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 Mitras. 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 Adhisthana Dharma Team

Nanamoli IV: Tuscany 1986

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS on NANAMOLI'S LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

Tuscany, 1986

PRESENT: The Venerable Sangharakshita, Vessantara, Uttara, Sudhana, Sumana, Cittapala, Jayamati, Sanghapala, Chakkhupala, Dharmamati, Ratnaprabha, Padmapani, Douglas Ponton, Duncan Steen, Peter Nicholson, Paul Tozer, Alan Pendock, Ben Murphy, Ong Sin Choon, Alan Turner, Kevin Donovan, Derek Goodman, Colin Lavender, Thomas McGeary, Gerd Baak.

7 October 1986

Padmapani: Did you ever meet the author of this book?

Sangharakshita: No, I'm afraid I never met him. He had a quite distinguished, but quite short, career as a monk and as a translator. He did a great deal of very useful work but, as you will see from the short biography at the end, he didn't really live very long, which was rather a shame. I believe I had some correspondence with him in the fifties.

Padmapani: Was he a senior bhikkhu, in terms of was he seen as a great scholar?

S: Well, to be a senior bhikkhu and to be a great scholar, unfortunately, are two quite different things! There are lots of very senior bhikkhus who are by no means great scholars, and vice versa. How many years had he been a bhikkhu? seniority is determined by that.

Padmapani: It seems that he was ordained in 1950, and his death was in 1960, so

S: Yes, so he just about achieved his therahood, yes. I wouldn't say he was a great scholar; he was a good scholar a careful, conscientious scholar.

Vessantara: What do you think of his translations?

S: I think they are very readable. Sometimes his translations of technical terms are a bit idiosyncratic, but if he gives the Pali in brackets there is no need to quarrel with that. For instance, towards the end of his career, he started translating Dhamma as 'the true idea' which could be a bit confusing for a beginner. But then again, as I say, if a translator always puts the original term in brackets in the original language, after his idiosyncratic translation, [there is] no harm. A new translation from a different point of view just makes you perhaps think more carefully about the meaning of the term, instead of assuming that you already understand it is translations, on the whole, are readable, no doubt. [They are] in decent English, and that is something. His major work, of course, was his translation of the Visuddhimagga. I am not so sure that his translation is an improvement on the previous one; I think it is as well, perhaps, to use them both in conjunction, if one is studying that particular work seriously.

Kevin: One is aware of different sort of strata in the ... age basis of the material. Could you comment on how old you think the passages that we are studying are 'The Spreading of the Dhamma' in particular ?

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S: That is very difficult to say, very difficult. Do you want a guess within a century, within ten years, or within a year? Do you see what I mean? I notice on the title page he says: 'The Life of the Buddha as it appears in the Pali Canon, the oldest authentic record.' I think many scholars would challenge that description. But he himself has to recognize that there are different layers in the Pali literature, not just the canonical literature but the literature that is to say, the Canon and the commentaries, and so on. And he has this quite useful device, actually, hasn't he? of the 'Voices' you know, the Narrator 1, the Narrator 2, the First Voice and the Second Voice. So it is the First and Second Voices that represent the canonical material, that is to say material taken from the Pali Canon, from the Sutta and Vinaya Pitakas, actually. But if one goes through that and I did read through this chapter for this afternoon clearly one is already there dealing with a number of different layers. One can see that the whole material has been very heavily edited, possibly in the oral stage of transmission itself; because already a lot of legendary material has been incorporated, and what seem to be rather late doctrinal formulas and stereotyped descriptions. So even if one goes back to what the translator calls 'The oldest authentic record', that record itself is a very composite thing which we need to analyse if we are to arrive at some idea of what the Buddha might have actually taught or might have actually done. We can't take even this 'oldest authentic record' at its face value, by any means. On the other hand, [3] that is not to say that we can very easily distinguish what is older, what is later, and so on, or what is latest. It just suggests that we have to approach the material with caution and try to read between the lines. this brings me to something I was thinking about recently. I think I have mentioned this before: that, a few months ago, there was a quite interesting meeting in the United States a small meeting between a well-known Christian theologian, Hans King, and a group of American Buddhists from various traditions. It seems that Hans King, in a quite sympathetic way, was just wanting to try to find out 'What is Buddhism?', and he was discussing this question with the different representatives of different schools, different traditions Zen, Theravada, Tibetan Buddhism and so on. At the end of a series of discussions, he was no wiser than he was at the beginning, because they all gave different accounts. But and this was an interesting point; I can't remember all the details it is not that all the Theravadins were on one side, and all the Tibetans were on the other, as it were. No: but, reading between the lines of the report, it was quite clear that there were definitely two groups which cut across the ordinary as it were sectarian divisions. You had those, whether Tibetans or Zen or Theravadins, who stuck quite literally to the actual letter of their tradition and insisted that that was Buddhism; and there were others who had, so to speak, a more liberal point of view, regardless of whether they were Theravadins, Tibetan Buddhists or followers of Zen. Do you see what I mean? So it's as though you've got what I call a fundamentalist attitude on the one hand, and a more liberal attitude on the other. Well, 'liberal' isn't really very adequate, but I can't think of any better one. And this distinction, this division, cuts across the division into schools. It represents a sort of polarization. There are some people who will hang on, who will cling, to the letter of tradition exactly as it has come down to them, but there are others who take a more liberal view, a bit more critically minded, who try to get, perhaps, to the spirit underlying the letter. now this is putting the contrast in rather stark terms, but one could say that, yes, you have to be a bit traditionally minded after all, the letter is there, you can't ignore it completely; it is also, after all, only through the letter, perhaps, that you arrive at the spirit. So it is all right to be a bit traditionally minded, but not to go to extremes and be narrowly fundamentalistic. And, yes, on the other hand, you do need to be a bit liberal minded, and try to get to the underlying spirit of the tradition itself, but you don't want to be so liberal minded or so sceptical that you just explain everything away. On the one hand, you don't want to have a

blind faith, but on the other you don't want to be totally devoid of faith. So it seems to me that the modern Buddhist, the educated or intelligent practising Buddhist, has to steer a sort of middle way between faith and scepticism faith in the fundamentalist sense, and scepticism in the as it were more liberal sense. I think it is very difficult to maintain a proper balance between these two, but I think that is really what we are called upon to do. So I think we should read material like this, be as it were receptive to it, try to feel it, try to experience it, let it inspire us, but at the same time retain some critical sense, some critical awareness: on the one hand, not just take it all absolutely literally, as some fundamentalists do, whether we are studying a Pali text or whether we are studying a Sanskrit or Tibetan text; and, on the other hand, not approach it so critically and sceptically that we are unable to obtain any spiritual benefit from it. It is not easy to maintain a proper balance. You are almost certain to topple a little over in this direction or a little in that. It is not easy to just keep one's balance. but you see what I'm getting at, I think? I was even thinking this is going a bit off the track that this distinction between the fundamentalist and what I have called the more liberal minded person to some extent cuts across religions; because in Christianity you can come across fundamentalist Christians with whom it is totally impossible to have a discussion, and you can also come across liberal minded Christians with whom you can have a very interesting and worthwhile exchange of ideas, who are relatively open-minded. And, in the same way, you can come across Buddhists of all schools, practically, who are so fundamentalist, whether Theravadins or followers of Tibetan Buddhism or Zenists, that you just can't have any discussion with them at all. I think Suvajra, in a recent letter to Shabda, described an encounter he had had with a Western woman who was a follower of Tibetan Buddhism and who apparently believed quite literally every word that the lamas said. Suvajra found it almost impossible to have any discussion with her, she was so fundamentalistically-minded. But there might be another follower of Tibetan Buddhism who was quite liberal minded and with whom one could have an intelligent discussion and sympathetic exchange of ideas. so it does seem that this distinction between the fundamentalist approach to religion or spiritual life, and what I have called the more liberal minded approach, is in a way quite basic. Both can really go to extremes, and it's as though you need something of what each represents at its best.

Padmapani: Going back to your regular thing about writing a commentary on the structure of the Order

S: Constitution.

Padmapani: Constitution; commentary; constitution.

S: No, the commentary was on the Precepts.

Padmapani: Yes, a constitution [for] the Order. Could you see this difficulty arising within the Order with the constitution? On the one hand, you have people that are trying to follow the letter of the constitution and [on the other hand] you have people who want to follow it in a spirit of -

[4]
S: Well, I'm afraid one has that even now. Literal-mindedness is something that is with us even at present. I've talked about this, I think, on many occasions before: that people's approach is sometimes very literal minded, and this is the seed or the root, if you like of

fundamentalism: lack of appreciation of the spirit of a teaching; lack of imagination, even. So I don't think this is going to wait for my passing away, but it might be exacerbated if I'm no longer around. But it is an ever-present danger, I think. Therefore, also, I think perhaps the fewer and the plainer the principles and the precepts and the rules that we have, the better.

Padmapani: Presumably this would [be helped by] the way you crafted your structure?

S: That's true, though I'm not quite sure what you meant by crafting it perhaps it's got a connection with 'crafty'! (Laughter.)

Padmapani: I didn't mean in that sense at all.

S: Oh, I take craftiness as very definitely a positive quality! You can't survive without it!

Padmapani: But I didn't say 'crafty', I said 'craft'.

S: Yes, but I said 'crafty'. I don't think it's possible to formulate any teaching or principle or precept or constitution or commentary in such a way that no one can possibly take anything that you have said over literally. I think that is just not possible, unfortunately. So what is really important is the communication of the spirit of the Movement, the spirit of the Order. So long as that is alive and flourishing, people are less likely to interpret precepts and constitutions in a literalistic way.

Jayamati: Could you enlarge on being crafty as an essential?

S: Well, I've summed it up before. I said you can't afford to be as harmless as the dove unless you have the wisdom of the serpent not in this wicked world! Probably I could say that part of the success of the FWBO and the Western Buddhist Order has been due not perhaps so much to my spiritual talents as to my talent for diplomacy and craftiness! (Laughter.) because it's not easy to survive; and it's easy to have good positive qualities and all that, but to have not exactly worldly wisdom but to be able to understand the workings of the minds of worldly people, without being affected by that, is quite important if one is trying to run a spiritual movement. Well, maybe some of you have worked in coops and in centres where you have contact with the public and local authorities; perhaps you know this. This is an essential part of the equipment of the Bodhisattva to know his way around, so that you can safeguard the spiritual movement, protect the spiritual movement, and ensure its survival. There's no point in encouraging a head-on collision, so to speak, with the powers that be; very often you have to circumvent them if you are to survive. Sometimes I am really surprised, sometimes even shocked, [at] how incredibly naive some of our Friends and Members are. I think some of them, without losing their spiritual innocence, have got to acquire a little bit more worldly wisdom, not only for their own sakes but for the sake of the Movement! Do you see what I mean? A certain type of craftiness is by no means incompatible with spirituality. (Laughter) As I've said on other occasions, in Buddhism there is no room for the ideal of the holy fool! There is no such thing in Buddhism at all. There is such a thing as crazy wisdom, but not holy fool. And the best Order Members, on the whole, are those who combine spiritual talents with worldly talents.

[5]
Jayamati: Yes, in that connection, Bhante, I was once quite shocked when Subhuti flagrantly

announced that he thought cunning was a very useful skill for ...

S: He may well have been quoting me! But what is cunning? Cunning is well, 'kenning', isn't it? It is from the same root as 'to know'. In the Authorized Version of the Bible, there is a phrase about the hand not having lost its cunning* it means just its skill. So, originally, the word cunning had quite a positive meaning in English. It is only recently that the meaning has become debased. I believe that the word 'king' is from the same root: the king is the one who knows, who knows more, who knows better, than other men, and therefore is qualified for leadership. And, of course, in Scottish we've got 'ken', haven't we? 'I dinna ken'. Anyway, let's pass on.

Vessantara: We learn that before the Buddhist Sangha became very differentiated from , the groups of the Wanderers and parivrajakas, presumably there were quite a number of practices which were then continued by the Buddhist Sangha. Is there any suggestion anywhere that Going for Refuge obviously not to the Buddha but to an ideal, to a teacher and to his teaching and to the community of wanderers who followed him was something that was done by other groups and other sanghas?

S: I don't recollect any reference to anything of this sort, though there were numerous references to other ganas(?), as they were usually called groups of disciples around a teacher and numerous references to six famous teachers in particular. But I nowhere recollect any reference to anybody Going for Refuge to any of those teachers rather than to the Buddha. There might possibly be something in the Jaina tradition, which in many ways was close to the Buddhist tradition, but I can't recollect anything, even in the case of Jainism. Though again just to add this all those other groups did have, in a sense, the three things. They had a teacher, they had a teaching, and they had an organization. So in a sense they had their own Three Jewels. None the less, I can't recollect any reference to any of them actually Going for Refuge in so many words to their own Three Jewels. But this is something, perhaps, that could be looked into. It could be that the Jains had something equivalent. I wouldn't like to say categorically that they didn't. But, certainly, normally the idea of Going for Refuge is associated with Buddhism and not with any other tradition. Though there is a verse in the Bhagavad Gita where the expression 'going for refuge' is used. Sri Krishna says to Arjuna let me see if I can remember it [Sanskrit quotation] you see, saranam: 'Renouncing all dharmas' what dharmas means here is the subject of a lot of commentaries 'mam (to me) saranam (refuge) praja(?) (take)'. 'Giving up all dharmas' is sometimes translated as 'giving up all religions' or 'giving up all duties', 'take refuge in me alone'. Mam ekkam yes, 'in me alone'. So that does have the idea of going for refuge, which is one might say a very general idea. But certainly, in Hinduism, no Three Refuges.

Sanghapala: In India ... that the followers of 'Bhagwan' Rajneesh chant the Three Refuges with him as the Buddha. I just wanted to make that point.

[footnote: If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. (Ps. 137. 5.)]

[6]
S: They do chant them. As far as I know, they've got it a bit wrong: they put the Dharma Refuge first, then the Buddha, whom they understand as Rajneesh, and then comes Sangha. They've taken that, of course, from Buddhism and just got it a bit wrong as he usually manages to get a bit wrong all the various things he takes from Buddhism, including the

'Bhagwan'. (Laughter.) I don't know if it's generally known that I met him once? (Voices: Yes.) Yes, many, many years ago long before he became famous; and at his request I gave a lecture this was in Jabalpur in oh, the late fifties or early sixties, I can't remember which now; probably the very early sixties. I was in Jabalpur and he was then a lecturer in philosophy at a local college, and he had a little group; and coming to hear that I was in town, giving lectures, he invited me to address his group. So I went along to the college and I gave a talk, believe it or not, on mindfulness! I wish he had taken my talk more seriously than he appears to have done! But, yes, I must say I was quite favourably impressed by him at the time. He must have been in his late twenties, and he was a quite impressive sort of person; had this group of about 20 quite sincere, interested young men. But he had already begun to get a bit of a reputation, so I was informed by the friend who took me along, on account of his rather unconventional teaching, perhaps, isn't the word on the subject, believe it or not, of sex. Some of the elders of the students he was teaching weren't very happy about what he was teaching them or telling them on this particular subject. So even at that time, though I saw nothing of this myself, he had a bit of a reputation. But, yes, I was quite favourably impressed, on the whole. Anyway, that's just by the by. I have sometimes thought of perhaps trying to meet him and trying to what shall I say? find out what went wrong, at exactly what point he went wrong; because he has gone wrong, quite seriously, at a certain point. But he wasn't a bad person to begin with, by any means: misguided or mentally confused, it's difficult to say what. But clearly something did go quite seriously wrong at some stage.

: He had a Jain upbringing, didn't he?

S: This is what I have heard, but I have also seen a sort of semi-official biography and that gave quite a different account, so I am not really sure. Legends spring up very quickly. I think I have mentioned before I have heard various legends about myself. There was a legend going round at one time that quite a few people believed in quite firmly that during the war I was a fighter pilot! (Laughter) which I certainly wasn't! What to speak of flying an aeroplane, I can't even drive a motor car! But yes, I believe there are still people who firmly believe this, and various other legends equally absurd. Anyway, we'd better pass on. This is, incidentally to return to the point one of the reasons why I can't believe even all the legends about the Buddha quite implicitly, because I have seen and heard legends circulating about people whom I have known in my own lifetime, including myself. I've heard the most extraordinary legends about these people which I knew were definitely not true. So I know that in India legends really do flourish and very, very quickly become accepted as gospel. So one has to be very cautious in extending one's credence to any document of Indian origin, even Buddhist documents. But none the less, not to the point of being unable to experience faith and derive inspiration from those documents, at least as regards their essential teachings.

Duncan: It's about Yasa and his rapid rise to arhantship. I'll just read the little bit.

S: Yes, I have read it, actually. Just read the actual crucial passage. I know what you're referring to.

[7]
Duncan : Yes. After this achievement, Yasa is no longer capable of reverting to what he has left behind and enjoying sensual pleasures in the house life as he used to do. The question is, firstly: Why is he no longer capable, as an arhant, of reverting to the household life?

S: Well, let's deal with that first, then. It seems to be one of the assumptions underlying Theravada teaching, or the teaching of the Buddha as it has come down to us in the Theravada version at least, that it is impossible for the householder to avoid unskilful action completely. An arhant is one who cannot commit an unskilful action; therefore an arhant cannot live as a householder. This would seem to be the assumption underlying the Theravada tradition. In the case even of the Stream Entrant, or initiate as Nanamoli calls him not a very good translation, that that is not the case. A Stream Entrant, by virtue of the fact that he is only so to speak a Stream Entrant, not yet an arhant, is capable still of committing minor unskilful actions and therefore is able to live as a householder, but that is not the case with the arhant. Do you see what I mean? This is so to speak standard Theravada teaching. Just to give an example, the householder, especially in ancient India, will have to plough the land; ploughing the land means taking life. A bhikkhu is not permitted to plough the land. A bhikkhu is not permitted to kindle a fire, because kindling a fire and in those days you kindled a fire with sticks would mean destroying the insect life that was perhaps in those sticks. So the Theravada view is that an arhant cannot possibly live as a householder. Perhaps we experience that in a way, on another level, within the context of the FWBO, because after you have gained a certain amount of spiritual experience, or perhaps if you've had a certain experience of meditation, there are certain things you just can't do. There are certain occupations, certain situations, that you just can't engage in, even if Insight hasn't as yet actually arisen, but none the less your experience of spiritual life is such that you feel that such situations are just not for you; you cannot engage in them. So the case of the arhant is very much that, at the highest level. In the case of the Stream Entrant, even, there are certain things that he just cannot do, but there are not so many things that he cannot do so many unskilful things, that is to say that he is entirely incapacitated for the ordinary householder's life; but that is the case with the arhant. Therefore, for the arhant, the only possibility according to the Theravada is to live as a bhikkhu.

Duncan: I may be wrong, but I thought there was one householder who made his living making pots out of earth which had just fallen down, and he had to live as a householder because he had to look after his parents. I thought he was an arhant? I can't remember his name.

S: To the best of my recollection, I don't think in the Pali tradition there is any actual arhant living as a lay person. I won't be absolutely certain of that, because one can't always be sure in some nook or corner of the scriptures you may find somewhere an exception to the rule; but it is certainly the standard or general Theravada tradition that the arhant cannot live as a householder. As for supporting one's parents, the bhikkhu is not supposed to support his father, but he may support his mother, you may be interested to hear, from the contents of his begging bowl. Here again, this is perhaps an example of how literally you take something. Perhaps one cannot take completely literally the statement that an arhant cannot live as a householder. What does one mean by a householder, anyway? [8] And what does one mean by a bhikkhu? But one can certainly take the point that once you develop Insight to any degree there are certain unethical things that you just cannot do, and if the following of a certain occupation or lifestyle, as we say, necessarily involves the performance of those unskilful actions, then you cannot follow that particular lifestyle. That is the clear general principle that emerges from that particular teaching or tradition. So if going back to this example you give, which I don't recollect but if it is possible to live by making pots in that way without infringing any ethical precept, well, presumably even an arhant could support himself in that way, regardless of what the Theravada tradition says. What was the second

question?

Duncan: Why was he no longer able 'to enjoy sensual pleasures in the house life as , he used to do?

S: Ah. The word is kama. It is not so much pleasure; it's more like desire or even craving. I think 'pleasure' is perhaps well, if one was going to be unkind one could say a typically Theravadin mistranslation. The five kinds of pleasure are the pleasures of the five senses. I think if you translate that as 'pleasures' it means that an arhant cannot experience pleasurable sensation, which is nonsense. What an arhant cannot do is to make pleasurable sensation, whether physical or mental, a basis for attachment or upadana; but there is nothing to prevent the arhant experiencing pleasurable sensation. Therefore, I think the translation should rather be 'desire' or perhaps 'craving', not 'pleasure'. 'Pleasure' is too ambiguous; well, perhaps it isn't ambiguous, it just suggests hedonic sensation, positive hedonic sensation. An arhant can experience that, I would say, even better than others, because in the case of those who are not arhants, the experience of pleasure is spoiled by craving! You worry about it, you are attached to it, you are afraid of losing it, so there are all those not only negative but unskilful mental attitudes bound up with the experience of pleasure which interfere with the unalloyed enjoyment, in a skilful manner, of that experience or sensation of pleasure.

Ratnaprabha: The word is probably, you suggest, kama?

S: Yes.

Ratnaprabha: And you are translating this probably as 'desire' or 'craving' for sensuous experience specifically?

S: Er yes. I believe there is a note here about mental pleasure or, no, maybe I'm thinking about something else. But obviously there is mental pleasure because there is a sixth sense, which is the mind. So you can have mental pleasure as well as physical sense pleasure, and you can also have attachment.

Vessantara: So do you think the word here is kamacanda or just kama?

S: No, I am pretty certain it isn't kamacanda. I think the expression is probably kamaguna, which is often translated as 'the strands of craving'; but it means the pleasurable sensations experienced through the five physical senses. So to be devoted to that is a fetter; to be devoted to that is a hindrance. An arhant is not capable of that. But he is certainly capable of enjoying pleasure as such. He doesn't cease to experience pleasurable sensation, but it doesn't become a basis he doesn't make it a basis for attachment. So I think Nanamoli's translation is typically Theravadin in a way, inasmuch as it suggests that pleasure as such, as [9] distinct from desire or craving, has no place in the spiritual life. So here we come back to hedonism and the spiritual life do you see what I mean? It is only a little difference in the translation it is quite slight, in a way but it gives a very different impression.

Chakkhupala: To pursue that a bit further given that it is a subtle but none the less important mistranslation. In this, the word it's translating is simply 'sense experience' or 'pleasure derived from the five senses'. So is that not implicit in the word itself? Do you see what I mean? It's not an accurate translation, even though it has that unfortunate connotation

S: You can certainly have an experience of pleasure through the five senses which is ethically neutral. It doesn't have to be bound up with craving.

