Once again they go through the motions of agreeing to do something. They aren't really agreeing to do it. Sometimes their saying [151] that they will do it is merely their inability to say that they won't do it. They don't like to say, 'no I won't do it - I don't want to.' They want to be agreeable, to go along. I noticed this in minutes, that people agree to do certain things but you follow the story month by month and you find that they haven't done it. There was one particular instance I remember - the saga of the doorknob, this saga went on for a full fourteen months if not more and I followed it through the minutes month by month. First of all so and so says he will put that knob on the door. The next month, has he done it? - no, he's been too busy. The next month he went and looked at some knobs but he hasn't made his mind up yet, and then the month after that he's been away so he hadn't been able to do any more work on the subject. The month after that, yes, he'd thought about it again and he was going to do it. In this way it went on for fourteen months at least. In the end somebody else had to do it. So this is the sort of thing I mean. You don't make that firm resolution.

Chris: Cultivating that weak state of mind while the job is left undone.

Clive: I think that people need practice in making a decision and then doing it. They need to sort of connect the two things.

S: Well it's not making a decision. It's just saying the words. I think people should ask are you really going to do it, do you really mean that, do you understand what it implies, have you really decided that you will do it. More often than not people just go along with the total in an easy going way. They don't like to say no so they say 'OK I'll do it', but there is so little volition in that that within a matter of minutes they've forgotten all about it and are not likely to think about it again unless they're actually reminded. So why is it that people do this, that when they say it they don't really mean that they're going to do it? That is where the difficulty arises in the first place even if they only say it to themselves. Or even if they say they're going to do something, make a resolution but not make a firm resolution, sufficiently firm to carry them through the actual doing of what they've undertaken to do. Sometimes, of course, if it's in the meeting he just complies wanting to be agreeable and not wanting to not say yes, especially if everyone is looking at them, but not really wanting to say yes actually.

Clive: I think many want to do it actually to get the attention in the first place.

S: He says, 'yes I'll do it' and everyone is pleased that he's offered to do it but the next minute he's forgotten all about it because you've got what you wanted out of it which was that momentary attention and applause. I think there's more to it than that. I think that a lot of people are so much, to use the current expression, in their heads, that to think and say are the

same as actually doing. They're so out of touch with their [152] energies or actually doing something that they genuinely or almost genuinely feel that if they thought of doing it or said that they will do it or have spoken of doing it, well, emotionally at least it's almost tantamount to doing it for them. They don't really feel all that much different. Because they live, as it were, so much in ideas rather than in practical reality.

\_\_\_: At the time of saying it you don't know what you'll feel later.

S: Well they know what they feel about it in a superficial way, on the level of ideas. They know that they feel it's a good idea, it would be a good thing to do but they are so used to fantasizing and living in a dream world that it doesn't almost occur to them that this has got to be translated into action. It's as if saying 'I will do it' is as though they've done it. The imagination, the idea of doing it, is equivalent actually to doing it. Sometimes it seems as extreme as that. It's almost as if they're reminded maybe weeks later you haven't done it yet, they're almost offended as if to say well I was willing to do it, isn't that enough?

Subhuti: Some people say 'I said I'd do it' as though they're quite indignant that you'd pressed them.

Clive: It's usually that they've got some rationalization as to why they couldn't do it. It's not that they just haven't done anything more about it but something happened which meant that they couldn't do it.

S: Well the rationalization isn't even a genuine rationalization.

Chris: It's a lie.

S: No, I don't mean that. It can only be a genuine rationalization if they were really aware of the possibility of really doing something as distinct from thinking about it. You have to be really aware of that distinction even to rationalize. They're not even fully aware of that distinction, that thought has to be translated into act so they're not even in a position to rationalize. They go through the motions of rationalizing. They don't really experience even that, because sometimes if you really do rationalize you know pretty well that you're doing it because you're quite aware of the distinction between act and thought, but if you're in that sort of situation of not having that sort of awareness even your rationalization isn't a real rationalization, in a manner of speaking. Do you think that many people have experienced this hiatus between thought and action because they're not really in contact with their energies? Again in a manner of speaking. Do you think this is a common state? It's as though usually there should be a sort of continuity between thought and action, so that when you say 'yes I will do it' at once your energies should start sliding over into action without any further thought almost but with some people it's as though they say, yes, it's a good idea, yes, I'll do it but that remains an idea and the idea doesn't latch on to their energies or their [153] energies don't latch on to the idea so that nothing happens. The connection is not made.