Chakkhupala: That wasn't quite what I was getting at was that the canonical statement is that the arhant can't experience that, can't live a household life and have sense experience.

S: What was your actual question? let's get back to that, because it is that that I was answering.

Duncan: The actual question was: why cannot you enjoy sensual pleasures in the house life, as you used to do, once you have become an arhant?

S: Why can you not enjoy sensual pleasures?

Duncan: in the house life, as you used to do? yes.

S: Well, first of all, we must look at this word 'sensual', because in English there is a distinction between 'sensuous' and 'sensual'. 'Sensuous' would mean purely hedonic, relating to sense experience, but 'sensual' usually has a connotation of attachment, even addiction, at the same time. Do you see what I mean? And also there is this word 'enjoy' what does one mean by 'enjoy'? An arhant can enjoy, for instance, the pleasurable sensation of the warmth of the sun on his body. He is conscious of that as a pleasurable, and not as a painful, sensation; but he does not make it an object of attachment. So whether that occurs within the context of a household life or in the context of a bhikkhu's life, it is not incompatible with the experience of an arhant. So your question, then, is 'What are those sensual pleasures' as distinct from 'sensuous pleasures' of the household life?

Duncan: Yes, I was just wondering how it was that he wouldn't

S: Well, for instance, one that would certainly be very much in the mind of the Theravadins would be -

Side 2

- Sexual pleasures, which are regarded, I think one can say, as inherently unskilful; and the pleasures of luxurious living and things of that sort. Any kind of luxurious living that was really inseparable from greed. And maybe the enjoyment of drinking, merrymaking, things of that sort. I think, as far as I can remember, it is all quite simple, basic things of this sort that the Theravada tradition has in mind: the sort of rather crude enjoyments of the average householder's life in ancient India. Is that what you were getting at?

Chakkhupala: I think perhaps I can put the question more exactly now. Is it, then, that the word kama necessarily implies attachment or craving, or is it merely sense experience, which can be neutral?

S: I think it varies. I think, in Pali itself, especially in the older scriptures, that the term is not

fully differentiated in that way. I think one has to read it according to context.

Chakkhupala: And in this context it would have that meaning?

S: Yes. For instance, we have the precept kamesu micchacara, which means misbehaviour in kama, misbehaviour in matters of kama. So is one to assume from that that there is an experience of kama in the sense of that precept which does not constitute a micchacara? It isn't really quite clear. Do you see what I mean? Sometimes kama seems to be used in a quite neutral way; but on other occasions it does seem to have a definite connotation of unskilfulness. It does seem that Pali, as used in the context of the scriptures, doesn't differentiate clearly, in the way that we can, for instance, the words 'sensuous' [and] 'sensual'. I remember at the Chiswick Vihara, the Sinhalese vihara in London, some years ago, they had a board on which the Precepts were written with English translations; and kamesu micchacara was translated as 'abstention from wicked love'! So kama was translated as 'love', you see? an interesting translation. The Theravada tradition itself does seem very ambiguous on this point. In fact, I think it has actually confused the experience of pleasurable sensation per se with attachment or addiction or clinging to such sensation, which is, of course, unskilful. In the nidana chain you have 'in dependence upon vedana there arises tanha' is it not so? So vedana is always defined, even in the Theravada tradition, as of three kinds: as sukha, as dukkha, and as neither neutral feeling. So that vedana arises before the arising of tanha; so before the arising of tanha you have got pleasurable sensation, painful sensation, and sensation which is neutral. So it is quite clear, from the fact that tanha arises subsequently, that tanha is not inherent in vedana, or in pleasurable sensation. So, even in the Theravada tradition, if you look at it closely enough, it is clear that pleasurable sensation, that is to say sukha vedana, is not in itself unskilful. It is in any case a vipaka; it is not a karma. All right, perhaps I've laboured the point a little, but it is important to get this quite clear. So even an arhant can experience pleasurable sensation. He can experience intensely pleasurable sensations; but in his case they do not become the basis for attachment. There are some forms of pleasure which are inherently unskilful, one may say, and those are very much bound up with what is traditionally regarded as the householder's life; and of those, of course, an arhant is not capable.

Ratnaprabha: Bhante, would I be right in saying that in vedana the pleasurableness or neutrality or painfulness of the vedana is part of its vipaka in other words, [11] it's part of your previous network of karma that determines what you find pleasurable and what you find painful? And so somebody who had escaped from karma, to the extent that they had escaped from karma, would no longer experience vedana or at least they wouldn't necessarily have to distinguish between the different kinds of vedana?

S: Yes, in a sense it wouldn't matter to them, because their reaction would be the same; whether it was pleasant, whether it was painful, whether it was neutral, their reaction would be the same. They would be aware of pleasurable sensation as pleasurable sensation, and they would be aware of painful sensation as painful sensation, but there would be no inclination towards the one nor avoidance of the other. [That is] not to say that they wouldn't refrain from putting their hand in the fire, for instance that would be a sensible thing not to do; but the pleasurable sensation would not become the occasion of attachment, nor would the painful sensation become an occasion of aversion. Even an arhant eats, and presumably requires volition to eat, to take the food; but, even though the arhant is experiencing the pleasurable sensation which accompanies eating the food, it does not mean that he is for that reason

making the experience of that pleasurable sensation an occasion for the development of craving.

Ratnaprabha: This is a slightly different point, relating to the remark you made earlier about kama referring to the five senses. Does this mean that kamacanda, as one of the five hindrances in meditation, does distinctly only refer to desire associated with the five senses and not with the mind sense?

S: I can't remember whether that point is actually discussed in the texts. I would imagine, just consulting one's own experience, that a kamacanda associated with a purely mental object was just as much a hindrance as one associated with an experience through the five senses. So I would imagine that kamacanda as a hindrance included craving directed towards purely mental objects.

Ratnaprabha: So it seems that the word kama, then, could perhaps be used a little loosely at times could be used to refer to both sensuous and sensual experience, and could be used to refer both to the five senses and the six senses in different circumstances?

S: Well, one would in any case have to have some kind of word to apply to the desire you experienced for an object which was purely of a mental nature.

Cittapala: To switch that into the thing of the Theravada tradition of arhants not being able to return to their household life

S: Before you actually put the question, let me just make one little point, which is I haven't mentioned this, but we mustn't forget that the term arhant itself underwent a process of development, and in what seem to be quite early passages of the Pali Canon it is used in a very general sense indeed not just in the sense of a disciple of the Buddha who had attained Enlightenment, in the way that it was used later on. So, in a sense, when we talk about an arhant, we don't always know exactly what we are talking about. Certainly, in the passage which we are dealing with, it would seem that a distinction is assumed at least between the Stream Entrant and the arhant. It is interesting that the other two categories aren't mentioned, the Once Returner and the Non Returner. Anyway.

Cittapala: In our study group we had a little bit of confusion about whether Yasa and Yasa's father had both achieved the same degree of attainment, and we ended up assuming that they had.

[12]
S: No, that is not the case. I think here the translation doesn't help very much. It is much too general. What seems to have happened was that Yasa gained Stream Entry; the Dharma Eye opened in his case, he gained Stream Entry; and then, while the Buddha was talking to his father, who also gained Stream Entry, he reflected upon that experience of his, of Stream Entry, and by virtue of his reflection upon it or development of it, as it were, he attained arhantship. His father, it would seem, did not do that, did not have the capacity to do that, so remained a Stream Entrant and went back home. Yasa, on account of his higher experience or higher attainment, could not do that; he remained with the Buddha and became a bhikkhu. Though, again, at that stage, whether they were bhikkhus in the full later sense, that is again quite another question. But the interesting point here is that one has the experience of the

opening of the Dharma Eye, one gains Stream Entry and then reflects upon it, and it is through that reflection, which is not just a thinking about but a sort of conscious deepening of that experience, one attains higher and higher levels of spiritual experience, one advances further upon the Path.

Cittapala: So when the text says that 'Then there were seven arhants in the world', we should assume that that includes the Buddha, not Yasa's father?

S: Yes, it's the Buddha plus the first five disciples plus Yasa.

Vessantara: This is made clear at the end of the previous chapter, where the Buddha has just converted five; talked to the five ascetics, and that passage ends 'And there were then six Arhants, six accomplished ones, in the world' the Buddha and the five ascetics.

S: There is this very important general point here, that in a sense it is not enough to have experiences, spiritual experiences or Insight experiences. Very often it happens that people have experiences but they just rest content with the experience, whether it is on a lower or a higher level. But what is important is that one should reflect upon it and try to enlarge it, try to develop it, try to develop all its different aspects, its different ramifications and implications. One should pursue it and not lose sight of it. One knows quite a few people, especially on retreat whether an ordinary retreat or a solitary retreat do have some quite important experiences sometimes, but they forget them, they lose sight of them. When they go back to their centre or they go back into the world, they just lose sight of them, they lose contact with them. But if one possibly can it is quite important that one bears them in mind and reflects upon them and tries to deepen them. In this way, insight with a small 'i' may become Insight with a capital I. This is one of the reasons why it is a good idea to keep a sort of meditation diary or spiritual diary, because a month later you may just be leafing through your spiritual diary and come across just a brief account of an experience that you have completely forgotten that you had; and it's very good to be reminded, because if you are going through a rather dry, unproductive period spiritually, leafing through your diary will perhaps give you encouragement and inspiration, because you are reminded that things weren't always as bad. And apart from that, [it] will provide you with starting points for further reflection. It is very important to try and conserve whatever one gains or experiences in this way; and I know, from my contact with them, that quite a few of our Friends have quite important experiences from time to time but they are squeezed out, they don't have an opportunity, or don't give themselves an opportunity, of reflecting upon them sufficiently and trying to explore them and realize the implications. This is a quite important aspect of spiritual life. In a way, one should be doing this all the time.

Vessantara: Why do you think people don't follow these up sufficiently?

[13]
S: I think, one, they don't make a sufficiently conscious resolve to do so. Perhaps they also don't realize their significance. Perhaps they don't realize also, always, that they are in danger of forgetting them. They might think they'll never forget that experience, it was just too powerful, to use that phrase; but actually you can forget, you can lose sight of it if you get into a completely different situation or your attention is distracted. One knows, again, from one's contact with people, that even such a simple thing as the experience that you have of a retreat a very positive, happy experience of a retreat, say, for two weeks and you leave it

feeling wonderful, but, say, three or four months later someone suggests going on retreat, and you just don't feel like it, you think of it as something not very enjoyable, something that is a duty rather than a pleasure. Why? You have completely lost contact with your experience on that previous retreat; you have really forgotten it, you know that you went on retreat but you are not able to remember your experience on that retreat in such a way as to recreate it and therefore to want to go back and have more. This happens again and again with people, I have found: they almost have to be dragged on retreat. Once they get there, they recontact whatever it was they experienced before and again they are happy to be on retreat, but they have got so much out of contact with that original experience, and forgotten it to such an extent, that it's as though it had never been; and that's really quite sad. Some of you might have had this experience.

Uttara: Do you think, in terms of diaries, it is important also to keep a diary of your dreams, of significant dreams? It seems to be very popular.

S: I think perhaps it is. Sometimes dreams have a significance that would repay pondering upon. Yes, indeed.

Uttara: (inaudible).

S: Some dreams really do stay with one. But there are lots of dreams [of which] you think 'I'll never forget this dream' but you do! So it's better to write it down, even just two or three lines to just spark off your memory.

Sudhana: Talking about forgetting positive things: people don't seem to forget things in, say, the kamaloka, do they, quite so easily? I mean, people don't forget you they can always get a good meal at your mother's, or something no, I don't quite mean a good example is

S: Well, you have had rather a lot of experiences of getting a good meal at your mother's! So maybe the fact has sunk in. Perhaps that is part of the very definition of 'mother'!

Sudhana: Yes, it's funny that things in what we call the spiritual world tend to be forgotten, but other things ...

S: It's not surprising, because we live mainly on the kamaloka plane. We are more familiar with that plane, usually.

Sudhana: So it's a case of perhaps keeping that extra awareness alive.

S: Well, learning to live more on at least the borders of the rupaloka plane.

Sudhana: A higher level of awareness.

[14]
S: Yes. We are pulled down to the kamaloka plane so regularly, aren't we? Think of meal-times: three times a day you are pulled down to it, aren't you, whether you like it or not? (All chuckle reflectively).

Cittapala: Bhante, returning to a point which we were discussing, I believe, a couple of weeks

ago: when you mentioned that Yasa's father attained Stream Entry but might not have had the ability to reflect on his experience, this raised in my mind Vessantara's question about a Stream Entrant making effort. I was wondering in what sense his Stream Entry precluded him from being able to continue to make the kind of effort which Yasa himself managed to make.

S: It wouldn't had been the Stream Entry itself, presumably, but the weight of conditioning. I think I used the word 'capacity'. According to Theravada teaching, the Stream Entrant will eventually in a sense automatically gain arhantship, though not necessarily in this life. But by capacity or incapacity to work on that experience of Stream Entry and develop it, I meant that there was or that there was not a sort of assemblage of supporting positive conditions which would make it easier or more difficult for one at that particular moment to go further. Yasa was able to follow up his attainment of Stream Entry very quickly, according to this account, with his attainment of arhantship, but his father wasn't able to do that, so he needed a rest for the time being; he had, perhaps, more negative conditioning to overcome than did his son. How are we getting on, by the way?

Vessantara: It's five past nine and we've got three more questions, but they're probably fairly short, I'd say.

S: Let's see what they are, then.

Gerd: When accepting a bhikkhu into the Sangha, the Buddha says: 'Come, bhikkhu. The Law is well proclaimed. Lead the Holy Life for the complete ending of suffering.' We couldn't agree on one single interpretation of 'The Law is well proclaimed'. ...

S: It's svakkhato bhagavata Dhammo it's in the Vandana. Svakkhato means well taught, well spoken.

Gerd: We thought there were several possibilities of understanding it. It might mean 'Yasa has understood', or it might be an exclamation of contentment.

S: No, there is a commentarial explanation. I forget all the details, but roughly it is along these sort of lines I have gone into it somewhere else, but I can't remember the Dharma is said to be 'well proclaimed' inasmuch as the Buddha has explained it in accordance with the needs of different kinds of sentient beings. He has explained it in detail, he has explained it in brief, he has explained it analytically, he has explained it with the help of parables and stories, he has explained it or proclaimed it in all possible ways. He has well proclaimed it. This is what it means in general. It is, you could say, properly taught. That would probably be a correct no, an adequate translation: that the Dharma has been properly taught by the Buddha. 'Proclaimed' is not quite correct; it is more like just 'spoken' has been well spoken, well said, or well taught.

Vessantara: So is it in this passage that the Buddha is in some way acknowledging or averring that the Dharma has been communicated; yes, Yasa has understood, [15] therefore he is a bhikkhu? Or is it simply a sort of general statement of the Buddha's confidence in

S: Yes, the Buddha is saying: 'I've taught you the Dharma, I've taught it properly. Just lead the spiritual life and make an end of suffering. I've done my bit', as it were, 'You do yours.' In some passages in the Pali Canon, the Buddha in fact says this in so many words at greater

length. He says: 'Here are the roots of trees. I have done all that a teacher can do for his disciples; now it is up to you to meditate and realize the truth of what I have taught you.' So it is as though he is saying, 'You haven't got the excuse that I haven't taught the Dharma or explained the Dharma properly. I have done that. So now practise it, now make an end of suffering.'

Cittapala: I may be being a bit literalistic, but hasn't he already done that, inasmuch as he has just become an arhant?

S: Ah, you are being a bit literalistic, but it's understandable, because we mustn't forget that here is an account of something that happened at the very beginning of the Buddha's career; but, as I said, it has been all edited, and very often one finds that formulas which are of late development are sort of read back into the earliest accounts. This is probably one of those. Sometimes it happens that the formulas, to use that expression, really are introduced in a quite anachronistic manner. You can see that they don't belong really to that particular context. For instance, sometimes you have, say, three of something and at the beginning you only have three, but later on say, years and years later there's ten of those things, the list has grown. And sometimes you get the list of ten in a context where it is quite clear that only the list of three could have been taught. Do you see what I mean? So I think this may well be one such phrase, a sort of stock description which is probably just inserted there in that expanded form by whoever was reciting and handing down the old tradition. We can't be completely sure exactly what the Buddha said on that occasion. He said something like that, but perhaps not in that particular form, which is probably a form that developed some time later.

Cittapala: Do you have any particular feeling as to when the sort of formalization of Going Forth and full admission might have occurred in the formation of the Sangha?

S: It's very difficult to say. It probably was present in the Buddha's own time or from an early stage in his career, but in a very simple, rudimentary form. We see, in the case of Yasa, he simply Goes for Refuge, and some of the other early disciples who are represented as bhikkhus simply Go for Refuge, and according to tradition there are a number of different forms of ordination for a bhikkhu. There is the ordination by Going for Refuge, ordination by the Buddha's call, when he says 'Ehi bhikkhu' just 'Come, bhikkhu'. But years later it developed into a very elaborate ceremony. The point I was making there was that at a very early stage in the Buddha's career, becoming a bhikkhu meant just Going for Refuge; or you became a bhikkhu just by Going for Refuge. Whereas, at a much later stage of development, if you simply Went for Refuge, you were just an Upasaka, you were just a lay follower, not a bhikkhu at all. So it's quite clear that even though the word bhikkhu here is used, there wasn't that differentiation between the Buddha's monk disciples, as they later became, and his householder disciples, as they later became. Both just Go for Refuge.

[16]
Cittapala: But this idea of Going for Refuge - if it wasn't extant in the society at large, how ? Would the Buddha have, as it were, introduced it as an idea, or ?

S: No, it seems that is exactly what didn't happen. It was a spontaneous response of those who were impressed by the Buddha's teaching, especially those who were impressed to the point where the Dharma Eye opened. It was their spontaneous utterance.

Cittapala: So in effect it is actually something inherent to a realization of the Dharma itself

S: Yes, on the level of response by way of opening of the Dharma Eye, it clearly represents the real Going for Refuge.

Cittapala: So it's one's actual, genuine emotional response? Just the externalization of

S: Right, yes. It wasn't that the Buddha sort of thought it out beforehand 'If anybody wants to join my Order or become my disciple, then this is what they should do.' No: it happened quite spontaneously. And originally it happened on a very high level, usually; sometimes not on such a high level. It can happen at the level of what we call effective Going for Refuge, or it can happen on the level of what we call real Going for Refuge. In the Buddha's day, it happened more often than not, it seems, on the level of the real Going for Refuge; certainly in the early days of his teaching career.

Peter: A question about the description of Yasa's father when he gained Stream Entry. It says that 'his doubts vanished, he gained perfect confidence and became independent of others in the Teacher's Dispensation.' Could you explain what being 'independent of others in the Teacher's Dispensation' is?

S: Ah. That is to say, you are not dependent on the testimony of others, because you have your own experience; you have your own experience of Insight. You have your own Insight, for instance, into dukkha, into anicca, into anatta. So your experience of the Buddha's teaching, or your confidence in the Buddha's teaching, is not based on any external authority. You don't need to depend on anybody else in that respect because you have your own experience, your personal experience, on which you can depend.

Peter: The preceding line, 'perfect confidence' I think you cast doubt on that as being something

S: Well, 'perfect' clearly, if it is only the confidence of a Stream Entrant, it cannot be perfect in the strict sense; so one can't take that expression literally.

Peter: He can be totally independent of others?

S: At least, yes; he has sufficient experience of the Transcendental Path for that person to have no need of depending any longer on others with regard to confidence in that Path. He knows now from his own higher experience that there is some as it were Transcendental dimension. It is no longer a matter of belief (as distinct from faith). 'Dispensation' here is sasana(?) a word which we often encounter in Pali. One more? Ah, two more.

[17]
Sanghapala: Bhante, it is said that there are Stream Entrants in the Western Buddhist Order. Would you comment on this?

S: No! I mean I have spoken a bit about it in the past; but one of the points I have made is it is not easy to determine the difference between insight with a small 'i' and Insight with a capital I, because as regards their conceptual-cum-verbal formulations, they are the same. As I mentioned some evenings ago, the only real test is the extent to which an Insight is embodied

in one's actual life and transforms it, and that takes time. Also, sometimes, people can keep up a certain kind of practice or level of behaviour as it were by force of will, so you need time you need to have known someone very well, and to have known that person for quite a while, before you can conclude that for one there is in fact Insight, because the personality has been transformed to such an extent, and it has been transformed, as far as you can see, for a longer time than somebody could really just keep up a pretence of being transformed, or could just maintain that level as a result of will or as a result of discipline. So it takes time. So, if someone has been an Order Member just for a few weeks or for a few years, how can you be sure whether they are Stream Entrants or not, even though they are spending the whole day in the Shrine Room, and even though their observance of the Precepts is impeccable? You can't be sure. But after 10, 15 years, if they have kept it up, well, you might begin to entertain the suspicion that perhaps they are Stream Entrants. Do you see what I mean? It is not something you can just tell like that that someone has got or that they haven't got it. Of course, it's easier to be sure that someone isn't a Stream Entrant than it is to be sure that they are a Stream Entrant, because though some Stream Entrants do manage to disguise themselves ! even then it's not all that easy! Any more?

: Bhante, going back to when the Buddha first teaches Yasa, it says: The Blessed One gave him progressive instruction, that is to say, talk on giving, on virtue, on the heavens.' We suspected in our group that this was a traditional triad of some kind

S: Oh yes, indeed. I have dealt with this in the Survey, haven't I? Oh yes. It's dana, sila, bhavana. And then I pointed out because, in the Theravada tradition, they distinguish between teaching for lay people and teaching for monks that you've also got, in addition to the teaching of dana, sila, bhavana for the lay person, you've got sila, samadhi, prajna for the bhikkhu; and these overlap, so you've got dana, sila, bhavana or samadhi, and prajna; that gives you four. And, according to my account, this is the rudimentary form, if you like, of the six Paramitas of the Bodhisattva, because you just interpolate virya and kshanti and you have your six Paramitas. As I said, I've gone into all this in the Survey. But, yes, it does represent a very standard triad, which occurs again and again. But bhavana here it would be understood as samatha bhavana, not vipassana, because vipassana bhavana wouldn't get you just to the heavens, it would get you on to the Transcendental Path. It represents a sort of spiritual softening up process first dana, then sila, and then bhavana, meditation.

Uttara: Going back to the origins of the Going Forth, and here this incident with Rahula, the Blessed One told the venerable Sariputta to ordain Rahula, and then he gives a discourse on how one should allow the Going Forth to be given by means of the Three Refuges, and explains the way it should be done. Is this the first evidence of the Going forth?

[18]
S: No, the first Going Forth, in a sense, was the Buddha's, the pabhajja(?). This is a Going Forth of an adult person leaving the family behind, leaving household life behind and just taking up the life of a wanderer or parivrajaka(?). But, in the case of Rahula, taking it as an actual historical incident, it is a rather different sort of situation, because Rahula is a minor; he is a small boy. So there is no question of his Going Forth in the ordinary sense. So pabhajja seems to have changed its meaning here from a sort of spontaneous Going Forth from the household life to representing a sort of stage of a novice prior to becoming a member of the bhikkhu Sangha on the attainment of the age of 20. So there is a difference between the two. And in Buddhism subsequently pabhajja has that double meaning: on the

one hand, it is a Going Forth from the household life, but on the other hand it represents a stage of preparation, especially in the case of someone who is very young, for admission into the bhikkhu Sangha.

Uttara: Because he does take the Three Refuges, too.

S: Yes.

Vessantara: Going back to your set of four terms, Bhante dana, sila, bhavana and prajna do you think that there is a possible connection between that and the first four Paramitas in the Pali tradition, which I think are dana, sila, nikama(?), panna; so they come over a bit like a sort of leaving of the kamaloka, as it were, behind, remaining ...

S: Nikama is a sort of renunciation, which seems to have ... It's very difficult to say, because the Pali list of 10 paramis is quite late. Some scholars say it was in fact modelled on the Sanskrit list. It appears in very late canonical texts, which were clearly of a later period. It is a very miscellaneous sort of list. You can make some sort of sense of the Sanskrit list, as a sort of rationale, but the corresponding Pali list doesn't seem to have that same rationale at all. I think there are probably a lot of loose ends in the Pali Canon that will never be completely tidied up. Did you do the whole of that chapter? We are still only partly finished with it. All right, then, we'll leave it at that.

[19]
Nanamoli IV: Tuscany '86

8 October 1986

Vessantara: Today, Bhante, we have been carrying on with Chapter IV, and we have got nine questions. We start with Uttara.

Uttara: This is a question to do with teaching. The Buddha, after the sixty arhants, sends them forth into the world to teach the Law. In the FWBO, it's not long after somebody is ordained that they come to teach, whether meditation or the Dharma; and reflecting on what I read in the article ..., that bhikkhu's attitude towards one is that he must be a Stream Entrant to teach the Dharma. What is your point of view on this? Do you see it as that we need to be like really arhants? But we're not. So where is the I wouldn't say the qualifications, really, but it seems a very different approach?

S: Of course, one mustn't forget that, according to this particular text, the Buddha's disciples were teaching pretty soon after they became disciples isn't it so? within a matter of weeks, it seems, in some cases. According to the text, they were arhants; but then, of course, the question does arise: what exactly did that mean at that time? Are we to understand 'arhant' in the full technical sense that it later assumed? That is a question one may consider. But, apart from that, there is the fact and this is something that I think I talked about quite recently at Padmaloka on some occasion that an Order Member is not necessarily expected to teach. I think the question arose in this way that some people seemed to assume, judging by their questions on that occasion, that you weren't ready for ordination unless you knew enough about the Dharma to be able to teach it. Do you see what I mean? But the point that I made in that connection was that capacity to teach the Dharma was not a requirement for ordination;

the main requirement for ordination was that you should be committed to the Three Jewels, or be willing to commit yourself, and that you should be, practically speaking, in a position to commit yourself, with no practical or emotional or psychological, or even spiritual, hindrances to your doing that. But you would not necessarily be qualified to teach, nor would you be required to be qualified to teach, in the full sense. So that is one point. So, as an Order Member, you are concerned primarily to practise the Dharma as a consequence of your having committed yourself to the Three Jewels. But none the less, you can't live isolated in the world. You come into contact with people. Those people will ask you questions. You cannot avoid, really, giving an answer to those questions. Do you see what I mean? You cannot avoid giving, in one way or another, an account of your position what it means to you to be a Buddhist, to be a Member of the Western Buddhist Order, to have committed yourself to the Three Jewels. So you cannot avoid, in one way or another, formally or informally, communicating something of the Dharma, even if it is only in a very basic, rudimentary way, by virtue of the fact that you are yourself a Buddhist and you are, so to speak, a social being, and cannot avoid communicating with your fellow human beings. So this does not constitute being a teacher of the Dharma in the full sense in the sense, perhaps, that those first sixty followers of the Buddha were. You may, of course, formalize your communication of what you understand of the Dharma through classes, or even giving talks, eventually; but even that you should do quite cautiously. I think preferably a new, a young Order Member shouldn't have to be involved in public classes really for a couple of years; if it was an ideal world that we were living in, I would say perhaps for ten years, but since it isn't an [20] ideal world I would say preferably, say, for a couple of years. I think it's a bit unfortunate that some centres, just because they don't have a sufficiency of Order Members, are eagerly looking forward perhaps to the return of new Order Members from Tuscany so that classes and other responsibilities can at once be handed over to them. I think that is rather unfortunate. Perhaps it's unavoidable sometimes, but I think in many cases it's not in the best interests of the new Order Members concerned. So I think one should think, as an Order Member, not so much in terms of teaching the Dharma in the full sense, but simply, in a quite modest and matter-of-fact way, sharing your experience or understanding of things with those who invite you to do that.

Uttara: I have heard people who are coming to the centre saying well, there is one example which I have encountered, this lady who I don't know whether she was impressed but she wanted lamas there, and she thought that we weren't taking it as seriously as she was (?) that we were teachers of the Dharma

S: Well, you didn't have the right sort of label! If you could be labelled an incarnate lama, even if you were only five years of age and knew nothing of the Dharma, people would find infinite wisdom in every little word that you babbled! I am sorry to say that people are often very stupid. I sometimes think that it is religious minded people, so-called, that are the most stupid of all! Suvajra encountered some of these lama worshipping ladies in the course of his recent visit to India.

Derek: I just wanted to pick up the point about new Order Members opening centres and taking classes. Were you thinking about actually leading classes, or do you not think there is a case for new Order Members supporting classes?

S: Yes, I was thinking in terms of leading classes; but certainly it's a good experience for a new Order Member to support. When I say 'support classes', I mean to be present as a sort of

understudy, as it were, and to look after the practical side of things, to make sure that the cushions are all in their right places before the class begins, or make the tea during the interval; so that the Order Member leading the class doesn't have to bother with all those things; and maybe just circulating afterwards and talking with people and just giving your full support, in every way, to the person who is leading the class. That is, I think, the normal way that one is inducted into those sort of responsibilities. One certainly shouldn't be in a hurry to lead things oneself. Sometimes it is unavoidable; maybe someone is ill, or falls out for some such reason, and you have to take over, but it's best if you confine yourself, as a new young Order Member, to a supporting role for a while, even though your friends may try to push you to the forefront. Of course, if you are exceptionally brilliant and have an outstanding knowledge of the Dharma, perhaps that's another matter; perhaps.

Paul: Bhante, could you say why you think it's not good for young Order Members to take classes?

S: Well, I think usually their level of knowledge and skill in dealing with people, dealing with questions, will not be up to the mark. If they support, they can see for instance how the leader of a class handles questions, how perhaps he handles difficult people, answers perhaps tricky questions. They can just observe and learn in that way. Sometimes the new Order Member is a bit too eager to plunge in.

[21]
I remember in this connection when I was in Sarnath, a couple of youngsters were ordained as sramaneras, and just to show their mettle as it were they sort of looked around and they spied an unfortunate brahmin in the audience, or congregation or whatever, and they seized hold of him and demanded that he should tell them why he believed in an Atman. The poor brahmin had probably never even thought about it; they were going for him hammer and tongs, saying 'Why do you believe in this atman? Show your proofs', etc. etc. They lost no time in showing what they were made of. I don't think young Members of the Western Buddhist Order would do quite that sort of thing, but it is a temptation for the enthusiastic initiate.

Sumana: By 'a new young Order Member' do you mean young in age or young in

S: Not necessarily. I am thinking primarily of him being young in ordination, spiritually young. There may be exceptions; some of them might have been ordained rather late, at a mature age, with a good understanding of the Dharma, well able to handle people. One must be careful not to over-generalize. But usually new Order Members are at the same time quite young well, young in every respect, very often.

Cittapala: Do you think that there is any case for extending our teaching skills by attending courses ?

S: Oh yes, indeed, I think that would be a very good idea. Yes, I think this subject has been mooted, has been discussed. Yes, indeed. I think one has to distinguish, perhaps, between deepening one's real understanding of the Dharma, perhaps even Insight into the Dharma, through one's practice, and the acquisition of skills that will enable one to communicate whatever understanding and knowledge one has. The skills, without the actual understanding, are not really of much use. But I think there is room for improvement in all respects. If it wasn't for the rather parlous condition of the world, one would be tempted to suggest that

Order Members should just mature their understanding of the Dharma for quite a few years, but the world is in quite a bad state, the Dharma is badly needed, people are suffering from a lack of it, and a little of it goes a long way. And even the most ordinary Order Member, even the most untalented Order Member, I believe, is able to communicate the Dharma somehow or other in such a way as to be of great use and help to quite a large number of people, circumstances being what they are. Sometimes just a few words go a very long way, and just offer a glimmer of hope to someone who perhaps was in a quite hopeless condition before. You don't have to be a great orator or to have a wonderful knowledge of the Dharma or to be a well-known scholar in Buddhism to produce that sort of effect, or help in that sort of way. It is quite surprising, sometimes, what in a sense quite ill-equipped or untalented Order Members have been able to do with just a bit of drive and sincerity; those things do go a long way.

Peter: Yasa's father invites the Buddha and Yasa to come for a meal. He , invites Yasa as the Buddha's attendant. Did Yasa actually become an attendant of the Buddha?

S: I don't think one is to understand that Yasa was seen as the Buddha's permanent attendant, in the way that Ananda afterwards became. But it was a sort of etiquette, at least later on in the development of the Sangha, and that later development may be reflected back into this early period here. But it was a sort of etiquette that the more junior monk should attend upon the more senior one if they went out together in that way carrying his bowl and his extra robe and so on, just out of courtesy as it were, or respect for a senior or for a teacher. One often finds manners and customs of that sort, which perhaps were developed later on, being attributed to a much earlier stage in the history of Buddhism. This is part of the [22] editing process that the scriptures underwent probably at their stage of oral transmission.

Peter: When did the Buddha gain his first full-time attendant in his career?

S: I don't remember exactly. He had several before Ananda came along. They were all, for one reason or another, unsatisfactory. It seems, to the best of my recollection, that Ananda became his full-time attendant about 20 years, I think it was, before the Parinirvana; when the Buddha was about 60, that would be.

Ratnaprabha: In the section where the Buddha sends out the first 60 arhants preach the Dharma to the world, usually there is a mention at least in most translations I have seen of no two going together. For some reason, this seems to be omitted from this translation. Are there different versions of the story or something, or ?

S: There is only one Pali version, to the best of my knowledge, but you are right about that except that the phrase I forget what it is in Pali is sometimes translated 'Go two together' and sometimes translated as 'Do not go two of you together'! It is ambiguous; grammatically it can mean either. I am inclined to think that it was 'Go two together'. But that depends not on grammatical considerations but on the general trend of the Buddha's teaching, emphasis on kalyana mitrata, and the fact that the Buddha himself usually was attended by another monk. But, yes, it is rather odd that that is omitted, if it is in fact an omission. I believe it is. One mustn't forget that the work was published after Nanamoli's death. It could be that little omissions did occur. If there is any other anthology on the premises, you could look up that particular passage.

Ratnaprabha: Yes, we have got Woodward's Some Sayings of the Buddha, and I'm afraid I haven't brought it with me,but it does actually say it.

S: But you can look up the passage look up the reference to that part of the Canon which Nanamoli is quoting from, and see if it corresponds to the passage from which Woodward is quoting.

Ratnaprabha: I believe it is the same passage. Woodward has 'Go not any two together' before Nanamoli says, 'Teach the Law that is good in the beginning, good in the middle and good in the end.'

S: I think in that case it is a simple omission, because there aren't differing versions to that extent. Whether the omission was accidental or deliberate, it is difficult to say. But the passage, as I have said, can be translated as 'Go two together.'

Ratnaprabha: Do you think, Bhante, that two is a particularly good number for going and teaching the Dharma? I am thinking of, for example, if one does go out of one's centre to give a talk to a school or one is visiting another town, or one is invited, do you think that to go in pairs is a particularly helpful way to ?

S: I think that is good. In fact, I have suggested that, or I encourage that from time to time, because I think if another person goes with you it fulfils several functions. First of all, that person can listen to your talk and the way that you answer questions and give you feedback afterwards; and that, especially if you are relatively new, may be very useful. Then, of course, if it is a question of [23] circulating after the talk, just chatting with people or giving information about the FWBO, distributing or selling literature, it is very useful to have a second person with you who can help out, instead of one Order Member having to do everything himself. So if it is at all possible I would certainly suggest that when Order Members go to, say, a group outside the FWBO to give a talk, they take along another Order Member who can just accompany them, give them moral support if need be. Also it is an occasion for increasing your contact and friendship with that particular Order Member. If an Order Member isn't available, you can even consider taking a more experienced Mitra along with you. It is best not to take your girl friend! A Mitra at least can sell literature or just talk with people. And, of course, that Mitra gets a good bit of kalyana mitrata on the way, especially if it's a long journey by train! Two is a good number in many ways, but I think if it's a question of starting up a new centre, I think two probably isn't a particularly good number. Because if, say, difficulties arise, or problems or tensions between those two people, it is not always easy for them to sort it out. If there is a third person present, part of the team as it were, I think it is usually much easier to sort out any little problem that arises as between any two of those people. But, yes, for excursions to outside groups to give talks, it is good that you have two.

Tommy: Can you say something about the Buddha's convention of consenting to, for example, meals with silence?

S: I am not sure whether it was just the Buddha's personal custom, or whether it was an Indian custom of that day; but it means that no words were wasted, doesn't it? Silence means assent, or consent. But that habit of the Buddha's, if it was just his habit, seems to have been well known, so perhaps it was something of a general custom: if you agreed, you said nothing.

You didn't have to say, 'Oh, thank you very much, yes, by all means, I'll come tomorrow.' It was considered perhaps more dignified just to say nothing to say nowt!

Sudhana: Would it not be a device, just to make the Buddha seem high, as it were?

S: I don't get that impression. I think it most likely was based on the Buddha's actual practice whether, as I said, that was peculiar to himself or whether that was the general practice at the time, at least on the part of ascetics.

Peter: There is at least one instance where the Buddha's silence means he doesn't consent; that is where Ananda is asking him to teach the pratimoksha to the assembly. So how is one to tell the difference?

S: Ah, but he doesn't Ananda sort of announces that the time has come, but the Buddha doesn't take any notice. It is not exactly an invitation, it is more like a reminder. He thinks that the Buddha has been so deep in meditation that he hasn't noticed how late the hour is; so he jogs the Buddha's elbow sort of 'Do you know how late it is?' But actually the Buddha did know, but he was keeping silence for a particular purpose. So I don't think it falls in quite the same category. This also was an incident within the Order, wasn't it? whereas that as it were etiquette of assenting with silence seems to apply especially to invitations to meals from the laity.

[24]
Uttara: ... If somebody sent you a letter that they are going to do something and if they don't get a reply from you they take it as being all right. I think this has happened recently.

S: Oh yes, I very strongly objected to that, because it's a form of coercion, really. It has happened in recent years quite a lot to such an extent I had to say something about it some months ago. Because what sometimes used to happen was that someone, yes, as Uttara says, would write to me and say: 'I'm thinking of doing such-and-such' it might even be an Order Member occupying some kind of official position at a centre, it might be something to do with centre activities or something of that sort, or something that commits me to something; and they'll say, 'This is what I'm thinking of doing, and if I don't hear from you, say, within two days, I'll take it that you are happy about it.' So, assuming that the letter reaches me in time, it means I've got to drop whatever I'm doing and think about that particular thing and come to a conclusion about it, write a letter or get a letter written, which may be very inconvenient. So, to bring that sort of pressure, so to speak, to bear on me in that way is really quite inconsiderate. So people should in fact never do this, and never do it to other people, unless you give a very lengthy, reasonable period of time, or unless the situation, due to no fault of your own, is a very urgent one do you see what I mean? But that is hardly ever the case, I've found. So it's really not at all a good sort of thing to do, whether with me or with anybody else.

Sudhana: Of course, Bhante, it is a good idea to contact you about important decisions?

S: Oh, that's true, yes. But not on the basis of 'If I don't hear from you, I'll go ahead, taking it that it is all right.' If one wants to do that and sometimes that may be necessary at least I must be given time to think about it, because I can't always just drop what I'm doing to consider that particular matter so as to meet the deadline that has been given; unless, of course, as I've

said, it is something that has arisen quickly due to no fault of that particular person.

Sudhana: Just to give you feedback I've actually found the method of giving you time perhaps just mentioning that I wouldn't mind a reply from the Office by telephone or letter and it works very well. I've always had a telephone call back from somebody in the Order Office just to say, 'OK, that's fine.'

S: But, even so, I should still be given sufficient time, because they will always ask me 'What should we do?' and that means I've still got to think about it. It may be a matter that requires quite a bit of thought. If I am in the midst of writing something, I don't want to be interrupted in that sort of way, or rushed, as it were.

Sudhana: What sort of time, Bhante?

S: Oh, that's quite impossible to say. It depends on the nature the more important it is, as far as you can see, the longer time I need to be given. Usually people don't bother me about trivial things. That means I need time to think about them. I would say try to give me a week, if you possibly can. And sometimes the Order Office is very busy; they might be able to make a phone call, but sometimes they are so busy that to write an extra letter at short notice is difficult. I'm afraid sometimes people have sent me letters of that sort and they've reached me after the deadline, so you should make sure that you have allowed sufficient time for the letter to get to me, and then for me to consider at relative leisure. Sometimes it's almost as though people just want an excuse for going ahead with what they want to go ahead with, but they go through the motions, as it were, of giving me a chance to object, or something of that sort.

[25]
Anyway, I just mention that in case anyone in future is ever tempted to write to me or contact me in that sort of way. But don't do it with anybody not just with me.

Vessantara: I get the impression certainly, people should give you long enough to think, but sometimes people say 'Unless I hear from you by a certain date I shall take it that it's all right' in order to save you and the Order Office the trouble of having to write back and say 'That's OK' or having to make a phone call.

S: They don't always, of course, understand the implications of what they ask about. Sometimes they don't understand that it is a matter requiring thought. Sometimes I am quite happy just not to reply at all, thinking, 'Well, it's OK, it doesn't really matter, it's something they can go ahead with.' But sometimes there are implications which people haven't understood.

Vessantara: Are there any particular areas where people seem a bit blind to the implications of what they are doing?

S: I think very often where it affects other people, I think often they don't give sufficient thought whether the other people are Mitras or fellow Order Members, or people connected with outside groups, or outside agencies of any kind. I think very often they don't realize the implications there, due just to lack of worldly experience, more often than not.

Vessantara: Any particular area? you mentioned this thing about lack of worldly experience in

a way last night, talking about cunning and craft. Do you see any particular areas where numbers of Order Members sort of fall down in worldly

S: In matters connected with business or money, they are not always sufficiently well informed not that I know much about these things, but at least I've been around a bit longer than most people. Anything as it were of a 'political' nature. It's not usually anything connected directly with the Dharma. Very often they haven't properly considered the consequences of a particular line of action. They mean well, and in a sense what they are intending to do is all right, but they are not able to foresee possible consequences of a kind that perhaps they wouldn't like. Usually it's just due to lack of experience, mainly worldly experience, I'm afraid, rather than knowledge of the Dharma.

Cittapala: Bhante, do you foresee a body of Order Members taking over that role from you in liaising with the world in that kind of way?

S: I hope someone, whether in the singular or the plural, will take over some time! Obviously, some senior Order Members are much more capable in this respect than others: Subhuti, for instance.

Cittapala: At the moment, the Movement seems to refer to the Order Office i.e. to yourself but presumably at some point you will want to hand that on?

S: I would hope so; yes, indeed.

Cittapala: In which case, presumably some Order Members will then have to as it were represent the Movement or even the Order in respect of that?

S: Or speak for it, yes. Yes, indeed. There are two or three, or even four, who are able to do that to some extent already; but there are some matters which they even aren't fully experienced in. I suppose one can't expect too much too soon. I am sometimes a bit concerned about the lack of worldly know-how on the part of such a [26] large percentage of Order Members; they often seem to make little mistakes or little blunders that one would not have expected someone with a bit of almost practical common sense to make. I can't think of any examples offhand.

Cittapala: For my own part, I've become increasingly less involved with the world over the last five or six years; and well short of becoming involved in centre activities of one sort or another, I can just foresee that continuing. So I imagine that that might extend to other Order Members in a similar position to myself. I am wondering if there isn't actually a need to almost groom people or prepare people in some kind of way, so that they

S: I am not so sure, I think it's a sort of knack you have. I never had any particular interest in worldly affairs, or any particular training or grooming in them; if anything, less than most people. But when a situation was presented to me, I was able to see certain implications, or possible consequences. It seemed just a matter of common sense that you should be able to see those things, if you just put your mind on to that particular matter. Not that one has to have a vast experience beforehand. In many respects, I have had no experience at all haven't wanted to have. It seems more a matter of just applying your mind to something, just thinking about it a little bit.

Vessantara: Do you think this is where people are falling short? just perhaps in the same way as they don't really reflect on the Dharma enough; they just don't think, especially a prolonged or deep weighing

S: I don't think it's even that. There are a few Order Members, a very few, who have this a sort of foresight, a common sense, an intelligence which is just there and they apply it to that particular situation, even though it may be a quite new situation. There is just a handful of Order Members not even a handful, perhaps that I know I can completely rely on to exercise that sort of common sense. But the majority I can't rely on to exercise that kind of common sense. I have found it again and again and again. It is not a question of experience, necessarily, because the people who have that sort of capacity are not people with a great deal of worldly experience. One, in fact, I can think of [has] hardly any such experience, but he is very alert and on the ball in this sort of way. I feel I can trust him. Do you see what I mean?

Vessantara: Mm. So how is this to be developed?