Clive: I think you get this on a bigger scale with co-ops. You might get a lot of energy in a meeting without planning some course of action and you might draw up quite detailed plans and, yes, we're going to do this, we're going to go ahead with it, and what happens? Absolutely nothing.

S: Because there's no actual decision taken and no actual apportioning of any responsibility at the end. Therefore, this is a good idea, that's a good idea, and people go away under the impression that they've decided things but actually nothing has been decided and therefore nothing happens. So if this sort of thing can happen with one person, I won't say individual, how much more likely is it to happen when you've got a whole group of people with that sort of attitude or functioning in that sort of way.

Chris: I remember attending union meetings of the teaching union and some evenings it would get quite heated and people would split into factions and there'd be quite heated arguments but really it was all academic because you knew nothing would be done anyway, almost as if it was all wasted.

S: Or if there was any decision there's always one safe decision and that is to go on strike, whatever the discussion has been.

Chris: If the same amount of energy could be put into actually carrying out something rather than to arguing about it on principle...

S: But often this is what you find, that people so much enjoy the purely subjective experience of, so to speak, to use one of these hackneyed phrases, experiencing their own energy, that they are satisfied. It doesn't occur to them, well, what is really going to be done with this energy. They just go on to another discussion group.

Clive: Imagine someone who has the unfortunate task of having to go to a lot of meetings in a day.

S: It's all right if at each meeting there is a discussion, decisions are come to and then the decisions are implemented. But just to go from discussion to discussion with nothing ever happening must be extremely frustrating for anyone who has any consciousness of getting things done.

Then Milarepa says, 'When in one's heart kindness grows, one through love can help all others.' What's the purport of this? To me it seems that it means that you can't go through the motions of love or helping others. There's got to be real kindness in the heart. You can't just go around doing good irrespective of your mental attitude. Sometimes people will say in quite a grieved tone, even a quite angry tone, 'I'm only trying to help you!' But that rather gives the game away. Why do you think Milarepa is saying this to Rechungpa?

[154]

Subhuti: He's just been in the village.

Chris: He's been do-gooding.

S: Possibly.

Clive: If you genuinely do feel (kindness) your actions will be skilful because you'll do what is necessary.

S: But on the assumption that along with the love there is some element of wisdom.

Clive: It seems to me that if you genuinely feel it then ...

S: Well you may sometimes genuinely feel love for others and want to help but actually you may not be in a position to help. That is not so easy. Therefore I say there must be the wisdom along with it. You can have metta without, let us say, insight. In the long run it's the insight that you need - quite deep insight - really to be able to help someone.

\_\_\_: If it was a strong enough feeling then you would at least try to develop the means to help.

S: Well if you saw that you can't really help others unless you have that insight. Yes, that would be an additional motive to develop your insight. I don't think good feelings or a positive attitude towards others in itself is really enough. Because it's difficult to understand others. It's not easy to know what they really need. You can just be providing them with what they don't need with the best of intentions. It depends on the level on which you are operating. If it's just the common sense level well, yes, you can help just with ordinary good feelings but if it's, so to speak, on a more spiritual level then you need some measure of insight too. I mean suppose someone is cold and wet and hungry, well, you don't need much insight to know what to do. Your good feelings will guide you sufficiently but if someone is in a quite difficult complex situation and many factors have to be weighed it isn't easy to see what he should do and it isn't easy to give advice however good and positive your feelings may be, you need quite a bit of experience and insight. You might even need in some cases some worldly experience as well as spiritual insight. But on the other hand you can't help others without that emotional positivity. If you've got the insight you'll certainly have the emotional positivity. It can't be a sort of dry abstract thing. Though perhaps Milarepa is assuming that that kindness is the karuna or compassion of the Bodhisattva and that wisdom is in fact inseparable from it. But as I said again this seems to underline the fact that one can't just go through the motions. It isn't enough just to go through the motions of helping. There has to be the genuine feeling to help with some real skilfulness or insight.