S: I'm not sure, because very often it seems to be a knack or capacity that you are almost born with. I think it must be possible to develop it, if you don't have much of it. A lot of it is to do with mindfulness, and applying your mind properly to something fully. For instance, to try and give an example: I send someone maybe into town to get something for me. I say 'I need such-and-such a thing, you can get it in such-and-such a shop'. Well, quite a lot of people just go, and they will inquire in that shop, and if they can't get it they will just come back and say, 'Sorry, I couldn't get it.' But others will actually go and search in other shops, or they will check that what I want is actually still available or not; they might find out that it is no longer available, it is no longer made. They will then perhaps just phone me to that effect and say, 'I can't get that but I can get something near to it. Is that good enough?' They will take that sort of initiative. But a lot of people just come straight back and say, 'No, I couldn't get it.' Do you see what I'm getting at? It's quite basic things like that; well, sometimes, quite often, of a more elaborate type, a more important type. But I sometimes am surprised how little people actually think, and how little initiative they show in this way.

[28]
Vessantara: Is it connected with some sort of questioning?

S: Some sort of questioning; an active, alert mind.

Cittapala: It seems to me, from what I've read about managerial skills, that that is actually what you are saying that the majority of Order Members lack: the ability to manage. Because to be a good manager in business, those sort of skills are the sort of things which captains of industry are

S: But the lack of that sort of skill seems to show itself in such ordinary, everyday ways. I am frankly really quite astonished, sometimes, how little well know-how people seem to have. But just a few people do have it, and they really stand out, and I know that those are people I can rely on. It is more that such people use their own intelligence. Others just carry out orders almost without thinking. But this minority of people, it is as though they have got a mind of their own which they can use in the situation. They are good in emergencies. You can trust them in emergencies. They can act very quickly, think very quickly, adapt themselves very quickly, take action very quickly and the right action where the majority of people would just

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Nanamoli IV: Tuscany'86

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Side 2

Also, of course, a certain amount of self-confidence is perhaps implied.

Cittapala: Do you think that this may be something which Vajraketu has been jumping up and down about?

S: I am not sure whether it is quite that that he is thinking of. I think he is definitely thinking in terms of more managerial skills, outwardgoingness. I am thinking much more, really, on a more basic human level, where people seem lacking in this sort of way that one would not really have expected people in the FWBO; even Order Members. It seems to be a lack of alertness, a lack of capacity to be on the ball, having one's wits about one.

Cittapala: It seems extraordinary; where people are developing spiritually, you would think that that would be something that would come with

S: Yes, one would have thought that. And those who have this aren't necessarily those who are best known within the Movement for 'spirituality'! just to make it more complicated!

Derek: Bhante, do you have any ideas as to why this should be the case?

S: I don't know! It's just a baffling sort of question, in a way. Perhaps I can guess it doesn't explain why some people have it, but perhaps it explains why some people don't have it: that we don't live in a sufficiently dangerous situation. We are like wild animals that have suddenly been domesticated and all their natural predators removed, and they just lose their alertness and all that sort of thing. This is all that I can think of as a possible explanation.

Perhaps it doesn't affect people outside the Movement all that much, I don't know. I am talking mainly about the people I come into contact with within the Movement, especially Order Members.

Padmapani: Bhante, I met it in ... those art projects. (?) Because people were doing a lot of manual work, there did seem to be a lot of common sense around.

S: There did seem?

[29]
Padmapani: There was. But that sort of seemed to go out the window, so to speak, when the project was finished. I am wondering if there is a connection between working, in a more crude sense, and that sense you were talking about.

S: This I am not sure of. I've never been particularly good in that sort of way; I can't mend a broken pipe or anything of that sort, never have been able to. I think it's more a capacity to deal with situations that I'm thinking of, I think it's more that; not so much practical jobs, but more the capacity to deal with situations, especially unforeseen situations. People often seem so helpless. Anyway, maybe I shouldn't dwell upon all this too much. Has anybody else sort of noticed it?

Voices: Yes.

Padmapani: I've also noticed to the contrary, to the credit of some Order Members I've worked with some Order Members and it's somehow we could move mountains together, virtually. I have noticed that, too.

Alan Turner: Bhante, just in connection with that. You have talked about the crucial situations. Do you think there is a tendency in the Movement to settle down a bit too much rather than to actively seek out the crucial situation?

S: I think there is something of that (in Britain, anyway; one has to exclude India from this). But I am just thinking of these common-sense-type situations that people seem often not able to meet.

: I am just wondering, where there is a necessity, whether people aren't somehow more obliged to respond when it is actually up to them to

S: Well, if you have to live by your wits, your wits become sharpened. It may be I don't know, I was going to say that in my case I was on my own in India, so that might have sharpened my wits; but on second thoughts, no, I don't think it was that at all. I just seemed able to deal with situations as they arose, and I seemed to know what to do even in quite unforeseen situations. It never seemed difficult.

Vessantara: I think a lot of it is to do with self-confidence. I think if you've got self-confidence you are prepared to apply your mind, and most situations are not that difficult. And if you haven't got it, you tend to look around and do the safe thing, or even go back and say,'I didn't get it, but I've covered my tracks, I did my best. I did what you said' which is the safe thing to do.

S: Right, yes. Also, perhaps, intelligence of a kind? But, yes, I certainly think lack of self-confidence has a lot to do with it in many cases. Not that I have ever thought of myself as a particularly self-confident person! I never used to think about it! I never used to think in those psychological terms when I was in India.

Sudhana: Would some of it perhaps be explained by people getting used to working in a different mode i.e. in the FWBO? You are usually giving when you are doing something that is, you are not being paid to do it, sums of money, etc. So I am wondering sometimes I've seen people move into coops and suchlike, and they've lacked the sort of common sense you are talking about. You see them working in co-ops and you think 'Is it because they are not sufficiently motivated emotionally?' So they don't really feel for that situation sufficiently, in order to get that more earthy kind of intelligence that you are talking about. It seems to correspond with an emotional state of mind.

S: Yes, I think there is definitely something in that, too. Yes.

[30]
Sudhana: So it follows that the more integrated person would develop this common sense as a matter of course.

S: Yes. Sometimes you don't rise to the occasion or exercise initiative or intelligence just due to lack of interest.

Sudhana: Lack of commitment, in a way.

S: Lack of commitment, in a way,yes. Anyway, perhaps we have spent long enough on that particular topic.

Derek: Back to the text, now. We were looking at the text this morning, we were , discussing the little bits in verse where Mara comes on the scene and there is an exchange between Mara and the Buddha. They seem to be fairly straightforward verses, but I was wondering what the actual relevance was of the verse to what happened in the rest of the passage.

S: Which particular verses are you referring to, which page?

Derek: There are two. There is the one on pp. 52 and 53.

S: One must bear in mind that, first of all, broadly speaking, very often verse passages are older than passages in prose. And sometimes one finds that verse passages occur in contexts where they don't quite seem to fit. You find this,for instance, with the Udana. It is almost as though the editor, so to speak, had these verses and he had to find a place for them somewhere. So I think, generally speaking, one must be prepared to find them not always fitting. But, in this particular instance, on pp. 5253, what makes you think that they don't fit, so to speak?

Derek: It's just that I can imagine him not being ...

S: I would say, in a way, it's not surprising that Mara does appear. Mara Appears, if he appears at all, on quite crucial occasions. He appears just before the Buddha's Enlightenment;

and here is the Buddha, he has just sent out his first sixty disciples, and they are going to preach the Dharma, they are going to undermine Mara's kingdom; so one would have expected Mara to appear at this moment, would one not? The Buddha has just said: 'Bhikkhus, I am free from all shackles whether human or divine.' But Mara says: 'You are bound by every shackle Whether human or divine,' as though he is trying to undermine the Buddha's confidence. Is that not what one would have expected Mara to try to do? I mean, if you had been Mara, what would you have done on that occasion? Would you have kept quiet on the occasion of these sixty arhants being sent out in all directions?

Derek: There was another connected point. We were wondering how to take Mara. Could we take him, in this context, as symbolizing something psychologically? Because if the Buddha is already Enlightened, it wouldn't be part of his own consciousness, would it?

S: Presumably not. But, of course, one mustn't forget that, according to general Buddhist tradition, including Theravada tradition, Mara can be understood in four ways. There are four Maras. You have come across this, I think at some time or other, haven't you? There is Kilesa Mara, that is Mara as the personification of the passions or defilements, Mara as a sort of personification of something subjective, something psychological. Then there is Macchu(?) Mara, Mara as the personification or embodiment of death. And then we've got Khanda Mara Mara as representing conditioned [31] existence itself; and then there's Mara the Devaputta, the Mara as what we might call a mythological being, an actually existing being from the traditional point of view, existing somewhere in the kamaloka, and in a way ruling over it, or in a sense even ruling over the whole of conditioned existence. So he is an actual figure in the Buddhist pantheon, to use that term; just like Indra or Brahma there is also Mara. So it can't be Kilesa Mara, because the Buddha has eliminated all kilesas. It seems most likely that it's Devaputta Mara, this being belonging to another realm as it were, who is opposed to the Dharma.

Derek: Do you think that this could be interpreted in a psychological way at all, as representing resistance on the part of the bhikkhus, or resistance on the part of people generally?

S: One could understand it in that way. But I don't suppose it seemed like that to the Buddha or anybody else who might have been around. The Buddha might well have experienced it as an actual presence, an actual personality. One can't rule that out. But, yes, it seems quite appropriate, coming back to the earlier part of the question, that Mara should appear on this occasion, or should manifest on this occasion.

Ratnaprabha: Bhante, you mentioned that Mara can sometimes be considered as the ruler of this world. I had always thought of him, in the Buddhist sense, as being rather a weak figure, nothing like the Christian Satan. I think you have perhaps made that point yourself.

S: Indeed, yes. But he is weak in relation to the Buddha and the arhants; he is not weak in relation to ordinary beings! He cuts a very sorry figure in the Pali Canon, but that is because he is always coming up against the Buddha and his Enlightened disciples. I think, if it was a question of coming up against unenlightened beings, it would be a very different story. You mustn't be misled by the fact that, in the Pali scriptures, Mara is always discomfited or nearly always but look who he's up against! So one mustn't be misled by that; yes, he cuts a very poor figure in the scriptures, but I am sure, on other occasions, he doesn't.

Vessantara: Presumably 'Mara' would be another way of describing the gravitational pull?

S: Yes, indeed. Yes, one could say that. Anyway, that's an aspect of Khanda Mara, perhaps. I think I did suggest or someone suggested, perhaps not me years ago, that it might be a good idea to sometimes think in terms of our own experiences in terms of encounters with Mara. There might have been all sorts of Mara trying to prevent your coming to Il Convento. There might have been a Mara trying to prevent you getting the necessary money together, or it might even be that Mara's daughters were trying to put a spoke in your wheel, who knows, to delay your coming hither? (Laughter.) Oh dear, what's all that about? (Loud laughter.) There's many a true word spoken in jest, apparently! So, you know, one can think of Mara in this sort of way, or rather think of the obstacles and difficulties of the spiritual life in terms of Mara's personal interest or personal intervention in your affairs.

Ratnaprabha: Bhante, isn't that in a way getting away from one's own personal responsibility for one's difficulties, by saying, 'Oh well, it's something else that's doing it to me,' rather than saying, 'I am placing these obstacles in my own way,' sort of thing?

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S: Well, sometimes it doesn't seem like that. You are making every effort, perhaps, to get say, to take that example all the money for your three months at Il Convento together, and all sorts of inexplicable things happen to prevent and frustrate you; so then, perhaps, you think, 'Maybe it's Mara. Maybe he's lurking behind the figure of the bank manager and whispering in his ear,' or something of that sort. Sometimes it does seem like that, that there is some sort of force, almost of a personal nature, frustrating your efforts. The other would be accounted for by Kilesa Mara, but this is Devaputta Mara. So perhaps there is a Devaputta Mara, as distinct from the Kilesa Mara. Maybe you can't reduce Mara to Kilesa Mara, or even Khanda Mara and Macchu Mara. Perhaps there is also this fourth category of Mara, an actual sentient being of this rather unskilful and malevolent type; or, at least, mischievous type. One can't rule out the possibility, I suppose.

: Given the occasions when Mara does tend to appear, could we draw the conclusion on principle that we are most likely to come under his attack or influence as we are going to leave the kamaloka or make a powerful spiritual effort?

S: Yes, Mara doesn't bother to attack those whom he has already enslaved. He doesn't bother to attack his faithful servants! It is when you try to get away that you feel what is otherwise called the gravitational pull. You don't feel the pull of gravity so much when you are sitting on a chair, but when you jump up into the air and start coming down especially if you are in an aeroplane that's crashing you feel it much more.

Peter: Can you suggest what we should do if we believe we are under attack from a Devaputta Mara?

S: Well, you can argue with him. I don't know if I should mention it, but I had an experience of that sort myself once. I have mentioned it in my unpublished memoirs they are only unpublished because the publishers didn't want to bring out those particular chapters but it started, significantly enough, when I started meditating; the first time I seriously meditated, which was in Delhi shortly after I arrived in India. I was only 19 then, and this was the first time, believe it or not, that I had actually sat down to meditate in a formal manner. Until then,

I had only been concerned with studying Buddhism and reading about it and writing about it. So I was just sitting and meditating, and suddenly this head appeared in front of me, which I can only describe as the head of Mara. I can see this head in my mind's eye even now. It was a quite old man; he must have been between 50 and 60, fairly dark complexioned; and a white stubble both on the chin and on the head,quite white. And his expression was that of someone who had led a quite wicked life; it was sort of stamped on his face. He had a sort of yellowy brown complexion. And, as I was sitting there meditating, he said it was just the head, sort of floating in mid-space, in front of me he said: 'Huh! You're wasting your time. All this meditation, it's just a waste of time, a sheer waste of time. You won't get anything out of it.' So I think perhaps I was slightly argumentative (laughter) and I said 'No! You're wrong. I know that you're wrong, because I'm getting something out of it here and now. That is my experience. So it's wrong to say that I'm wasting my time.' When I said that, he disappeared. So this is what I mean when I say you must argue with Mara, at least you must stand up to him; if he speaks to you, don't be afraid to speak to him. There was a sequel to this, because years later I met him again, as it were, but in a human form. The strange thing was I won't go into details but I met this person, and I knew at once it was the same face, it was the same sort of features, and it was that same Mara. Now, whether that Mara had possessed that person or whatever, I just don't know, but that was my actual experience. I recognized him immediately, and [33] I think he recognized me. Yes, it was in Nepal; that must have been in 1951, I think. So, yes, one can have these sort of experiences. And I don't think one well, one could say in my case it was my own unconscious doubts about the usefulness of meditation; I am not aware that I had any unconscious doubts, but then, of course, if they are unconscious you won't be aware of them. But I can't believe that that was just Kilesa Mara not that there weren't any kilesas there, but I regard that as a sort of encounter with something or someone who was in a sense actually there, not just reducible to my own mental states. I just mention that as an example of what you should do; you should stand up to Mara. Or you should recite a mantra; I didn't think of that then. I don't think I knew much about mantras at that time. I had another experience on the London tube, strange to say, while we are on the subject; it's just running in my mind. This was in the very early days of the FWBO yes, it's yet another crucial time! I was sitting in a tube train, and I happened to notice that there was someone just a little way along the carriage standing in the doorway with his back to me, wearing a dark suit; and as soon as I saw him I instantly knew 'This is a Mara.' I can't explain how, but I just knew it: 'That's a Mara.' So I kept my eye on him! He didn't turn round at all. I didn't look at him, I was just watching out of the corner of my eye in case he turned round; but he was just standing with his back to me, waiting for his station, and after two or three stops the doors opened and it was his station. So he very deliberately turned round, and he went like that at me, and then he jumped out and ran away very quickly! So I thought, 'Well; he must have been a Mara. He must have known that I had my eye on him.' An ordinary-looking chap, maybe about 40, dressed in a rather shabby dark suit. But the instant my eyes lit on him, even though he had his back to me, I knew: 'That's not a human being, that's a Mara.' But I can't rationalize it. Some people might say, 'It's completely crazy,' or '[You're] suffering from some kind of schizophrenia or something,' but that was definitely my experience, however it might be explained. I have had a few experiences like that.

Vessantara: Why did you just look at him out of the corner of your eye, then?

S: Because sometimes, if you are looking at someone intently, they sense it. So I wanted to keep my eye on him without alarming him, as it were. Apparently he must have felt it, anyway well, being a Mara!

Uttara: Were you wearing robes at the time, Bhante?

S: Yes, I was. I used to wear my I am pretty certain, I won't be absolutely certain, because that might have been the time when I was sort of, you know, beginning to wear ordinary dress outside. I won't be sure. But if I was, I would be wearing a sort of brown cloak over my yellow robe. Anyway, let's carry on.

Sin Choon: About dealing with Mara, ... experience, that reminds me of a Sinhalese monk, quite a high ... priest I won't mention any names says that meditation is wasting time, ... and effort. That's what the monk says. So how to deal with this Mara in yellow robe? He tells us, his disciples say, 'Meditation is a waste of time, just sitting on chairs and ... forwards and backwards.' How is one to deal with this, when somebody comes and tells you 'Meditation is a waste of time'? It is of human form. (?)

S: You can just say: 'I know it isn't a waste of time, because that is my experience. I actually find that I am benefited by it.' You should be able to say that.

Sin Choon: Because that chap is sort of very influential monk, so -

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S: Well, you have to build up your influence until it is greater than his! You can direct the attack and say: 'Look, he is supposed to be a monk, and he is directly contradicting the teaching of the Buddha according to all traditions. Why is he a monk? He is just an impostor if he is saying that sort of thing.' Be quite blunt and outspoken. You have just as much right to your opinion as he has to his, so to speak. One mustn't be overawed by someone's apparent position. One expects to hear people saying that meditation is a waste of time, but one doesn't expect to hear monks saying that!

Sin Choon: ... meditation is associated with madness, and meditators become crazy and that,you know. So that sort of thing ... people ...

S: Well, sometimes if people as it were meditate in the wrong sort of way say, do a lot of pranayama or something of that sort, it may affect them mentally. But that is not to say that meditation as such is going to have that effect. There used to be a bit of a scare of that sort around in London; when I arrived back in 1964, Mr Humphreys used to say that no one should meditate for more than five minutes it was dangerous. I was considered quite daring that I had meditation classes and used to allow people to meditate for 20 minutes at a time. It was considered quite risky! But some people build up that sort of scare, perhaps on the basis of someone's unpleasant experience. Sometimes someone is mentally disturbed already, or sometimes they get the wrong sort of teaching. But to say about meditation as such that it induces madness is absolute nonsense. If anything, it is those who don't meditate who are mad, not those who do. But I think sometimes in Buddhist countries or semi Buddhist countries, or where Buddhism is strong as an ethnic tradition, you will come up against people with all sorts of weird ideas; but you just have to challenge them, whatever their position may be, and not allow yourself to be intimidated by the fact that they are older than you or supposedly more learned than you, etc. I came up against this when I was in India; some Buddhist monks thought I was really quite eccentric in wanting to meditate or being interested in meditation. But one must have confidence that you are on the right path and you do know what you are talking about, and that you are not going to be browbeaten by some

pseudo-authority like Luther and the pope. The pope said, 'Who are you, just an ordinary monk, to question the tradition of the church and the authority of the pope?' But Luther said, in effect: 'I just can't help it. This is what I believe. This is what I see as the truth.' In the end, he won. Or at least he was not defeated.

Padmapani: Bhante, in Dhyana for Beginners I think this is from Goddard's Buddhist Bible there is a whole section devoted to the monks of the Tendai school in dhyana states having to get to grips with Mara; and [it is said] there are periods of the day given over to Mara, and then the monks have to recognize what period of the day it is, because these cause distractions in dhyana states. I was just wondering how that system fits in with

S: I am not sure about that. There are parallel traditions in other parts of the world. I don't remember any such tradition or teaching in the Pali Canon; but the Sufis have a teaching of this kind, that there are different kinds of spirit for the different times of day. And, of course, in the Christian tradition, there is what they call the noonday demon. Have you heard about that? That was a demon that was especially supposed to afflict monks in the desert at the time of noon. It was supposed to be the time when they were most susceptible to demonic influences. According to Indian or Vedic tradition, the early part of the afternoon is a period of lowered vitality. They say during the morning your vitality is building up, and then [35] during the afternoon it's tailing off. That is why in India, traditionally, people don't eat in the middle of the day. They eat in the morning and they eat in the evening. But I think it's true to say that the early afternoon is that period when you are in a sense at your lowest ebb. Your vitality is lowest. It is not a good time for meditation not for beginners say, between 1 o'clock and 3 o'clock in the afternoon, it is not a good time. And because that is a period of lowered vitality, it could be then that you are more susceptible to a sort of invasion from your own unconscious mind; you may have sort of semi-daydreams and you may perhaps be more open to the attacks of Mara at that particular time. But, with regard to this Tendai tradition of specific demons or specific Maras for particular hours of the day, I am not sure whether that is actually a Buddhist tradition or something taken from Chinese tradition. It may be that at particular hours of the day depending on the prevailing atmosphere or influence you are more exposed to one particular type of as it were temptation than at another. That may be so. I can't say that I have looked into it sufficiently to be able to say. But I do know about the noonday demon, and I do know from what I have observed on retreats that that period of well, let's say from 2 to 4 o'clock is a time of definitely lowered energy. Oh dear! more words spoken in jest being true ones? But it's a natural thing, isn't it? I think in the night, also, at the corresponding hour; I think quite a high proportion of people die at that time of the night. I think I am right in saying that it is that time that that is roughly correct. But certainly it is a time of lowered vitality. People who die natural deaths, as it were, tend to die at that time. So it is perhaps good to I was going to say study one's natural rhythms in this respect; but I have a vague recollection that, some years ago, I read a book which dealt with circadian rhythms, is it called? yes; so that these low periods that we sometimes experience are those periods when, the low points of, say, a number of different biological cycles, perhaps, happen to coincide. So one should be on the lookout, perhaps, for these sort of things. You may notice in your own experience that there are certain times of day, normally, when your energies are definitely aroused and when you can do certain things more easily and happily, and certain other times of day when your energies are at a low ebb, and when you shouldn't perhaps try to do certain things certainly if you can help it; without, of course, being too precious about it.

Douglas: Bhante, how do you distinguish the Mara Devaputta figure from the Satan figure of

the Christians?

S: I suppose in principle one doesn't. Satan has a slightly different history, perhaps a slightly different character from Mara; but they seem much of a muchness. Maras are,of course I'm not sure that this is actually stated, but it is certainly implied are human beings reborn, just as Indras and Brahmas are human beings reborn; whereas Satan, according to the generally accepted account, is a being who was originally created as an angel, but who fell and who became the devil, in fact the chief of the devils or one of the chief devils. So the histories are a little different, because the so to speak theological-cum-mythological context is rather different. But ... is of a sentient being who is the embodiment of evil, rather than of good, so to that extent there is a resemblance.

Sudhana: I was just wondering if you ever had cults of Mara like you do of Satan?

S: No, that's interesting; no, I've never heard of that at all. In the same way, you don't find blasphemy in Buddhism. You can understand it if you read my booklet Buddhism and Blasphemy; you will easily see why there should not have been a Mara cult,

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just as there was not a practice or habit of blasphemy. Buddhism is not the sort of religion which sets up those sort of reactions, that sort of rebellion, as it were.

Peter: In terms of the Six Realms, what sort of realm does Mara inhabit?

S: He is a Devaputra.

Peter: In the heaven realm?

S: Yes, in a sense he is in the heaven realm, the lower reaches of a heaven realm. He doesn't seem to have a realm of his own; I suppose it's because well, he is like Satan in the Old Testament, he walks up and down and walks around all over the place. He doesn't confine himself to a particular locality.

Peter: So he has become a deva due to his good efforts in a previous life? (Laughter.)

S: Well, he wasn't very good, so he doesn't occupy a very high realm. I am not sure whether he is actually, as I said, given a realm of his own, in the sense, say, that Indra is. But I suppose, yes, he must have performed some good deeds, but something must have gone wrong, as it were. It is also said this is perhaps an interesting point that a woman cannot become a Mara. A woman cannot become a Brahma; I don't know what the feminists would say to this. One maybe cancels out the other. Perhaps we won't go into the implications of that particular teaching or tradition. But that is the case; that the woman cannot become a Mara and cannot become a Brahma. In other words, men are more extreme creatures than women.

Side 3

Ratnaprabha: Could you see any place, in considering Mara, for looking at him in the way that Blake looked at Satan that is, to see him as a sensual and harnessable force, if you see what I mean?

S: Well, yes and no, because in order to do that I think you would have to put Mara within perhaps the purely Vajrayanic context or perspective; and perhaps this is what happens in the case of the wrathful deities; perhaps they have got, in a sense, some external features or attributes of Mara, but they have been transformed. Well, it is said in the Vajrayana that Kilesa is Bodhi; the five skandhas are the five wisdoms, and so on. Mara is Buddha; I believe that is actually said. So, yes, one can regard him as a harnessable energy except that then one is regarding him more as just Kilesa Mara. But there is the Devaputra Mara, too, which I think shouldn't be sort of psychologised away too easily.

Ratnaprabha: But do you think that is what Blake was doing with Satan psychologising him away? Wasn't he, in a sense, seeing him as a real being?

S: No, if Blake psychologised him away, he wasn't seeing him as a real being. Buddhist tradition doesn't deny that there is a psychological state that can be regarded as a person such as Mara; but that does not mean that there is [not?], apart from the psychological state so personified, an actual person in the cosmic hierarchy, who is Mara. Do you see what I mean?

Ratnaprabha: Yes.

S: I am not so sure whether Blake did completely psychologise the figure of Satan. Perhaps he also believed in an objective Satan?

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Ratnaprabha: If I understand The Marriage of Heaven and Hell correctly, he seems to be saying, in a sense, that human beings can be divided into two classes, which you may call angels and devils; and that he feels that the devils have as much, if not more, to contribute to society, human culture and so on, as the angels do.

S: I doubt whether the Buddhist tradition would take that view that the Maras have as much to contribute as the devas. It seems a different point of view, one might say. The background of Christianity is quite different. But one could say, from a Buddhist point of view, that just as you can have human beings who are embodiments of unskilful rather than skilful mental states, can you not have non-human beings, of a deva-like nature, who are the embodiments of unskilful rather than skilful mental states?

Sanghapala: Bhante, are poltergeists Devaputta Maras or something else?

S: No, I would say that is something else. As far as we know, poltergeists have, if not human origins, human connections. They seem to represent loose energy of actually existing human beings manifesting in that particular way.

Sanghapala: Human beings that were once existing or that are now existing?

S: Now existing, yes.

: The phenomena usually occur around very disturbed adolescents; that is usually the situation in a household. Usually, not always.

Jayamati: Bhante, would not one distinction between the Devaputra Mara and the devils in

Christian mythology be that the devils are objects of fear? that is to say that within that teaching they can actually do harm to the being, whereas the Devaputra Mara wouldn't be such a source of fear because it is not of itself able to actually inflict harm?

S: Well, as I say, in the Buddhist sense Devaputra Mara is not a source of fear to Buddhas and arhants, but he might be a source of fear to ordinary human beings. The Tibetans used to be very afraid of evil spirits of all kinds. So, no, I don't think one can really make that distinction. Of course, in a way, the main theological difference is that a Mara as an ex-human being can be reborn as a human being, a Mara can eventually gain Enlightenment, not as a Mara but as a being who was at one time a Mara. Maybe we'll all be Maras at some time or other! But the devil, in orthodox Christian belief, cannot be redeemed; he is a devil for ever and ever, and lives in hell for ever and ever. That probably is the main as it were theological difference. So I think the thrust of what I am saying is that you shouldn't take these sort of passages too literally, in the sense that you think that Mara is not very important, not very powerful. He is not shown as very important or very powerful in these particular passages, but then, as I said, look who he's up against. It doesn't mean that he doesn't represent or embody forces, so far as ordinary human beings are concerned, that are quite powerful especially if he represents the gravitational pull, the strength of which we experience all the time. But I don't think Mara is anything to be afraid of in the spooky sort of sense. There is no need to as it were walk into a dark room and be afraid, saying Mara might be lurking there waiting to spring out on you. Mara doesn't work quite in that sort of way, not even Devaputra Mara. And if one is in a reasonably positive frame [39] of mind, there is no reason why Maras should have very much to do with one. Or even if they do, if you are in that positive frame of mind, they can't really do very much.

Jayamati: I suppose, really my own concern is that the feeling is that the devils, the teaching as I've understood it from the Christian point of view is that they can't be resisted; whereas a Devaputra Mara can.

S: Oh, I wouldn't say that. Christians believe that holy water, for instance, prayers, protect you from the devil. Even the crucifix, if you hold it up, will protect you from the devil.

Uttara: I used to get quite a lot of very strong confrontations in my dreams with what I can only describe as [devils] or enter into sort of a room where I'd detect it. There was actual evil in the room.

S: Yes, this question of evil is quite interesting though here we are getting on to quite a big topic. There is no real concept of evil in Buddhism in the way that there is in Christianity. Papa (?) doesn't really correspond to it; akusala doesn't really correspond to it. It may have been that Buddhism's experience was as it were of a more happy type; but if one considers, you know, some of the things that have happened in the world, even in the present century, really quite dreadful things initiated by people who do seem to have been, in many respects, very evil, one can't help wondering whether the traditional Buddhist conception of, say, papa or akusala is as it were sufficiently dark, whether it does sufficient justice to what human beings are capable of at their worst. It is as though, even in the present century, there has been a sort of revelation of what people are capable of. Because, in the last century, when they believed very much in progress, they believed that humanity, especially civilized humanity, which they thought of as Western European humanity had emerged from barbarism. It was civilized; there were certain things it couldn't do. But, in this century, we have discovered

that, no, that is far from being the case; and that experience has given a tremendous shock or jolt to our belief in progress, and even our faith in the basic goodness of human nature, our sort of Rousseauistic belief in that. We have realized that there are sort of depths of evil, certainly as possibilities, in human nature. So sometimes it seems as though Buddhism, perhaps because very often people in India were of a more positive type at that time, didn't plumb those depths sufficiently. Do you see what I'm getting at? So Mara, yes, does cut a sorry figure; he isn't very impressive. It's as though he is, as I have said in one of my writings, I think, mischievous rather than wicked. But the devil in Christianity doesn't represent just mischievousness. So I think this whole question of evil needs re-examination from a Buddhist point of view; that perhaps historical Buddhism has not realized, always, what human beings were really capable of. But we have been reminded of it in this century, and we can't ignore that.

Uttara: So, like in the dreams I had, maybe it's a case of I was getting in touch with my own potential to be evil, to feel it's a sort of going down to a level of the human

S: It's not just that. It's more complicated than that, because under this concept of the devil, or evil, in the West, we've included some things which might be regarded actually as positive rather than negative, as good rather than bad. Do you see what I mean? For instance, the devil is associated with the idea of disobedience. He fell, like Adam, because he disobeyed God. Well, one could look upon disobedience, under certain circumstances, as a positive quality. Blake regarded the devil as representing basically energy, and the angel as representing that which repressed [40] energy, which held it down. So we wouldn't necessarily regard energy per se as evil. I mean one can make an evil use of it, but energy by itself is surely not evil? So we have to bear in mind that the devil is a quite complex sort of being, or concept in Christianity. It does include what we would regard as unskilfulness from a Buddhist point of view, but perhaps it includes other elements which, if not actually skilful, are at least not unskilful. So, if you do have a sort of dream experience and you encounter the devil or a devil, you are not necessarily just in contact with pure evil; you can also be in contact with those forces or energies which traditionally Christianity regards as evil and as associated with the figure of the devil.

Sanghapala: You said that Devaputta Maras aren't necessarily to be found in dark rooms. They don't operate in that way. In what way do they operate? I think they [are?] to be found in dark rooms...

S: I suppose they could just appear before you in the way that I described from my own experience. I think usually they work in more indirect ways, just to place obstacles in the path of your spiritual life and tempt you; perhaps they work through Kilesa Mara. If you don't believe in them, they are less likely to appear, perhaps not that they won't manifest in any way at all.

Sanghapala: Because you have said, Bhante, when things are going well for us, that is the time to watch, because maybe Mara will stop you and ...

S: Yes, right. Well, one can understand that either literally, in terms of Devaputra Mara, or just as it were metaphorically in terms of Kilesa Mara; or either of the other two Maras.

Sanghapala: Bhante, what beings hang out in bus stations late at night? It's been kind of

S: Sorry, I missed that.

Sanghapala: Beings that are to be found hanging round bus stations late at night seem unhealthy. Have you noticed this?

S: I never hang around bus stations. (Laughter.) I shall have to take your word for it! Maybe there are some localities which have an eerie sort of atmosphere, an odd atmosphere, or even slightly negative atmosphere. I think one can't deny that. But what is the reason for that, it's very difficult to tell. Well, we know that there are localities which have a very positive or refreshing atmosphere. Some people are more sensitive to these things than others.

Peter: Bhante, would it be fair to distinguish Christian devils from Buddhist Maras by saying the Christian devils see their job as to lead you into a hell state and Mara as attempting to keep you out of positive mental states?

S: Yes; as far as I know there is no suggestion in Buddhist literature that Mara wants to drag you down to his own unhappy level. Mara is not a hell being. Mara is definitely in a lower heaven rather than in hell. Also, which is interesting, Mara, of course, is often identified with the kama deva, that is to say what we would call the god of love. So, yes, in that sense, too, he is rather different from the Christian devil. There are 'hells' in Buddhism, as you know, but Mara doesn't live in the hells particularly. If he lives anywhere, he lives in one of the lower heavens. So that is an important difference.

Cittapala: So what would be his basic motive, then, for getting in the way?

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S: I suppose you ought to ask Mara! Well, why do people get in the way? Why do they? I mean other human beings sometimes get in the way, apparently, for no other reason than that they enjoy getting in the way. Maybe Mara is just that type of being. If you have had any experience of life, you must have met some people who just enjoy being difficult and obstructing, just for the pure I was going to say hell of it but maybe that's (laughter) the fun of it, since it's Mara. But there are such people, aren't there? It is an expression of their own very disturbed mental state. But perhaps there are disembodied beings of this kind. One can it's difficult to say exactly why they do it as it is to say exactly why certain human beings behave in an analogous way. Sometimes human beings of that sort seem a bit mad, a bit insane.

Cittapala: I was just thinking that you advised us to argue with Mara if we happened to meet him. Sometimes it helps in an argument to know where your opponent is coming from.

S: Well, in the example I gave you, I knew where he was coming from, so I replied accordingly! If he speaks, maybe he will make his position clear and you can deal with it accordingly. I remember that I didn't experience any fear on that occasion at all. But I won't go into the details a few years later I had an experience where I saw a figure that was completely positive not a Mara at all but I experienced fear. So I thought about that subsequently, and I came to the conclusion that that more spiritual being was more threatening than the as it were evil being, because the good being, the spiritual being, threatened one's ego itself, which was a much more terrible threat. But Mara is not threatening to the ego in that way, because he is on the same level. So sometimes I think you can experience fear in the presence of as it were good beings, spiritual beings, and not

experience it in the presence of evil beings. So it is really quite ridiculous to be afraid of ghosts or anything of that sort. What can they do? They can't do anything! I once had the idea this is going a bit off the track of writing a short story about a ghost who was frightened by a human being! They probably are much more afraid of us than we are of them! It's like the snakes; you know, human beings are terrified of snakes, but snakes are much more afraid of human beings, and get out of their way as quickly as possible. So we don't really need to be afraid. We've got a bit off the track; let's get back on to it. But there was this bit about Mara in the text, so we could hardly avoid him altogether.

Ratnaprabha: This is my question back in the text, but it's to do with what Mara actually says.

S: Oh, he says quite a lot, doesn't he? In fact, he speaks in verse. Mara is a poet, too. No wonder the Sinhalese bhikkhus mistrust poetry!

Ratnaprabha: The particular thing I had in mind was that he refers to The shackle in the air that has Its hold upon the mind. I found this slightly cryptic. It's at the top of p. 53.

S: I'd have to look at the Pali.

Ratnaprabha: I've got Woodward's translation of that same verse.

S: What does Woodward say?

Ratnaprabha: In the very air is bondage And the mind runs to and fro.

[42]
S: It could be that the word is akasa, which means, of course, 'open space', the sort of open space of the mind, as it were. I think one is not to take 'air' too literally. It's 'In the sphere or the realm of the mind there are shackles.' I think it means, really no more than that. So Mara is threatening to bind the Buddha with mental shackles. How can there be a shackle in the air, in the sense of the atmosphere, which has a hold upon the mind? It must be a shackle in a, so to speak, mental sphere that has a hold upon the mind; so a mental shackle. Sad and disappointed, he vanished at once. Because, if you recognize Mara as such, he disappears. He appears many times in the Pali Canon. There are some whole sections devoted to him. There is a book, by Trevor Ling I think it is, called Mara and the Mythology of Evil; we have it in the Order Library at Padmaloka, if anyone is interested in following this up.

Sin Choon: Bhante, when the first few disciples asked to Go Forth, it seems that the Buddha simply said, 'Come, bhikkhu', and did not insist that they should shave their hair or anything. But later on it says that when he authorized the bhikkhus to give Going Forth and admission into the Sangha, the first thing he says that the hair and the beard should be shaved off. I just wondered whether that practice, shaving off hair and beard, is specifically Buddhist practice, or can you ... ?

S: It seems not. It seems that it was the practice of other sramanic groups, even some of the brahminical groups. There is, for instance, an Upanishad called the Upanishad of the Shaven-Headed One Mandukhya Upanishad. So, no, it was not a distinctively Buddhist practice. Many of the practices and customs we think of as Buddhist were not in fact distinctively Buddhist. They were general Indian customs and practices; even the saffron

coloured robe. That was worn by other groups in the Buddha's day.

Sin Choon: It seems that there were rules that those who Go Forth should firstly shave off his head.

S: I think the reason was that it had come to be a sort of uniform, so that the householders could recognize the parivrajakas, the wanderers, and perhaps invite them for a meal. It seems to have been more like that. It certainly was not a distinctively Buddhist practice. How many questions left?

Vessantara: One. Ratnaprabha?

Ratnaprabha: Did I have another question apart from the one I have just asked?

Vessantara: Something about ordered effort and ordered attention.

Ratnaprabha: Ah. It says on page 54: It is with ordered attention, with ordered effort, that I have reached and have realized the supreme deliverance. I just wondered if these were technical terms and referred to anything particular 'ordered attention and ordered effort'.

S: I think they are semi-technical. I can't remember the Pali. It certainly isn't a standard translation. I can't guess what it might particularly signify; one would need to look at the original text and look it up in the dictionary. I think, as far as I recollect, it is sometimes translated more as 'systematic attention' 'attention in order'. Do you see what I mean? Systematically, stage by stage or item by item.

[43]
Vessantara: The Path of Regular Steps?

S: In a way, yes; in a way. For instance, if you pay ordered attention I imagine, as far as I remember systematic attention, to your bodily movements, your emotional states, your thoughts etc., that is paying systematic or ordered attention. I think this is what is meant here. But to be quite sure you should check with the text. Have we got to the end of chapter IV yet, or ? No, we haven't come to the Jatilas, have we? The Jatilas do come into this chapter.

: Jatilas?

S: The fire-worshipping ascetics. Yes, I was expecting there might be some questions about them, but you haven't done them yet?

Vessantara: No.

S: All right, we shall see, then.

[44]
20 October '86

Vessantara: We have been carrying on studying. Most of the groups have got up to round about the Fire Sermon. So, firstly, Ratnaprabha, about an earlier episode.

Ratnaprabha: After the young men in the wood in the episode ..., after they have met , the Buddha, he asks them: 'Which is better for you that you should seek a woman or that you should seek yourselves?' Discussing this in the group, we decided that seeking the right woman seems to represent the chief quest, even a sort of mythic quest, for most young men. Do you think that we are faced with such a stark alternative, an either/or alternative, as the Buddha seems to suggest to these young men: either one is seeking a woman or one is seeking oneself?

S: Did you say 'stark'?

Ratnaprabha: Yes. It seemed rather stark!

S: I am not quite sure what you mean by stark.

Ratnaprabha: Well, perhaps the black-and-whiteness of it. It's as if there are definitely two paths leading in different directions, one of which involves the following through of this sort of myth of finding the right woman, to fill their emptiness or something like that but usually it is played out in much more minor ways than that; and the other one is seeking, I suppose, self-knowledge or something like that.

S: But you are to begin with reading perhaps quite a bit into the Buddha's statement.

Ratnaprabha: Yes. We were trying to make it run(?) into our own situation, I suppose. (Pause. Laughter.)

S: Does seeking the woman represent some mythical or mystical quest, or is it something more basic than that? (Laughter. Pause) Read the little episode again, just a few lines. I am just trying to get my bearings in the midst of all this mythology!

Ratnaprabha: As they were wandering about in the wood they saw the Blessed One sitting at the root of a tree. They went up to him and asked: 'Lord, has the Blessed One seen a woman?' 'Boys, what have you to do with a woman?' They told him what had happened. 'How do you conceive this, then; which is better for you, that you should seek a woman or that you should seek yourselves?'

S: It seems very reasonable. It doesn't seem black and white to me, because he says 'better'. Because black and white suggests you know, one alternative is totally unacceptable, and the other is totally acceptable, but here the Buddha is simply saying 'better'. So perhaps the contrast isn't as stark as some of you thought. That's just an initial point, as it were; because he does say 'better', which suggests that the other alternative isn't wholly bad. This is looking at it in a quite logical, even literal, way; but perhaps we have to start with that before we begin to interpret things. [45] So I suppose one couldn't deny that seeking for oneself was better than seeking for anything purely external. But what about this 'mythical' business? Do you think the Buddha had that in mind, that by 'woman' he meant more than just woman in the ordinary sense? Even if he had some idea of 'woman' as some anima archetype, that obviously still is to be sought within oneself, rather than outside. So where does that leave the question?

Ratnaprabha: When I said 'stark alternative', I was thinking not so much in terms of one being

wholly bad and one being wholly good, but it being a question of either you do the one or you do the other. It's as if they are two mutually exclusive alternatives.

S: One must, of course, recall the actual situation. The Buddha was concerned to lead all of those young men, perhaps, in the direction of the Dharma, in the direction of Enlightenment, and he perhaps took that as his starting point: that the spiritual quest begins when you start looking within. There is an Upanishadic passage to that effect. I forget which Upanishad it is it might be around the time of the Buddha which says 'The Creator created the senses turned outwards, but some wise man looked within and saw the truth there.' So it's as though the Buddha is suggesting that it would be better to look within, rather than looking without. He is not suggesting that one should never look without, but he is suggesting that one should look within, that it is better to look within, better to go in search of oneself. And perhaps that is the particular strategy that he adopted to get those young men on to the spiritual path. Perhaps one can't generalize too much just from these sort of practical instances, where the Buddha is perhaps exercising his skilful means, rather than laying down some principle or doctrine. It is also, one might say, a question of emphasis. If one is over-oriented towards any external object especially, perhaps, towards woman if that occupies too central a place in one's life, one becomes unable to go in pursuit of oneself, and the inner life becomes very difficult, any spiritual life becomes very difficult. So this is perhaps where the 'better' comes in that external objects can't be completely excluded from one's life, but they have to take a subordinate place, from the spiritual point of view.

Ratnaprabha: This idea of a 'mythic' quest comes about partly through the way one is used to hearing sort of biblical texts used, whereby you read a story and take out one phrase which is here 'Which is better for you, that you should seek a woman or that you should seek yourselves?' and this sort of gets used as a text for a sermon, sort of thing, and one tries to sort of get out an enormous amount of implication from that one text.

S: Yes. Well, this is what is called the allegorical mode of interpretation. Christian theologians, Christian thinkers or commentators, developed the idea that the texts of scripture had a number of different levels of meaning. There was the literal, the historical, the allegorical, the anagogical, the mystical. The allegorical was a very favourite one. I happened to be going last night through that little work Spiritual Friendship by Aelred, and there is not much of allegorical interpretation there; but there is a little bit. There is a very famous text in the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's, which apparently Cistercian commentators expatiated on at great length and from which they drew all sorts of allegorical and mystical meanings, whereas the literal meaning of it is quite straightforward and even mundane; the text being 'Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth'. They wrote reams on that! So, yes, you are quite right; but Buddhist texts have never been treated quite in that way, even though there is a distinction made, especially in the Yogacara, between the direct meaning and the indirect meaning of a text. But there has never been that [46] systematical allegorical interpretation of the Buddhist scriptures that there has been of the Christian scriptures, especially the Old Testament. Perhaps it is a pity, because it is rather nice to embroider texts in that sort of way; you can get all sorts of wonderful meanings out of them. Whether they were originally there in the mind of I shouldn't say 'the author'; I should say God, because he inspired the scriptures or not, in a way is irrelevant. There has been a sort of systematic work written on this way of looking at the scriptures by Northrop Frye some of you know this, I think called The Great Code; the Great Code being that of the Bible as allegorically interpreted. And this was Blake's way of looking at the Bible, wasn't it? and he spun his own system of allegory, so to speak,

partly from biblical material. But whether that is a valid way of looking at Buddhist scriptures is entirely another matter. I must say I feel personally sympathetic towards allegorical interpretations, having indulged in a few of them myself occasionally, not systematically. But even though one decided that the Buddhist scriptures, say the Pali Canon, was subject to allegorical interpretation, or that it would be a good thing to subject it to allegorical interpretation I don't know quite how you would do that with the Abhidhamma Pitaka, of course we would have to recognize, none the less, that it was a departure, that it was a development of Buddhist tradition, that it would represent, yes, a new departure, one might say. I don't mind attempting an allegorical interpretation of that passage, but I probably would need a little time to think it over and get a little inspiration and all that sort of thing. The woman could stand for all sorts of things, couldn't she? depending on whether you looked at her literally, historically, allegorically, anagogically or mystically!