Then he says, 'He who sees his Guru as the Buddha, will then receive the great blessing power'. What do you think that means and what is this great [155] blessing power and how should one receive it in this way? What does Milarepa mean by saying this to Rechungpa? What does it mean by seeing Milarepa as the Buddha, seeing his guru as the Buddha, what does that mean?

Subhuti: Seeing his deepest nature.

S: Not being misled by accidentals, that he's of a certain age or a certain colour, that he speaks in a certain way etc. etc.

Subhuti: Unless you're actually open to that deepest nature you're not going to receive it's sort of influence.

Clive: Also seeing the Buddha as the teacher, as the ...

S: In which case it means genuinely acknowledging that Milarepa is enlightened and that Rechungpa himself is not. There does seem to be an element of resistance in Rechungpa's attitude all the way along so he's saying you can't hope really to receive the blessing of the

guru unless you are really open to him and that means seeing him as he is. In Milarepa's case it means seeing him as the Buddha. This applies obviously on all levels. You don't really receive anything from anybody, especially anything positive, unless you're open to that which means being open to and seeing them as they really are and one could even say not projecting anything upon them.

Then he goes on to say something quite drastic. He says, 'Rechungpa, the quotations you have made are excellent.' So that is very, very dismissive in a way. Here is Rechungpa singing that fine song all about the Great Perfection and Mahamudra and experience the Great Bliss, the Great Middle Way and then Milarepa says, 'Rechungpa, the quotations you've made are excellent.' So by using the word 'quotations' what does Milarepa suggest?

Chris: He's borrowed the words.

S: He's only borrowed the words. They don't come from his own experience. You quite often get people using a whole string of big words. Big words in the sense of words that carry a lot in meaning as if merely the words make the impression.

S: So of course Milarepa is saying, there's nothing wrong with the quotations, there's nothing wrong with what you said but the fact is that so far as you are concerned those words are only quotations. They may have actually been his own words but they are words that he's put together perhaps, this is what we gather from Milarepa's song, without any real experience. It's very easy to do this.

Then he says, 'If you understand them' - if you understand these quotations, 'you will find the Dharma there. If not, your remarks are babble and jabber.' There's nothing wrong with quotations. The point is do you understand them. Do you understand that you haven't yet reached the level [156] that the quotations pertain to. So again it's as though Milarepa is speaking in terms of just going through the motions. It's almost as though he is accusing Rechungpa of just going through the motions verbally in his song. It's not really an inspired song, not a song born of his own experience. He's simply put together some words and phrases that he'd heard or read.

Clive: He's using jargon.

S: He's using jargon.

Clive: Is it more positive for people to misuse jargon than not to have even those concepts at all? At least if jargon is around ... in the Friends there is a structure, people might misuse that structure until they have learnt to use it in the right way, at least there's the structure there.

S: Well that is the only way that one can approach it or become involved with things. You cannot but misuse terms. Take the word 'communication'. I thought of this in connection with that report that I think it was Nagabodhi wrote, about going to that Buddhist meeting in Europe and whoever it was wrote the article that I read was complaining about the lack of communication. I couldn't help feeling when I read the article that that was a little naive, because the article seemed to suggest that the people there at the meeting, the other people, in a sense knew all about communication and could have communicated if they wanted to. Whoever wrote the article, either Nagabodhi or Subhuti, I'm not sure, seemed not to realize



the extent to which other people didn't even have the idea of communication in our sense or at least, in other words, that we are using the word 'communication' in a way which is quite special to us. I feel that in the newsletter we should never do that because then it does become jargon in a way. We're not really fully communicating our meaning because we've given an additional meaning to that word which is generally current.