Vessantara: What does 'anagogically' mean?

S: It's sort of this is only very rough and ready in accordance with the sort of law of correspondences, you know, 'as above, so below', so to speak. Because allegorical interpretations were not original with the Christians, you realize that? The Neoplatonists went in for such things. There is that work by Porphyry which some of you know of, I am sure you have heard about The Cave of the Nymphs? but even before Porphyry there was Philo Judaeus, who gave allegorical interpretations of the Pentateuch. So it didn't start with Christianity. There seems to be a definite reason why scripture, or a sacred text, is interpreted allegorically. That happens when the literal meaning, for one reason or another, becomes unacceptable conflicts with a more developed moral sense. At the same time, it is part of the text of scripture, so it cannot be discarded. It has to be interpreted. This is what the later Greeks found with the myths of the gods and goddesses of Olympus; they were not at all edifying myths, so they had to be interpreted. Those sort of allegorical interpretations became a sort of literary form. Bacon Sir Francis Bacon has got a work called The Wisdom of the Ancients, in which he gives his own interpretations of many of the most famous of the ancient Greek myths; but his interpretations are almost entirely ethical and political, especially political. At the Renaissance period, those sort of interpretations were also quite popular. So this is how allegory seems to have originated. Perhaps, in the case of Buddhism, since its scriptures did not contain ancient, pre-Buddhistic literature which Buddhists felt the need of explaining away in certain respects, allegorical interpretation didn't develop. Supposing, for instance, it had happened in the case of Buddhism as happened with Christianity - you know, [47] Christianity took over the Old Testament; it didn't just have the New Testament, mainly the record of the life and teaching of Christ, it had the Old Testament, too, which in some ways had really nothing to do with Christianity at all; but none the less, for various historical reasons, they were as it were lumbered with it. Some of the early Gnostic teachers like Marcian tried to abandon the Old Testament, but the church wasn't having any of that. So eventually the Christian Bible comprised the New Testament and the Old Testament. But there was much in the Old Testament that just had to be explained away, so allegorical interpretation was called for; not that the literal, historical level of meaning was altogether rejected, but emphasis was placed more on the allegorical. So supposing the same sort of thing had happened in the case of Buddhism; supposing, bound up with the Tripitaka, we had the four Vedas. Well, Buddhists would have found it necessary to set to work to explain away quite a lot of those Vedic teachings and texts in the light of the higher Buddhist teaching. You would therefore have developed an allegorical mode of interpretation. This happened to some extent with the Vajrayana, because the Vajrayana took over all sorts of

popular Indian religious magical practices, but gave them, so to speak, an allegorical interpretation. It took over the four chief rites, for instance, magical rites of prospering and pacifying and fascinating and destroying, but gave them a spiritual meaning. Perhaps the reason why this allegorical mode of interpretation didn't develop in Buddhism was that in the Buddhist scriptures there was nothing that was in urgent need of allegorical interpretation. There is just a verse here and a verse there. For instance, in the Dhammapada you've all read the Dhammapada? there's a verse there which is definitely allegorical and cannot possibly be taken in a literal sense: When one kills mother and father. Who is mother? Craving. Who is father? Ignorance. And also, I forget how many, I think six kshatriya kings well, the six senses. You see what I mean? But that is a very exceptional instance, and it's obviously artificially allegorical. But no reason why we shouldn't, even at this late period of Buddhist history, set to work and allegorize anything that we feel needs as it were explaining away. But that is a little different, that allegorization, from trying to read a certain amount of, say, symbolism into certain episodes which don't actually call for allegorization. We do this with literary texts, don't we, quite extensively, these days? So there is no reason why we shouldn't perhaps wonder, at least, whether whatever the Buddha himself might have meant the search for woman here might not have some sort of mythical, let us say, overtones. But I don't feel quite prepared to make any pronouncement about that particular passage in that respect just yet. Did anyone have any suggestions to make in this regard, in the course of the study group?

Ratnaprabha: There were just some sort of vague hints, like the fact that they were all in a dark wood, and that they are enjoying themselves carelessly, it says, and one who loses his money. But we didn't really come to any conclusions, I don't think.

S: You could definitely allegorize money, or see a sort of mystical significance in that. And of course, the dark wood the dark wood in which Dante finds himself at the beginning of The Divine Comedy. Perhaps someone should give it some thought and perhaps even produce a talk on it.

Cittapala: Could you explain in a little more detail how allegorical interpretation differs from the same treatment you give the Buddha's biography in your lecture on Archetypal Symbolism in the Biography of the Buddha?

[48]
S: Hmm. Usually, in allegory, there is a sort of point-by-point correspondence between certain qualities or virtues or vices, and so on and persons. It is more like a sort of fable. Probably, in English, one of the best known examples of allegory is Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. You relate a sort of story about persons which really tells you something about the relations between, say, moral and spiritual qualities. Allegory is more like that. It isn't necessarily at all mystical; it doesn't involve symbolism. It can be quite highly artificial, even. Bunyan's isn't; Bunyan's allegory is very, very much alive. And he presents it in what he calls the similitude of a dream, which again is another sort of literary device.

Tom: This question arose from the episode of the Naga Serpent and the fire , chamber. We wondered if you had any ideas as to what the Naga Serpent was a symbol for in the fire worshippers' tradition.

S: I was wondering if this question would come up. It is a sort of obvious one. Here, of course, the question does arise how literally is one to take this whole episode. Fire

worshippers one can take quite literally, because, yes, there was a Vedic tradition of fire worship, as it were, and we know that there were these houses or chambers or whatever where the sacred fire was kept, where it was tended, and the cult of the sacred fire, having analogies perhaps with the Zoroastrian cult of the sacred fire. And it seems quite reasonable, quite rational, quite historically possible, that the Buddha should have converted these bands of fire-worshipping ascetics. But what about that Naga? If you want to look at it sort of rationalistically, it is quite possible that there was a big snake there that the Buddha tamed and caught in his bowl. But that is not actually what the story, or the legend, or well, the text says. Apparently, this was a monstrous, dragon-like Naga there that emits fire and smoke, and there we really are in the realm of legend and myth. That it really means is very difficult to say; because probably we find it difficult to accept it literally. It sounds a bit like something out of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, doesn't it? this sort of fire-emitting dragon of which everybody is afraid except the Buddha. Of course, one could, I suppose accept it completely literally and say in those days there were such creatures. There has been some attempt to explain these ancient myths and legends of St. George and the Dragon type, and Perseus and the sea monster type, as actually based on folk reminiscences of gigantic lizards and so on that did live in prehistoric times. Well, that is not impossible, but I don't think they could have lingered quite down to the time of the Buddha, except perhaps in a sort of Loch Ness monster type of fashion. But, even so, you've got to explain how the Buddha tamed him and reduced him in size. So it is as though you've got this legendary and mythical element worked into what seems to be a quite reasonable and acceptable historical framework. So it's very difficult to say what one is to do with this. It can be allegorised, I suppose at least, I could try; perhaps not wholly successfully. On the one hand, you've got this Naga, this dragon-like being that everybody thinks has eaten the Buddha up or something; so it is something that other people find very impressive, very awe-inspiring and fearful. But the Buddha doesn't find it like that at all. In a way, that is analogous to the Buddhist treatment of the concept of God do you see what I mean? Buddhism as it were cuts God down to size. Do you remember that episode where oh, what's his name? one of the Buddha's disciples goes up into heaven and asks Mahabrahama a question, and he says, 'I am the Great Brahma, I am the omniscient Great Brahma, I know everything, I am all-powerful,' and the monk says, 'No, I didn't ask you that. I asked you such-and-such a question.' And in the end, he takes the monk by the hand and takes him to one side, away from all the other gods, and says, 'Well, I don't know the answer but I didn't [49] like to admit it in front of all these gods. You'd better go and see the Buddha and ask him if he knows; he's sure to know.' So in this way God is cut down to size. So one might say that in this Naga episode something is being cut down to size well, the Naga; but what does the Naga represent? Perhaps it represents some unconscious content which ordinary people find quite impressive, quite awe-inspiring, quite overpowering, but which the Buddha does not find so, which the Buddha is able as it were to absorb and assimilate and integrate. Perhaps I am only offering this as a suggestion you could interpret or allegorize this figure or image of the Naga in that sort of way. But quite clearly here you've got the historical and the legendary, or even mythical, sort of coalescing, and it is not easy to separate the one out from the other completely. But quite clearly, it is difficult to take that part of the text absolutely at its face value. But what was it that gave rise to that legend or myth, it's very difficult to say. Perhaps the fire-worshipping ascetics represented to ordinary folk something mysterious, something rather awe-inspiring, something rather weird; and that is symbolized by the figure of the Naga. But the Buddha as it were exorcised that fear, as it were, that they had. Do you see what I mean? Years ago I met a sort of fire-worshipping ascetic. In India the cult of the sacred fire is still maintained in orthodox brahminical circles, but not quite in the way that it was in the Buddha's time well, not at all in the way except by a

very, very few ascetics. And I was taken to see one of them; this was in Nagpur, in I think 1954 so how far back does that take us? [Over] 30 years. So a friend of mine took me to see him, and I remember this very well. This ascetic was quite well-known in the area. He lived in a sort of well, it wasn't a temple, it wasn't an ashram; it was just a small building. As far as I remember, there was just this with the exception of perhaps a little antechamber just one big room, which was about the same size as this room, perhaps a little smaller, but slightly more oblong. And in the middle of the floor, taking up the greater part of the floor, there was a sort of pit, a shallow pit, a couple of feet deep. I think that was elliptical in shape. And all around the edge there was built up a little bank, or what would you call it? about a foot high of clay. And this pit well, the bottom of the pit was covered with ashes, white ashes, and right in the middle there was a little fire burning. And the old ascetic just sat by this fire, tending the fire; and he spent his whole time there. He spent his whole life there. He had been there, I was told, about 40 years. The chamber was quite low, not more than about seven feet high, and round the wall there were framed pictures of various gurus and deities and so on; and there was a quite strange atmosphere in this chamber. This I remember very well. It was very still, but quite intense, as though the old man led a very concentrated life, or was even meditating quite a lot. So it was a chamber, I imagine, of that sort that the Buddha spent the night in. I think it must have been rather like that. So it was certainly slightly awe-inspiring. There was certainly something going on, as it were. So perhaps the Naga just symbolized all the powers and potencies that had been sort of stirred up or accumulated by that particular type of spiritual practice, which the Buddha as it were assimilated and absorbed, on account of his own superior spiritual attainment. We can, I think, only explain, possibly, along such lines as those. But I remember this old ascetic didn't speak at all; he didn't give any teaching. He just spent his time there. That's all he did. People brought him offerings to feed the fire. That was his sort of object of concentration, as it were. But in many traditions you have this keeping alive the sacred fire. In ancient Rome you had the vestal virgins. If you've been to Rome, you will have seen the ruins of [50] their temple and their quarters, or their nunnery, you might even say, of these vestal virgins tending the sacred fire in the temple of the goddess Vesta.

Tom: Bhante, would it resemble a light cult, as opposed to you know light and darkness?

S: It is very difficult to say. In ancient times, of course, there was this tradition of sacrifice by means of fire. You get it in the Old Testament, the Jews had their burnt offerings, didn't they? But why were offerings burned? It seems agreed among anthropologists or students of comparative religion that the primitive idea was that the gods lived in the heavens, and if you wanted to offer the gods something, how did you get it to them? Well, you kindled fire on an altar and you placed the offering in the fire, the offering was burnt and the smoke carried it up to heaven, or it was carried up to heaven in the form of smoke. So fire, or the god of fire certainly in the Vedic tradition came to be regarded as a sort of intermediary between heaven and earth; and he became a sort of god in his own right, Agni. So there was the cult of the fire as the mediator between heaven and earth, the carrier of offerings and the prayers of men to the gods. In that way, all sorts of religious and mythological associations gathered around the concept of the sacred fire, the symbolism of the sacred fire. So the Jatilas, the fire-worshipping ascetics, represented some branch of that sort of tradition. We don't really know much about them we don't know whether they were genuinely Vedic, or some other type of fire-worshipping cult. But the symbolism of fire is very powerful, isn't it?

Vessantara: Haven't the Tibetans taken over fire symbolism in their practice?

S: Yes, the homa(?) homa is a form of offering in the so-called sacred fire. This was incorporated into the Vajrayana, and given a Buddhistic significance.

Uttara: I have seen photographs I don't know whether it was Tibetan monks or not with a sort of bowl in front of them, and flames coming out of it.

S: Usually, the Vedic tradition was that, for certain purposes in connection with certain rituals, ghee was poured into the sacred fire to the accompaniment of certain mantras, and there were special long spoons for pouring it in. It was a very elaborate ceremonial. I have, or had I hope I haven't lost it a photograph of Dardo Rimpoche performing a fire ceremony according to Vajrayana tradition. Yes, I've just remembered that. I haven't seen that photograph for a long time; I hope it is there somewhere among all my photographs. Yes, as far as I remember, he is ladling ghee into the fire. Anyway, perhaps that's enough about the fire-worshipping ascetics and the Naga.

Sudhana: You've just said that's enough, Bhante

S: Unless you can open up some fresh path of inquiry?

Sudhana: Well, I'll try. The Naga, as I understand it, would represent something that could be sublimated to spiritual good, as it were. The other night we were talking about Mara, and about Mara you said it's not really a threat until you really try to attain higher states, as it were. The Buddha, however, does represent a threat inasmuch as it represents change. It is interesting that the Mara does not represent a threat, in a sense, but the Buddha represents a threat, and the Naga in this sequence represents a threat, too. Is it perhaps there's a sort of Transcendental aspect, in a sublimated form, of the Naga that represents that threat?

[51]
S: What you are really asking, I suppose, is whether the Naga represents a genuinely numinous symbol?

Sudhana: I suppose so! (Laughter.)

S: Well, you could look at it like that (laughter), but after all the Buddha did capture him and put him in his bowl, so even if the Naga represented something genuinely numinous, the Buddha was more numinous still. It is not easy to interpret these myths or these symbols. It is very difficult to say, sometimes, whether the content is just psychological, whether it is spiritual, or even whether there is some hint of the Transcendental there; it is very difficult to say. But one thing is clear from the text, which is that the Buddha had the better of the encounter. So even if the Naga was genuinely numinous, even if there was something Transcendental about the Naga, the Buddha was still more Transcendental, so to speak.

Cittapala: The other night we were talking about Maras, and you were giving a description of some of the Maras that you have met in your previous life.

S: This life! (Laughter.)

Cittapala: I got the impression that these Maras were sort of quite small, in the sense that they were

S: I ... imagined(?) a big one!

Cittapala: Yes, right. I am not sure if I picked up the wrong end of the stick, but I was wondering whether these small Maras could be as it were servants of a huge Mara, or whether there was one big Mara somewhere around which might be ... a demonic figure, which one could see as being behind such things as, say, the nuclear arms race or terrorism or sort of holocausts which tend to afflict the human race in one form or another?

S: The Pali Canon does at times speak of what would appear to be the Mara, as though Mara is one definite figure; but there are passages which speak of Maras in

the plural, and even give one the names of different, apparently minor Maras. There is one called Dussi(?) Mara, for instance, who appears in more than one place, I think. In later Buddhist texts, I think Maras are spoken of in the plural. But at the same time, mention or reference is often made to the Mara, so it would seem as though there is a plurality of Maras, but there is a sort of supreme Mara ruling over them; a bit like the Miltonic conception of Satan. After our discussion about Mara, it occurred to me that if one wanted some idea about Mara from a Western, a Christian source, perhaps one should read Milton's Paradise Regained not Paradise Lost; that gives a quite different picture of Satan but, in Paradise Regained, the figure of Satan as he tempts and annoys Christ in the wilderness is very similar to the figure of Mara. It is the same type of conception. It is rather interesting there is a famous extended simile of Milton's, where he describes Satan sort of coming back again and again, troubling Christ in the wilderness, just like the flies buzz again and again round the milk pail, however often you shoo them away. So I suppose the short answer is that one does get the impression from the Buddhist scriptures that, yes, there are legions of Maras, ruled over by one supreme Mara. I expect Trevor Ling, in Mara and the Mythology of Evil, gives further information about that.

[52]
Cittapala: Would you see all these Maras as it were conspiring together in a sort of plan to work out their ends?

S: I suppose that would be, from their point of view, the sensible thing to do!

Cittapala: I suppose I still haven't got it quite clear in my mind how it differs from the sort of I am not sure whether it actually is a Christian interpretation of the devil or whatever, but I think it is a popular version of the devil as being something really quite dark and evil which one can see being behind, say, characters like Hitler, or other forms of atrocities which

S: One has heard, for instance, of demonic possession. I did have contact with someone once who did seem to me to be demonically possessed. I only spoke to him over the telephone, shortly before he committed suicide, in fact; but I got the strong impression at the time, quite intuitively, that he was just possessed. I am not saying that, literally, that was the case, but what I felt was that that way of looking at it explained the facts of the situation, or my impression of them, better than any other. I really did get the impression that there was some entity which had taken him over and which was going to destroy him.

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Side 2

It is not a very pleasant story, but perhaps it is instructive. I'll just relate it. This happened when I was at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara. He was a friend of a friend of mine; in fact, the two had worked together for many years they were both in advertising. And this friend of mine knew this other chap quite well. This other chap, unfortunately, fell in love with a girl who was also working with them; fell very, very violently in love with her in the fullest sense. But she didn't want to have anything to do with him whatever; but he continued to sort of pester her, to such an extent that she had to call in the police. She had to seek protection and get an injunction or whatever from the court that he was not to trouble her or try to enter her house or to speak to her, etc. But he seemed to get into a worse and worse state of craving as the result of this. This friend of mine had talked to him off and on, trying to help him, but he was just getting into a worse and worse moral and negative state, and he was saying, well, if he couldn't have this girl he was going to kill himself etc. Anyway, this friend of mine was with me at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara and this chap phoned there; I think my friend had given the Vihara's phone number saying that he was going to be there that evening with me. Anyway, this chap phoned and my friend spoke to him on the phone, and this chap said he had decided to commit suicide; he just couldn't stand the frustration of not being able to get this girl any more. So this was about seven o'clock in the evening. So my friend was talking to him on the phone, trying to dissuade him from committing suicide, for about two hours. At the end of two hours, he was quite exhausted. So he made signs to me, asking me if I was willing to take over and talk to the chap on the phone. I had never met the chap. I just indicated that I was willing, so my friend just said on the phone to this other chap: 'I'm sorry, I've just got to go somewhere for a few minutes. Hang on, there's a friend of mine here who would also like to talk to you if you wouldn't mind.' So I took over and I was talking to that chap for well over an hour, and we kept it up between us on the phone, talking to him, till two o'clock in the morning yes, from seven o'clock. And it seemed, in the end, that we had persuaded him to give up the idea of suicide. But early the next morning there was a phone call from this chap's mother, with whom he lived, to say he had committed suicide at five o'clock that morning, by putting his head in the gas oven. So that's the story; but when I took up the phone and started speaking to him, my instant impression, as soon as I heard [54] his voice, was: 'This chap is possessed. It is not a human being speaking.' This was my

impression. So my understanding was, looking at it this way, that the intensity of his craving had put him into such a negative state that it had become possible for him to be taken over by some quite negative entity, which sort of took possession of him and drove him to his death. That was definitely my impression. I can't understand my experience just in purely psychological terms; it just doesn't make sense in those terms. It was something beyond that, something so much worse than that. So I can imagine other people also being possessed in that sort of way by as it were entities, for want of a better term. It would seem to be the natural way to explain these things.

Cittapala: Would you call them entities rather than Maras?

S: I am just trying to use quite abstract terms. I certainly didn't get the impression 'That was a Mara'. When I saw this head in Delhi and that chap in the tube, yes, I got the impression 'It's a Mara,' I interpreted the experiences immediately in Buddhistic terms. On this occasion, it was just an evil entity; I can't put it more concretely than that. If I did I would be adding another layer of interpretation to the actual experience. The experience was: 'I am not speaking to a human being. He is just a mouthpiece. I am speaking to an entity that has possessed him' which could not be convinced that this chap should not commit suicide. So it is a question it is not that I am stating categorically, as it were scientifically, that he was possessed by a devil; but that, in view of the experience, that sort of language makes more sense and seems more convincing than any other language that I can think of. But, of course, the lesson here and I spoke of a lesson a little while ago is that, if you allow yourself to get into any extremely and persistently negative mental state you as it were lay yourself open to any negative influences, to say the very least, that may be around. And his was, in relation to this girl, whom I also came to know later on, an extraordinary mental state quite beyond normal sort of falling in love or anything of that sort. One of the most extreme cases I have ever seen. Completely out of control; beyond reason, and ultimately self-destructive. Anyway.

Alan Pendock: When you say this demon 'took over', I get the impression it's like something has actually come in, and what's happened to that man's consciousness? Has that gone off, or

S: It's as though it's in abeyance. This is one's impression. I am not saying that this is actually what happened; that was one's impression. Just as, you know, when you are in sleep your conscious personality is in abeyance.

Alan Pendock: So it's still there, but it's almost like it's covering it, or

S: One can think in those terms, yes. In the case of even modern psychology, it speaks in terms of multiple personality, doesn't it? At one time, one personality is uppermost, takes over, at another time another completely different personality takes over. This is a quite well-known clinical phenomenon.

Alan Pendock: I see that, though, as being different to what I was seeing you were saying it was being a demon. I get the impression that's ..., whereas

S: Yes, I am not saying the two are the same, I was only using that to illustrate the phenomenon of abeyance. Do you see what I mean? That phenomenon of multiple [55] personality shows that a personality can be in abeyance, as it were, and something else, whether belonging to the same psychophysical organism or coming from outside completely,

so to speak, can take over. This is one's impression. That sort of language seems to make the best sense of one's actual experience, regardless of how literally one chooses to take that language.

Paul: So you could say that the man had become a demon, as it were?

S: No, it wasn't actually like that. That was not the experience. You may be right in saying that; that may have been what happened, but my experience was that it was another person, as it were though I speak of, use the term, entity, that had taken him over. He didn't sound human at all; though, of course, yes, you could explain it by saying he hadn't actually been taken over, he had become a demon. You could but that would be interpretation, so far as my own actual experience was concerned. That is not to say that it might not be a correct interpretation.