Subhuti: 'Communication' is a very, very crucial term to us. Is there any traditional term that it corresponds to?

S: You could find some Buddhist equivalent. For instance, in the Theragatha there is that song by Vangisa - I have intended for years now to give a talk on this but I never have done so - where he says ( 'Saccham wa amatam vacca' ) Truth indeed is - you can either translate it as immortal speech or ambrosial speech. In other words, truth is communication. So this immortal speech or ambrosial speech seems to convey something of what we call communication. That truth itself - this is quite a strange statement in a way - but truth itself he defines in this line as being in fact immortal speech. That truth isn't anything abstract. It's almost a poetic definition of truth. That truth is not conceptual or, as it were, scientific. Truth does not represent a correspondence between subjective ideas and objective facts. The clipping of the two together is truth, the correspondence is truth. [157] Truth is not that but truth is an utterance which has such artistic or aesthetic value that people will not allow it to die, so to speak. It is immortal. It means something like that. In other words, truth is really the perfectly adequate artistic utterance. Or if you want an equivalent in the Vajrayana, well, you could say it's Vajraspeech. Just as that you've the vajra mind and the vajra ( ) you've got the vajra speech. That authentic speech, that vajra speech is what we call communication or what we are moving in the direction of calling communication. Perhaps vajra speech goes beyond even what we call communication

Kovida: The guru's saying himself.

S: But if you were to speak with those people at that meeting and say, well, look there's no communication they will say, 'what do you mean, we're talking together, we're meeting, of course there's communication.' They would not know what you were really meaning.

Subhuti: But at the same time you would expect that if people were really genuinely practising there would be communication.

S: Perhaps this again, to carry it one stage further, means that you or as though you hadn't realized the extent to which people who call themselves Buddhists do not practice the Dharma and do not make any attempt to practise it and are unaware of this. They thought that they were Buddhists and would be genuinely aggrieved if you were to suggest otherwise. This is what it really boils down to and it was in this perhaps that your naivety consisted. That one sort of assumes that these people are Buddhists. Well in a sense you should assume that they are Buddhists if they say they are until they show that they are not. Again it's going through the motions. They haven't even thought seriously what is right speech. I've read many books on Buddhism and the Eightfold Path and they all explain what is right speech but no one has ever explained it that I know of in the way that I explained it in some of those very early lectures. That one goes beyond mere factual accuracy and the importance of the emotional element, positive emotion in communication and so on and even the stages of communication. It's never been explained as though no one had ever thought about it or taken

it seriously or ever asked themselves what did the Buddha really mean by right speech. It's as though no one had ever thought of that, not for hundreds of years. This is the impression one gets which is ridiculous. That's why I said in the preface to this new edition of the Survey that this is what I used to do in my very early days - ask myself what did the Buddha really mean by this teaching, what was he really getting at? It's as though people had not been in the habit of doing this for hundreds of years. It seems really astonishing. Such an apparently simple thing as right speech or perfect speech. What does it really mean and why are these four forms or four levels or degrees, as it were, of perfect communication. So you can [158] find people in the Buddhist East or in the Buddhist West probably who are just indulging in quotations. They say all the right things. This is one of the things that really annoyed me, if I may say that, in the early years of my association with the Maha Bodhi Society. Whenever I went down to Calcutta the authorities of the Maha Bodhi Society would be quite keen on organizing lectures for me or to get me to speak on certain occasions but to give an extreme example on full moon days the local Bengali Buddhists used to come along to the temple which was above the lecture hall and there'd be a terrific hubbub while the women and the children mainly made their offerings and lit candles and you'd have to shout to make yourself heard. It was terrible. So I was asked if I would give a talk. So they were all Bengali speaking and most of them didn't know English so I was quite willing to give a talk but I said get someone to translate my talk into Bengali and get everybody quiet. So they agreed to get someone to translate my talk - they were mildly surprised - but they seemed to think I was being a bit extreme in expecting everybody to keep quiet while I was talking, but actually in the end I came to the definite conclusion they didn't care about my talk being translated, they didn't care about anybody hearing it. All that was wanted was that I should be up there and talking and then the programme would be complete there would be a lecture on the Dharma - but whether anybody understood a word of it or heard a word of it just didn't matter in the least. They had a bhikkhu preaching the Dharma on that occasion and they even had something of that attitude towards my public lectures in the hall downstairs. They didn't take any serious trouble about them or bother to listen themselves but they just wanted someone holding talks in the hall and a few dozen people brought in maybe off the street so they could have the satisfaction of thinking that lectures on the Dharma were going on. There were a few people who came and who listened seriously and enjoyed the lectures and that's why I continued giving them but the attitude of the authorities of the Maha Bodhi Society was just have some bhikkhu up there on the platform spouting forth - it didn't matter what he said - so that they could say or write that they'd had a lecture. All they wanted was that you should go through the motions and sometimes they'd be told, say anything, it doesn't matter what you say, just keep on talking. That was their attitude. It was really terrible. (Laughter) Many a time when I've been asked to address an audience and have known that they didn't understand English and insisted on a translator, several times people have been surprised and say, 'Oh yes they don't understand English, it doesn't matter just go on talking!' (Laughter) They just want the satisfaction of someone going through the motions and giving a lecture but I came up against this sort of thing so much. So therefore Milarepa says, 'Rechungpa, the quotations you have made are excellent. If you understand them you will find the Dharma there. If not your remarks are babble and jabber.' So this is what they really wanted. They want you to just babble and jabber. They didn't want a real preaching [159] of the Dharma, that was the last thing they wanted and they themselves, the organizers hardly ever used to stay and listen to my lectures. They'd go off and do something more interesting. They were hardly ever present or if they did ever come they'd just sit near the door just to check that a lot of people had come and then they were off doing something else. They weren't in the least interested in hearing the Dharma actually expounded. The organizers least of all. This was the Maha Bodhi

Society.

So Milarepa says in the end, 'How have you been, my son Rechungpa? Your old father is well and healthy.' (Laughter) Because Rechungpa has concluded with an inquiry after Milarepa's health. So what do you think Milarepa has done in this song or how do you think the two songs are contrasted? It reminds me of a parable that the Buddha told in the Pali scriptures about the wise and the foolish elephants. Apparently, he said there was an old wise elephant, at least he was an old elephant and he used to go along to the lotus ponds every day and he'd eat the lotus flowers so he plucked great bunches of lotus flowers with his trunk and he washed them carefully in the water and then he would eat them and they were very good for him. So some young, foolish elephants saw him doing this and they went along to the lotus ponds after the old wise elephant and they also tore up great bunches of lotus plants but they hadn't noticed that the wise old elephant used to wash the mud off the roots first. They just crammed them into their mouths and swallowed them mud and all, the result of which they became seriously ill and died. So the Buddha said that young, foolish disciples were like this - they see what the Buddha is doing and they try to imitate him but they don't really understand what he's doing. They just go through the motions. So that is to their harm and downfall, not to their advantage. So it's as though here Rechungpa is going ...is imitating Milarepa, is singing a song about the Mahamudra but there's no reality to it apparently. It seems it's a quite good song and Milarepa says the quotations you've made are excellent. We can get a very good meaning from it. It's not that it isn't a good song. It's a beautiful song, but who is singing it? It's Rechungpa and it isn't his own song, he hasn't really realized it. So that's the difference. The words are the same in a way. The words are good in both cases but in the first case Rechungpa is just repeating quotations. In the second case Milarepa is actually singing out of his own experience. It's very difficult for us to tell the difference. As a song the two songs are equally good you could say because there's nothing wrong with the sources from which Rechungpa is in fact quoting. You may put together not only a talk about the four Noble Truths, even about Nirvana and it may be a perfectly good talk and it may mean a lot to other people, they may get a lot from it but you may not necessarily have realized it all yourself. You are just providing quotations. There's nothing wrong with doing that if you don't try to give the impression that you're speaking out of your own experience. If you say, well, this is what I have understood from my study of the scriptures, this is [160] what the Buddha says in the scriptures and if you make it clear that you are just transmitting that, well, that is an honest approach. But if you try to give the impression that you've realized it all, well, that is a dishonest approach because you haven't. So Rechungpa's song, though a good song because it contains some good quotations, is not the genuine article as an expression of Rechungpa's own state, whereas Milarepa's song is the genuine article so to speak. It's the singer that matters as much as the song. You might have the right song but you might not be the right singer for that song. Sometimes of course the difference shows doesn't it? If you're giving a lecture on say, Nirvana, to take an extreme case, the difference can show and you can be very conscious of the fact that you are talking about concepts, you're talking about something you've studied and something you've read about. Something you have only intellectually understood but not more than that. So it's therefore advisable to keep off these topics or at least not to dwell upon them too long or perhaps even to deal with them actually by a few well chosen quotations and say, well, to give you an idea what the Buddha meant by that here is what he said on such and such an occasion. Then you're being completely honest. Not saying then you experience this dhyana, then comes the next and then you get Nirvana and you've realized it all yourself when in fact you haven't. You're just impersonating the person who has realized. And if you've got a bit of charisma and you're a bit lively you may