Sudhana: I was thinking about the demon and how a demon comes into being. Would you say that a demon would have evolved through having had a human form at one time or another and leading a very unskilful life, and you become a demon like that?

S: Well, the general Buddhist tradition is that all Maras and devas and asuras were at some previous time human beings. And the present-day human beings can be, you know, devas or asuras depending on their conduct, their behaviour. But also one mustn't forget that the converse is true: that if you think intensely positive thoughts, you may be taken over by something angelic, or something angelic may find expression through you, or you may become an angel or deva or whatever in this life. That is the other side of the coin, so to speak.

Colin: Bhante, it seems that a way to see this maybe is that demons entering somebody seem to become aware that one is going to extremes of behaviour;

S: Well, the same with the positive entity, so to speak.

Colin: Yes, from one extreme to the other. So, at the same time, presuming in one's spiritual life one is actually going to be in a position whereby, say, in a dhyanic experience, there is a possibility of being possessed.

S: Well, I have said this quite clearly in The Ten Pillars, haven't I? that when you are dwelling in the dhyanas you are for the time being an angelic being.

Colin: There is no possibility of being possessed by demonic forces on a sort of higher plane?

S: No; according to Buddhist tradition, Mara has no access to those planes at all.

Colin: This is above the kamaloka plane?

S: [Yes.]

Uttara: Isn't the reason why people get possessed I think you did mention something like this a few years ago in a seminar why women are better mediums than men, because the psyche is more scattered, in a way, so when one is in a state like that then you become open to there

isn't a personality in a positive sense or a self in a positive sense?

[56]
S: Right, yes. This is why perhaps you can't speak of being possessed, say, by an angel in the same way that you could speak of being possessed by a demon, because when you are at that angelic level, as it were, you are highly integrated; there is no question of your being taken over in the same sort of sense.

Uttara: Then Danavira told us at one time he was listening to I think it was a piece of Handel's music, and suddenly a pair of wings shot out of his head.

S: Whose head?

Uttara: Danavira's head. (Laughter.)

S: How did he know? Was he looking in the mirror?

Uttara: I think he just somehow they appeared there. I think it was in hospital(?) or something.

S: Not ears? (Laughter.)

Uttara: He liked to see them as wings!

S: Well, it could be.

Uttara: ... it happened just because he was in such a positive state, there it was!

Vessantara: Still in a way on the subject of Mara, Bhante. We have talked in the Friends quite a lot about blaspheming against God if one has an irrational fear or ... of God, cutting him down to size. I think it might my impression is that it can be possible for some people to as it were do away with God but still be left with their irrational fears of the devil or the other ... Christian belief. Can you suggest ways of cutting the devil down to size, if you ... ?

S: (chuckling) Some people try to do it rationally, not to say rationalistically. They say, 'Well, the devil doesn't exist, it's just an old wives' tale.' I think usually that doesn't work, or works only very superficially. So I suppose if one wants to cut the devil down to size you need to confront him; sort of accept that he exists but he isn't really so important as has been made out. And perhaps you just have to defy him and say, 'Well, I don't care. Maybe you are lurking behind that door or in that cupboard, but, well, come on out; let's see you, let's have a talk.' Do you see what I mean? Adopt that sort of more challenging attitude towards the devil, or whoever or whatever is there, rather than cowering away and being afraid of him. Be like Luther: fling your ink-pot at the devil. [You know] the famous example or story in the life of Luther one doesn't know quite what to make of it that he did actually see the devil and flung his ink-pot at him; he happened to be writing at the time. Whereupon I believe the devil disappeared.

Vessantara: Doesn't St. Dunstan take him by the nose with a pair of pincers?

S: That's right. I read about that recently; it's mentioned, isn't it, in the introduction to Spiritual Friendship? And the pincers still survive. They were kept for centuries in Glastonbury, but they are kept now where is that? I read it, I've forgotten, but they are kept

Vessantara: ... in Sussex, it might be ...

[57]
S: Yes, they are kept in a museum or church or somewhere. It would be quite interesting to go and have a look at them. (Laughter.)

Uttara: Would this be a ... pockets(?)?

S: Yes. Are we still going to be on Mara?

Vessantara: Well, only in a comparatively minor way now.

Derek: This is back to the text. It's on page 62, where Mara's daughters come in on the scene. They are listed here as Tanha, Arati and Raga. Arati is translated as 'boredom'. But in the study group we were wondering about this, because apparently in other parts of the Pali Canon Arati is replaced by Rati, which is usually then translated as 'sensual delight'.

S: That's right, yes.

Derek: And as to craving and lechery or Raga, passion they seem to be quite , closely connected and sensual delight would be more closely connected with those. So do you think there could be a mistake?

S: I think in different Buddhist versions of this episode, versions other than that given in the Pali Canon, Mara's daughters are given various names. I am not even sure that the number is always three, even. But they are all as it were much of a muchness. I suppose where there is Rati there will be Arati, huh? where there is delight in that sense there will be the possibility of boredom. So, even if there isn't a daughter of Mara called Arati, maybe he's got a niece at least called Arati! Do you see what I mean? Well, yes, some texts do speak of Rati. It might be interesting to look at the Lalita Vistara and see what the names of Mara's daughters are there. Do we have a copy here?

Vessantara: Yes. It's Rati in there.

S: Yes. Also, it could be quite easy for that initial vowel just to be dropped by a transcriber.

Dhammamati: What seemed unusual to us is that, although boredom might be the cause of these things, if you actually tried to tempt somebody you wouldn't be tempting them with boredom. You would tempt them with sensual delight, more likely.

S: Yes, right. Because in effect you would also be introducing them to boredom sooner or later, but that would not be the actual temptation. Boredom itself is not, one might say, a temptation. Unless, of course, it represents not so much boredom as that state of accidie which the medieval Christian writers speak of: the noonday demon; a state almost of despair that you are tempted into when you are not making spiritual progress. But, yes, I think Rati

seems to go with Tanha and Raga much better than Arati in the sense of boredom.

Cittapala: Do you think there is any particular significance, beyond the sort of dramatic device, to Mara's daughters having a go after Mara has given up on the Buddha in that story?

S: Well, there are various versions, as for instance in the Lalita Vistara; don't forget there are various attacks on the Buddha by demonic, asura-like figures. So it [58] is often said that Mara himself represents as it were here allegorical interpretation sort of primordial ignorance. His daughters represent primordial craving in its various forms, and those male demonic, asura-like forms represent primordial aversion in its various forms, so that the Buddha is being assailed by the three akusala mulas, the three roots of unskilfulness.

Ratnaprabha: I think you have explained in your Archetypal Symbolism in the Biography of the Buddha how one could interpret the attack of Mara which takes place before the Buddha's Enlightenment as, as it were, the integration in Jungian terms of a shadow, whatever is left of the shadow part of the Buddha; but presumably such an interpretation could not be used here, which is seven years after the Buddha's Enlightenment. So how can we interpret these attacks of Mara on the Buddha so long after he has gained Enlightenment? Should we just see them as ... ?

S: Well, clearly here Mara cannot be Kilesa Mara, he must be Devaputra Mara; still having some hope of troubling the Buddha. You could possibly interpret Mara's attack before the Enlightenment in terms of Kilesa Mara, but as you say you can't really do that after the Enlightenment. You have to then fall back on Devaputta or Devaputra Mara. It also occurs to me that in connection with Mara as the shadow I don't think I made this point in my original lecture but I think one has to distinguish between sort of shadow in the Jungian sense and sort of non-shadow; because one can regard, let us say, certain energies as in a way negative, but capable of transformation, but there are certain other, let us say, essentially unskilful factors or mental states which cannot be integrated. Do you see what I mean? And the shadow includes those two, presumably. So one can't speak of the whole of the shadow. It's not as though well, this idea of evil being just the shadow which is to be incorporated represents a minimization of the nature of evil. Because there are certain forms of evil which just have to be given up; you can't integrate them or transform them, they are just totally unskilful. Do you see what I mean?

: What have you got in mind, Bhante?

S: Well, take an extreme case; what about killing, or the desire to kill? Can you in what sense can you sublimate that or integrate that? Surely that is something which is to be completely given up.

: Well, the desire to annihilate, surely one would try and see in terms of annihilating one's own unskilful tendencies.

S: But that is allegorization, you see? Yes, you can certainly speak of annihilating unskilful tendencies, but that will mean annihilating, say, the desire to annihilate in the literal sense annihilate other living beings. There is no way that you can sublimate the annihilating of living beings. So I think one has to be quite careful not to give a misleading impression when one uses this sort of Jungian language, as though there is in fact no such thing as evil at least

on the ethical level. I think, as I observed the other evening, perhaps for one reason or another in historical Buddhism there is or there has been a tendency to make light of moral evil. I think historically that is probably a weakness of Buddhism I don't mean in the Buddha's own teaching but as it has developed through history. It is very easy to say 'kilesa is Enlightenment'; but what about all the evil that we have witnessed in this century? Is that basically Enlightenment? Can you really say that with any real conviction? Is it just to be transformed? Or does it not represent something that needs to be, as an attitude, so to speak, completely abandoned?

Cittapala: But inasmuch as those atrocities or whatever were perpetrated by human beings, surely the energy which those human beings represent in bodies, [59] psychophysical streams of energy, they can be transformed? It seems that you are almost implying that there is something external to that which can't be

S: No, what I am saying is that the energy which has assumed that particular unskilful form as that unskilful form cannot be transformed. That form must be abandoned, you might say, or the energy must be totally withdrawn from that kind of form.

Cittapala: So how does that differ from sublimation? I always understood that what you just said was

S: No, I think the way in which the term sublimation and the language of the shadow [are] used seems to suggest a sort of very light evaluation of the evil, and not a full recognition of it because, after all, it can be transformed or transmuted, so it is almost as though it isn't really evil; evil as an expression or as that particular unskilful expression. It is almost as though the language of sublimation and transformation, in practice, if we are not careful, makes light of the evil that we do or that has been done by other human beings. It is a practical point, perhaps, rather than a theoretical one.

Cittapala: And perhaps some forms of evil become so sort of hardened that it is almost impossible to withdraw them. I am thinking, perhaps, of somebody arguing that a character like Hitler could actually be transformed or changed if you put him through some psychological process, or something like that. But maybe it is not possible, after all.

S: Perhaps some human beings in this lifetime go so far in the direction of unskilfulness or evil that no withdrawal of their energies from that is possible in this lifetime. One must consider that possibility. Yes, very great transformations can take place; think of Milarepa who, according to at least the legendary life, committed many murders. But it was as it were in revenge; it wasn't so to speak gratuitous. He did repent thoroughly. But there have been people in this century who have done far worse things than Milarepa; perhaps in their case, even under the best conditions, a total withdrawal of their energies from such behaviour, and therefore transformation, is not possible not in this lifetime. Though, of course, Buddhism doesn't withhold all hope even from such people in the course of the process of birth and rebirth. Even they can eventually gain Enlightenment. But I think, notwithstanding all our terrible experiences in this century, in some quarters there is a tendency to undervalue as it were, or try to devalue, evil, in the sense of not really being prepared to recognize it as evil, and treating it rather lightly and, one might say, perhaps a trifle cynically, because it is after all the evil that was suffered by other people, it's not evil that we have suffered ourselves.

Cittapala: Do you think this sort of attitude lies behind sort of liberal reforms in respect of systems of punishment and so forth?

S: I think some penologists are a bit over-optimistic with regard to human nature. For instance, those who allow out on what do they call it? not parole what do they call it?

: Licence?

S: let out of prison those who have been guilty perhaps of more than one murder; they seem almost light-heartedly to let them go back into ordinary society, and in many cases they have killed again. And people seem not all that much concerned [60] about it, some of them, as if they have even said, according to newspaper reports, 'Well, that's the sort of risk we have to take.' But do you have the right to take that sort of risk with the lives of completely innocent people? It all seems to be treated so lightly. You should bend over backwards to be as compassionate as you can to the criminal, which perhaps up to a point is fair enough; but you are so compassionate to the criminal that you cease to be compassionate to his potential victims. And that does seem in a way to be another example of taking evil really quite lightly. Because the people who take the decisions are very unlikely to be the people who suffer. I think perhaps, looking at the issue more broadly, there is a general unwillingness very often to accept that something that we have done was actually wrong. I think sometimes there is a tendency to try to explain it away. And you can't really as it were repent of the unskilful things that you have done, unless you really recognize them as unskilful, and not just say, 'I made a bit of a mistake', or 'I was a bit careless.' You might have done really serious harm and damage to other people. Perhaps you are guilty of drunken driving, and maybe you maim or kill somebody; and then what do people sometimes say? 'Oh, what can you expect? It was Christmas-time. Do you expect that we don't have a drink at Christmas-time?' So I think this regarding the shadow as in a way quite easily assimilable or susceptible to sublimation is a manifestation of that tendency of making light of evil. Some years ago I used to think that the word 'evil' wasn't really a very Buddhistic word perhaps historically it isn't and I used not to like to translate papa by 'evil'; but I have come to the conclusion that we really do need a word with the strong as it were emotional connotation of 'evil'. I think 'unskilfulness' you know, well, it's accurate in a way, but it doesn't have the emotional weight that 'evil' does. It's easy to think of unskilfulness as just a little sort of mistake which can be forgiven quite easily, or which just requires a little correction.

: So, Bhante, what word is it translating? Pa ?

S: Papa; the opposite of punya.

Chakkhupala: I have often heard that the legend or myth of George and the Dragon I have often heard, in fact I have myself sometimes taken the view, that perhaps St. George shouldn't have killed the dragon but should perhaps have mounted it and ridden it back

S: Or put it in his bowl!

Chakkhupala: Or put it in his bowl. But, in the light of what you have just said, perhaps there are some dragons which should simply be slain.

S: Well, there are dragons and dragons, yes? It depends on what you decide the dragon should

represent or symbolize. Yes, no doubt you could say, using that language, that there were some dragons which need to be just tamed or made domestic pets of, and others that just need to be slaughtered outright.

Sanghapala: Bhante, is it the case that you have suggested, or even issued a directive, that when we encounter evil entities, for example, we should have nothing to do with them at all? You know, sort of black magic cults and what have you, Satan cults, or just -

[61]
S: Well, that's rather different, because those are things one engages in; and that I would absolutely discourage. But if you are actually confronted by some kind of entity, well, you have no choice, have you, whether to have anything to do with it or not? Well, it's there. And I have suggested in those cases that you can recite mantras.

Sanghapala: Is that a mantra of a peaceful deity as opposed to a wrathful one?

S: According to tradition, the mantras which work best are those of Avalokitesvara and Tara. I think, even though I have spoken in terms of, say, challenging Satan and all that sort of thing, one should be very careful not to adopt a negative attitude, that is a genuinely negative attitude of, say, hatred or antagonism. I think that is quite important, otherwise he has got you already. You are defeated before the battle has even started. You are on his side. He doesn't mind that you hate him; he doesn't mind in the least. All he is concerned with is that you hate someone, something!

Sanghapala: So you recommend more of an ink-pot and pincers sort of attitude?

S: No, I'm not, no; well, Luther presumably threw the ink-pot in a rage. I am not advocating that sort of attitude. Or even that you should use the tongs with the idea of actually causing pain to poor Mara. But certainly you want to as it were get rid of him; and that is best done by an intensely positive mental attitude, not a negative one. It is not a question of you know, confronting his negativity with your negativity, but of confronting his negativity with your positivity.

Sanghapala: Didn't Milarepa try to do that with the demons in the cave?

S: That's right, yes.

Uttara: Bhante, you have said I think you said in the lecture(?) of Padmasambhava that you felt the world wasn't evil but had just I can't think of the word I think you did use 'gone astray' but somehow it's gone crooked or something or other. I think that's

S: I might have been talking about the viparyasas, the upside-down views you know, seeing the conditioned as Unconditioned, the painful as pleasant, and so on. I might have been talking about that.

Uttara: No, I think it was in relation to T... Nagpo (?) and his evil...

S: I think I was making a rather metaphysical point there, explaining some aspect of the myth, that even in T... N... there was buried as it were some element of positivity that could be

extracted. But I was speaking as it were a bit metaphysically rather than ethically or psychologically.

Uttara: I think in a way you were saying that It was a bit of a simile well, like Vajrasattva sometimes the image is that we are primordially pure, but ... well, is samsara primordially pure as if we could look at it in that way?

S: I think it probably isn't very helpful to look at it in that way. Otherwise you are thinking of what is unskilful as primordially pure.

Uttara: Like beyond the delusion which has caused the unskilfulness.

S: But what do you mean, then, by saying that samsara is that?

[62]
Uttara: Well, beyond that, beyond samsara in a way.

S: It is probably better to say that beyond the samsara there is Nirvana; beyond the conditioned there is the Unconditioned. Otherwise there is a danger that you directly identify the conditioned as conditioned with the Unconditioned. Because theory is one thing, practice is another. Otherwise you can identify, say, evil, kilesa, with bodhi, and therefore understand that practically to mean that, well, evil doesn't really matter; evil isn't all that big a deal, after all it is fundamentally bodhi, so why bother much about it? But that is not really the intention of the teaching.

Cittapala: When teaching or explaining the fourth stage of the Puja to beginners, I have quite often come up against a resistance to the word 'evil' used in that section. And I have found myself, and have observed other Order Members, tending to explain the word away. From what you are saying it seems that we should actually stick to our guns.

S: Well, I would say it is a question of skilful means. Perhaps you shouldn't stick too firmly. For instance, give me an example: what do people usually say?

Cittapala: Well, they just look rather shifty, and they sort of they are made uneasy by the word, obviously because they associate it with the Christian concept of evil in some way or other; and I can't actually give an example, I'm afraid, straight off the top of my head

S: It's as though they are not admitting that they have ever done anything evil. So how could one paraphrase it for their benefit? Would they accept that they have sometimes been wicked, or selfish?

Cittapala: I think selfishness would be all right, and the concept of unskilfulness seems to be

S: Mm, they water down the concept of evil; in other words, they minimize your responsibility. They play down what you have done. Well, with absolutely new people, you may have to accept that playing down, at least provisionally. And if they find it difficult to accept the idea that they have done evil, say, 'Well, maybe you haven't; maybe you've led a much better life than a lot of other people, so perhaps in your case it isn't true.'

Cittapala: I wondered whether this might connect up with Vessantara's point about people actually fearing the devil somehow or other, they don't want to face up to

S: Right, this is possible.

Cittapala: that there is evil in the world. In which case one is playing a bit with fire, it almost seems.

S: Yes, there is an allied conception, or even misunderstanding, that on no account should you make people feel guilty. I'm afraid I've sometimes thought this idea is quite strong in the FWBO I've even heard that people have said, when faced by quite positive criticism, 'Oh, you shouldn't say that, you make me feel guilty,' as though on no account must they be made to feel guilty. But obviously there is irrational guilt, which is not a good thing; but there is rational guilt, in the sense of the feeling of regret and remorse and consciousness of having done evil, or at least behaved unskilfully, that you can actually feel and which you should feel, if you have behaved in that way. So, in a way, to be unwilling to be made to feel guilty represents an [63] unwillingness to accept responsibility for what you've done whether you describe it as wicked or evil or unskilful or whatever. I think it is quite important to make that distinction between irrational guilt and rational guilt. There is such a thing as rational guilt, which you should feel on becoming conscious that you have behaved unskilfully, especially when you have hurt or damaged or otherwise harmed other people. It is right and proper that you feel guilty. Otherwise how can [there]

Side 3

be repentance? How can there be confession? What have you to confess if you don't even have anything to be guilty about?

Derek: This concept of rational guilt is it definitely not the same as shame?

S: It is certainly connected. Shame is more what you feel when people whom you respect point out that you have been behaving in an unskilful fashion; you then feel shame, because you feel you have let yourself down in their eyes, you have disgraced yourself in their eyes. That is a quite healthy feeling. Shame and how would one translate the other one? maybe conscience hiri and ottappa are described as the two guardians of the world, or two guardians of morality. Without shame and conscience there can be no social order, one might say. 'World' in the sense of social order. Some people, I know, put up a very strong resistance to feeling guilt of any kind, and that is quite unhealthy usually because they confuse irrational guilt with rational guilt. It is very often because they don't want to be held accountable.

Cittapala: I suppose the other difficulty when trying to explain that section is actually showing people that what they do, or have done or whatever, is evil, if you see what I mean, or doesn't amount to something People don't seem to feel that they have done anything particularly bad, if you see what I mean.

S: Well, maybe, in quite a few cases, people haven't done anything dramatically wicked. I mean they haven't committed any great crimes or sins just lots of little rather mean actions. Do you see what I mean? So, yes, in some cases, it might be true; they might not be conscious of having done anything very wicked. They may have stolen twopence from their mother's

purse when they were five years old, or kicked their little brother when their father wasn't looking, or something like that. But anyway, those things do mount up; if you are persistently mean and negative in your behaviour, you become a quite unpleasant person. There are lots of things which are evil which we indirectly support, perhaps: perhaps without always fully realizing it. What about people who indirectly support, say, vivisection by buying those various cosmetics which are produced as a direct consequence of experiments on animals?

Padmapani: Bhante, do you think Order Members generally don't have a healthy attitude towards owning up to their own feelings of guilt?

S: I think it's more basic, in some cases, than owning up to one's own feelings of guilt. It's more a question of accepting, to begin with, that there are such things as guilty feelings which are right and proper on certain occasions. That is the first, the basic step. And I think there are some people in the FWBO, maybe even a few in the Order, who are a bit reluctant to accept the possibility of feeling guilt, and acknowledging it and confessing it. Sometimes I have noticed people feel very resentful at as it were being held to account and, in their language, made to feel guilty sometimes perhaps in a council meeting. Say, just to give a sort of example. [64] I'll invent the example, maybe someone undertook to be responsible for publicity for a certain event or a certain meeting, but it so happened that they just didn't do anything about it. All right, so a council meeting is held and then somebody makes the point, 'There wasn't any publicity put out.' So somebody else says, 'That was So-and-so's responsibility'. And then that person is asked, 'Was it not your responsibility?' and he unwillingly admits, 'Yes,' and then he is sort of taken to task: 'Well, why did you not attend to the publicity? Why did you not fulfil that responsibility, having undertaken it?' Very often that person will very much resent being held to account in that sort of way, expecting that it is going to be passed over quite easily. But he should actually recognize that he has behaved really quite unskilfully, and that he should be very sorry for that and apologise to the council for failing in that duty; but very often that is not the reaction. The reaction is of resentment at being called to account. Do you see what I mean? That is very often the attitude, unfortunately. Or even sometimes someone may say, 'Who's got the right to call me to account in that sort of way? I couldn't do it.' And they think that is sometimes a sufficient explanation that, well, they couldn't do it. They don't express any regret. So that is resistance to allowing oneself to accept responsibility, feel guilt and acknowledge that you have done wrong and in that way purify it. So I think we shouldn't easily let people off the hook. I think out of mistaken kindness, very often, in the FWBO, people are let off the hook. They undertake to do something; they take that very lightly, they don't do it, and they are not as it were taken to task for that; and I think they should be. Because not taking them to task in a positive way encourages irresponsibility, and irresponsibility is not a characteristic or quality or attribute of the individual. So letting people off lightly, you are encouraging them not to be individuals. I don't say you should publicly take them to task, necessarily though maybe the whole Council may need to do so. Maybe a better way of doing it would be just to take the person for a quiet walk and say, 'Do you realize that you promised to do that? We were relying upon you, and you let everybody down.' But they shouldn't be let off the hook; if they can't accept being taken to task when they have failed in their responsibilities, to that extent they are not behaving as individuals. An individual would be the first person to accuse himself under such circumstances, and take himself to task and acknowledge his mistake and apologise for that where necessary. I have sometimes found it really, in a way, quite annoying when someone promises to do something, and you ask him some time later, 'Have you done it as you promised?' and he gives a sort of silly giggle as though he's done something clever. I

am afraid I have come across this sort of thing more than once, and I think we shouldn't let people get away with it.