even give a quite convincing sort of exhibition or demonstration but it still isn't the real thing. It's better to be a bit sober and just read a suitably chosen extract from the sutras at that point. Rechungpa didn't say anything about quotations, he sang this song as though it was all his own understanding but apparently it isn't, not completely anyway.

Anyway we won't go any further today. I've got a bit of a sore throat. We'll close there but just before we do close notice that 'the Jetsun opened the door and Rechungpa went in.' There's a lot of symbolism there. Anyway (Laughter) 'Milarepa said 'We will take a rest today and have a talk. I see now that you still have great desires for worldly things.' Milarepa's not deceived. 'You should renounce that and meditate alone in the mountains. Now listen.' So we'll come to that next time. But it's clear that Milarepa has not been fooled by this beautiful song because he's not only able to listen to the words of the song, he can actually see Rechungpa, as it were, or at least he can feel from the way in which Rechungpa sings perhaps, the way in which he speaks, that he's not actually speaking out of experience. Again nothing wrong with the song, nothing wrong with the quotations. They are perfectly good quotations but Rechungpa is not the person really to be using those quotations, except as quotations. So I see now that you still have great desires for worldly things. It's interesting that he says, 'I see now', as if to say after singing that beautiful song, 'I see now that you still have great desires for worldly things which is probably [161] the last impression that Rechungpa (expected to give). (Laughter). As if to say, well, having given that wonderful lecture on Nirvana I can see that you're nowhere near it. (Laughter). So one has to be careful not to stray too far from one's own experience and obviously in talking about Buddhism sometimes you will have to touch upon or refer to matters which are way outside your own experience and you can't avoid that but you have to be very careful to avoid giving the impression even indirectly, that you're speaking out of experience when in fact you're not. You can speak out of genuine intellectual conviction without what you are speaking about being a matter of personal experience but then you must make that clear and if there's not even any intellectual conviction, well, you must be quite honest about it and say, well, this is part of Buddhist tradition, this is what the Buddhist tradition says as far as I understood it and leave it at that. Sometimes you may have to give expression to the fact that you are doubtful about Buddhist tradition but nonetheless for the sake of completing the picture you are including that but personally you're not very happy about it. Under certain circumstances you can be quite honest about that and can say well most Buddhists believe such and such. I personally am not completely convinced about that but nonetheless that is part of the general tradition, you can take it or leave it. Or you can present a number of alternative interpretations and say, well, some Buddhists believe this, some Buddhists believe that. I'll leave it to you to choose whatever interpretation appeals to you most.

All right let's leave it there then.

End of seminar

Transcriber's note: At the time of transcribing (October 1984) Bhante had not given any further seminar based on this chapter of the Song of Milarepa.

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