: Silly giggle!

S: Yes, but actually quite literally, you know, this has been my experience more than once with people.

: What's the basis for the silly giggle?

S: Heaven only knows!

Uttara: It could be embarrassment.

S: Embarrassment, possibly. No, the whole air is as though he has done something rather clever, almost, in not

Uttara: Not taking it seriously -

[65]
S: Yes, not taking it seriously. A responsibility is a responsibility. A promise is a promise. Giving your word is giving your word. Letting your friends down is letting your friends down. It is a serious matter depending on the seriousness of the actual occasion or the actual content of the promise.

Vessantara: Do you think this ties up a little with our discussion the other night about people within the FWBO not being very good at taking initiative and carrying things through? Do you think that because we do let people off quite lightly when they say they will do things, in a way that encourages them in a sense not to develop those qualities?

S: That could be; that could be. And often, of course, people promise to do something for the sake, consciously or unconsciously, of creating a good impression, but they haven't considered the matter seriously and they haven't really said that they will do that thing not with their whole being; they have merely said the words because they feel good. Doing that, they have a sort of feeling of taking on responsibility, but they just want that feeling of taking on responsibility, not the actual taking on of responsibility. At a council meeting, say, someone says, 'Oh, I'll do this,' and somebody else says, 'I'll do that,' so you also feel like joining in, and being one of the boys: 'Oh, I'll do that,' you say; but within an hour you've forgotten all about it, very often. I'm afraid it's as bad, sometimes, as that. You almost resent being reminded of it, much less still being taken to task. Well, isn't it so? We all must have had these experiences. So we shouldn't let people, or ourselves, off the hook so lightly, so easily. I don't mean to say you should rub their noses in the dirt, as it were, but you should try to awaken in them a sense of what they have actually done in failing to live up to their responsibilities or to keep their word or to fulfil their promise.

Cittapala: I sometimes feel in myself an inability to take people to task because of a mutual collusion that if I start doing it to X, then they are going to switch around and say, 'Well, chummy, what about the plank in your own eye?'

S: One should deal with one thing at a time. If you take them to task in a particular meeting, say, about something they haven't done, they should not be allowed to refer to something that you failed to do last year or last month. That is irrelevant. That either should have been taken up at the time or they should just take you aside on some quite separate occasion, not as it were retort on you in that way. That is a very negative form of defensiveness and people shouldn't be allowed to get away with that either. It's not a kindness to people, it's not doing them a kindness, to let them off lightly when they have failed to live up to their responsibilities.

Sudhana: I can appreciate the ideal, but sometimes if you are a bit rough with people they just don't talk to you. They can keep it up for years on end, you know? if the situation you are in isn't strong enough. In an ideal situation like this, which is strong, you can work things like that out.

S: I am not suggesting you should be rough. You can be tactful, but you can't just pass things over. Suppose it's in a coop; how can you run a coop if it's with people that you can't rely upon and who, if they are taken to task just very mildly or gently, react in that sort of way? Yes, especially with very new people, you have to be a bit careful what you say and a bit tactful, but the more people get involved or committed, or profess to be involved or committed, the more in a positive sense severe you should be with them.

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Uttara: I suppose you won't necessarily just jump at them, assuming that they didn't do it out of irresponsibility; you could

S: Oh, no, of course you have to find out what did happen. Supposing there was a death in their family, or something like that. But, anyway just to pursue that a little bit if they are unable to do something, they should at once communicate with a responsible person and say, 'Sorry, this has happened, please pass the word round I won't be able to do it.' That is the action of a responsible person. Not just leave the job undone. These are all different aspects of responsibility, and responsibility really is a quality of the individual.

Paul: Bhante, I don't tend to think of guilt as being positive emotion, personally. Could you go into it a bit and explain exactly what feeling you are talking about? I mean, shame I

S: Well, supposing there are certain actions that you definitely regard as unskilful or bad and which you really do not wish to perform. Do you see what I mean? At least, that has to be the starting point: that you do accept that there are certain things that you should not do, and that you do not in fact, in principle, wish to do. Then suppose you suddenly become aware that you have actually performed one of those actions, which you yourself are convinced you should not perform, and that you don't really wish to perform, but you become aware that, yes, due to inadvertence or for some such reason, you have performed such an action. Well, what is your feeling? You feel very upset, very disappointed, very sorry. You really wish you had not performed that action. That is guilt, in this more positive sense. Sometimes you feel you would almost give anything to undo that action. Maybe you've done serious harm to someone that you are quite fond of almost the last person that you would have wished to upset or harm. But you just see with your own eyes, so to speak, that you have done serious harm, and at that moment you really wish that action undone; you really wish that you had that time over again and could avoid performing that action. You feel really sorry and really

ashamed of yourself. You blame yourself. So that is guilt in this positive sense. And you at once want to make up for your action, or to modify the harm as much as you possibly can.

Paul: I would have thought of that as shame.

S: I think shame at least in a Buddhist context arises more when your unskilful action is pointed out to you by other people and you become aware that other people have been disappointed or let down by you. When it's just your own awareness, that is more like what we call conscience.

Ratnaprabha: I think, Bhante, the word hiri at least, I think it's Guenther translates hiri as shame and ottappa as 'fear of blame'. I may have this wrong, but I understand that ottappa is the fear of blame by others, while hiri is the as it were conscience or internal feeling of not wanting to do certain things.

S: No, that's not the way in which it is usually explained. Govinda, for instance, as far as I remember, doesn't agree with Guenther. Hiri or hrih and it is significant, I think, Govinda says that the mantra hrih when written is red in colour, it is the mantra of Amitabha so according to Govinda it is the blush of shame which suffuses the face when you become conscious that you have done something which others regard as wrong. Ottappa literally means burning; it is the burning of your own mind when you recognize that you have done something wrong. So there are these two aspects, as it were. There is becoming aware that you have done something which other people regard as wrong and here in this context it is which other people rightly regard as wrong, not just in a purely conventional way and on the other hand there is [67] your own personal recognition, regardless of what other people think, that you have done something wrong. So, regardless of whether we regard one or the other as the translation of hiri or ottappa, there are these two aspects. Do you see what I mean? Shame is usually, in as it were non-FWBO terms, used to describe your consciousness that you are being blamed by others, and your own self-reproach is usually described as guilt. So in this way anthropologists distinguish shame cultures and guilt cultures. But regardless of whether it is the external aspect or the internal aspect that is stressed, you have this uncomfortable sensation, as it were or very painful sensation, painful experience, when you become aware in one way or another that you have done something which you yourself genuinely regard as wrong. And that is a positive experience. Though painful, it is positive. Sometimes I think there is a bit of a miccha-ditthi that nothing can be positive that isn't pleasant. So I think, if we have this sort of resistance to being taken to task or resistance to experiencing guilt, it really means in a way that we are not taking our ethical life very seriously. This is the implication. Perhaps, in reacting against Christianity or certain wrong Christian conceptions or distortions and things, we have just gone a bit too far in the opposite direction; thrown away the baby with the bath-water, perhaps.

Jayamati: Could we just return to this fear of evil that you were talking about a few minutes back?

S: Did I speak of fear of evil?

Jayamati: Well, Cittapala mentioned that beginners still have a fear of evil. You then picked up

S: Ah, fear of evil in the sense of fear or reluctance to acknowledge that they may have done evil, because the reference was to the Sevenfold Puja.

Jayamati: Right.

S: Not fear of evil in the sense of fear of the devil, as it were. But an unwillingness to acknowledge that they might themselves have committed evil.

Jayamati: Right. Well, that resistance, or maybe my own resistance more that means, I imagine, that beginners have resisted the fourth part of the Puja is a fear of an evil entity actually existing, which we are getting on to very strongly in the last few nights, Mara Devaputra. Do you have any thoughts as to the substance of that fear of why one should actually fear the existence of evil?

S: Well, I suppose one fears it in that sense because it might do you harm. You feel that you are weaker than it. It might do you harm, therefore. What is fear? It is fear of being hurt, damaged, destroyed. So if you fear evil, presumably you believe that Evil with a capital E can damage you, can destroy you. Well, in a way that is true. But the only evil that can destroy you is the evil that you yourself do. Only your own evil or unskilful thoughts, words and deeds can destroy you as a moral or spiritual being. But an objective as it were evil entity can't destroy you without your own cooperation in the form of evil or unskilful thoughts, words and deeds.

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Jayamati: That's the area I get confused in. The other night, I asked that question about the devil; and although you replied that in Christian mythology one holds up a cross or sprinkles holy water, in my heart I could not believe that.

S: Yes. Well, you see, a Christian believes or at least a medieval Christian believed that the devil could harm you. He could do all sorts of harm. But the Christian equally believed that there was a protection, in the form of holy water or the cross. You only had to get behind those, as behind a sort of shield, and then the devil couldn't harm you. So it's almost as though, if we are not careful, we retain the belief in the power of the devil to harm, but we don't believe in anything in particular that can protect us from that power of the devil to harm.

Jayamati: It's beginning to strike me that it is a great disadvantage being an ex-Christian, because you've thrown away the protective paraphernalia. You are left high and dry against the evil coming along.

S: Yes. Well, you've thrown away the church, you see; but that's only one step. You have to throw away all the things in which the church believes. Maybe that's a bit more difficult.

Jayamati: I think it's also linked up with Vessantara's point about exorcising the devil, just being against the devil somehow. I was interested in Colin's [point?] about lurking and getting to meet him.

S: How are we going on, by the way?

Vessantara: It's 25 to 10, and we've got one to two more questions, and Padmapani with his

hand in the air.

S: All right, carry on, let's try and finish it off.

Padmapani: Bhante, I was just thinking this area of opening up, if one in a way tried to confess all if one's being pointed out one's failings in one's duties, you do need a very positive situation in the Sangha, I think. Some people have a fear of

S: Yes; I won't say you need. It's preferable. But you mustn't use the absence of a positive situation as an excuse for not as it were admitting the wrong that you've done. Again, we look for all sorts of ways and means of letting ourselves off the hook. I have sometimes witnessed instances where someone makes a critical point to somebody, and they respond by criticizing in turn the way in which that point was made; and you are just talking about that and talking about that, completely losing sight of the actual point that was being made. It's just a deflecting manoeuvre. So I think that should not be allowed. So, supposing you have committed a mistake, you have failed to do something that you should have done, and your council or your chapter takes you to task; and supposing they do it in a quite insensitive, rough way; never mind, your duty is to admit your mistake. Having done that and got that off your chest and out of the way, perhaps later on or on some other occasion, you can then raise the point: 'Well, look, I know I was in the wrong, I admitted it, but was it really necessary to be so rough with me about it?' You can then raise that point, but not raise that point at the time as a means of defending yourself against the need to acknowledge your mistake. Otherwise, there is just confusion, with charge and countercharge and criticism and counter-criticism, and you get nowhere. I mean these are quite tall demands in a way; but, after all, we are talking about mainly Order Members, so they should be capable of rising to the occasion and not just being reactive.

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Sudhana: Maybe the thing is to establish communication, in a sense

S: Well, that will certainly help. But even if you feel there is not a very good communication, that doesn't excuse you from admitting your fault, if that is what you need to do.

Sudhana: Mm. I am not very happy with that. Er

S: Well, it is not easy. No one is saying it's easy. But I think an Order Member should be big enough to be able to behave in that way. The mistake is his; he hasn't done his duty, so he has to acknowledge that before he starts finding fault with the way in which he is being taken to task. To me it seems a more manly attitude; I don't really feel that there could be much difference of opinion about it! All right, others may be not behaving quite in the way that they should, but all right, you've got something to confess; get it off your chest; it's to your benefit to do that, that you come clean and say, 'Well, look, I'm sorry, I know I ought to have done it. I apologise.' Maybe you are being a bit oversensitive in that sort of situation and just reacting too much to the way in which people have said something, rather than responding to what they have said. Sometimes I really get the impression that, in the case of some people, you can't deal with them without worrying, 'Oh, [I need] ten pairs of kid gloves'! Some of you seem so supersensitive. Anyway.

Peter: This question relates to the Fire Sermon. If we look at the way the , Buddha teaches in

the Fire Sermon compared to the way you have said he has talked previously in this chapter to Yasa and the others, it is quite a different approach between the sort of progressive instruction dana, virtue, heavens and so on, and the quite straight, direct, you know, form of 'This is the way it is, monks' to the ascetics. So that gives us the model of two different approaches that perhaps we can take when we are teaching the Dharma. The question is: how can we evaluate, in a given situation, which would be the most appropriate approach and which is the safer approach?

S: I think it is quite difficult. I think the gradual approach is certainly the safer to take people from where they are and try to lead them, if one is in a position to do that, just very gradually; because, after all, from the discussion we have just had, it would seem that even Order Members can be quite easily reactive, [not] to speak of people straight off the street. So I don't think it's a good idea to try to sort of hit people over the head with Buddhism in the hope that they will gain sudden Enlightenment. I think you are much more likely to drive them away. I think you have to know someone very well before you really as it were risk giving them a genuine shock; or you have to be very Enlightened. The Buddha, with the first of the Kassapa brothers, told him bluntly in the end, didn't he, that he was neither Enlightened nor on the path to Enlightenment? But the Buddha did it as a last resort, and after all it was the Buddha doing it, and it did have the desired effect. But if someone comes along to the centre newly, and he is disagreeing with you and being very obtuse and difficult, if you just say, 'Look here, you are really absolutely on the wrong path, you are a complete fool, you are an idiot, you are getting nowhere' well, it may be absolutely true (laughter), but he (I am sure you wouldn't address a lady in that way) is unlikely to come again. Isn't it so? Only someone who was really bent on Enlightenment [would] come again after that sort of treatment. If he had really been bent on Enlightenment, he wouldn't have put up the resistance that he did. So that sort of dramatic treatment is not recommended. I think one is not really in a position to treat people in that way; one doesn't have sufficient insight into them. You can only speak in that quite hard way to someone who is a really good friend and who regards you as a good friend and who can really take it [70] and you know that they can take it. But you really have, as I said, to wear your ten or twelve pairs of kid gloves when dealing with the general public. They come with all sorts of ideas, you know: pseudo-egalitarian ideas, feminist ideas, ex-socialist ideas, ex-Christian ideas, all sort of mixed and muddled up together, very often, and you've got to sort it all out and in a sense create a positive impression and establish good communication. So, as I said, you shouldn't try to hit people over the head with the Dharma; it doesn't work. Not unless you are a Buddha or not far short of being a Buddha.

Kevin: I think really Peter's question would it be of value if in the interim we used more traditional terms? At the time I was thinking of non-attachment specifically.

S: Non-attachment is a good term, isn't it? Some people don't like terms like that; they think that they are negative. You have to bear that in mind. Usually people prefer positive terms; they don't like the sound of negative terms non-attachment, or even detachment, or things of that sort.

Kevin: I was thinking of that particularly almost in terms of an approach. Certainly, in this text the Buddha emphasizes...

S: In what way?

Kevin: In the last of the conversions, because they were sort of non-clinging Dharma, ... that you see this time and time again.

S: Well, that is very true, that is very important. But, again, in dealing with newcomers, if that is what you have in mind, I think one has to be quite careful about talking in terms of non-attachment or giving things up, even though that may be what they need to do. They don't usually, as far as I remember, really like the sound of it very much.

Uttara: Especially if they just walk straight in the door and you start immediately talking to them about getting off things! Because they've come in to get something off you.

S: Yes, that's true, you are at cross purposes.

Kevin: But in the study group I was thinking more ... within the Order.

S: Well, Order Members ought to be able to think in terms of non-attachment.

Ratnaprabha: In our group we discussed the comparison between the Fire Sermon, which uses these quite negative terms of non-attachment and so on, apparently, and the parable of the burning house, which uses the same kind of language but brings in the very positive and human terms about the different vehicles which are waiting outside.

S: True, yes.

Ratnaprabha: Does that seem to represent the basic difference, do you think, between perhaps the Pali Canon's approach and ...

S: I think it does. I think it does, except that one mustn't forget that in the Pali Canon itself there are many very positive formulations, including that of the positive [71] nidanas, the bodhyangas and so on. But if one puts just that particular sermon by the side of that particular parable, one could say that, yes, on the whole the emphasis of the traditional Theravada, as distinct from the actual teachings of the Pali Canon, is definitely negative rather than positive, and that of the Mahayana definitely positive rather than negative. I think that is probably a fair assessment or fair generalization. Even though, as I have said and again I repeat it in the Pali Canon itself, if you look close enough, there are many, many quite positive presentations of the teaching, positive presentations of the spiritual path. So perhaps one more question, then maybe we will stop.

Kevin: So presumably as an approach it's better to have both a clear understanding of the shortcomings or sufferings of existence, and a clear understanding of the goal to which

S: Yes, but obviously the two do hang together. There are certain things to be given up, there are certain things to be developed and cultivated. I think, in dealing with the newcomer, you will probably have greater success if you emphasize first of all the things to be developed rather than the things to be given up; just as a skilful means. But, with Order Members and even Mitras, you should be able to just speak in terms of both developing and cultivating and giving up. All right, we'd better give up now.

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21 October 1986

Vessantara: So tonight, Bhante, it is our last session on Ch. IV of Nanamoli. We have only got six questions. We'll start with Derek.

Derek: I was thinking about what you were saying last night. In the light of , what you were saying about extreme kinds of evil not being able to be integrated into the spiritual life, how do you now see the story of ... Nagpo, his transformation into ...?

S: Well, clearly, Th... Nagpo represents within the context of that text that kind of evil which can be transformed! Do you see what I mean? But I think we must be careful not to think of evil as constituting a sort of entity in the philosophical sense. There are no evil actions, and therefore no evil, apart from sentient beings whether human or non-human who perform evil actions. When you cease to perform an evil action, the evil, so to speak, represented by that particular evil action, ceases to exist. It is not that it has been literally transformed or sublimated; it in a way goes back to the illustration I gave some weeks ago, in another connection, of the clapping of the hands: when you have ceased to clap your hands, where does the sound go? It is not that the sound is sort of sublimated into silence. So that, when you cease to do evil, it isn't that there is an entity called evil independently of any personality which existed when you were performing evil and is sublimated or transformed when you have ceased to do evil. It just, so to speak, ceases to exist. Do you see the distinction? So I think the difficulty arises when we reify. We first of all abstract and then reify this conception of evil. So, yes, when we speak of evil entities in the sense of evil personalities, maybe non-human, we mean those whose activities are predominantly unskilful. But that is not to suggest that evil or unskilfulness exists apart from the beings or the personalities who perform unskilful actions. So when you cease to perform an unskilful action, you are still there; it is just the unskilful action that ceases to exist, to the extent that it is unskilful. You could speak of withdrawing the energy which was invested in that evil action from the evil action and then employing it in some other way. But one doesn't, as I think I mentioned the other day, sort of transform or integrate the evil as such. Perhaps the difficulty is mainly semantic. It isn't as though you've got this great lump of evil and you take it up and, unchanged, you sort of somehow incorporate it into yourself and in that way it ceases to be evil. It isn't really like that. For instance, supposing you are ill and then you recover, you retain [regain?] your health, you don't incorporate the illness into yourself. You just recover from it, the illness ceases to exist, your organism is now functioning in a healthy way. It is the unhealthy functioning which was called disease the disease is not as it were an entity apart from your organism.

Uttara: There are two questions. One: what then do you mean by I've heard , you saying that people have a quantum of negativity. Is that the same for that? Supposing you transform that into good.

S: When I speak of a quantum of negativity, it is your negativity. It is not a thing which exists apart from you; it is those unconscious or semiconscious or partly conscious unskilful mental activities and tendencies which can very easily come out into the open. They are there, as it were, waiting ready to burst forth; or, if they are more or less unconscious, you can say waiting to be tapped. But even that, from the point of view of language, is a quasi-reification, so one shouldn't take it too literally; just as when we speak of people having a fund of goodness well, we [73] don't mean there is literally a fund, deep down in them; it is a way of

expressing their capacity for skilful action without much effort or difficulty, as though it's all there ready, so to speak.

Uttara: There is usually the analogy with us being like lotuses in the mire and the mire has to be transformed or we have to use the well, the mire isn't in a sense bad, it's just you use that energy for transforming.

S: Here you are confusing in a way two things. You can look at mire, the mud, from two points of view. You can look at it as simply evil, so to speak, or you can look at it as the energy which, at least currently, is finding expression in an evil manner. So if you look at it in the first way, well, the correct development of the analogy is to shake off the mire or emerge from it. If you are thinking of the mire in the second sense, well, then you draw nourishment from it and transform it into something beautiful. It just depends what you intend the symbol or the image of the mire to stand for.

Uttara: So therefore if the evil was, let's say, a sort of slimy hand out of the mire holding you back, in a sense you have to release yourself from that; whereas the other one would be like just growing

S: Right, yes. Providing you with crude nourishment, which you proceed to absorb and transform. So, in the one case you are seeing the mire as something evil to be got rid of; in the other you are seeing it as sort of crude energy to be transformed. So those are two different ways of looking at it.

Cittapala: Bhante, I know you said the other evening that Devaputra Mara inhabited , the lower realm of the devalokas in kamaloka. I am having a little difficulty in fitting that into my existing picture of the devaloka. Does this mean that the devas who inhabit the kamaloka are much more varied in species?

S: Perhaps one could make that point, because if one is to go into this, the Pali texts refer to all sorts of non-human beings (well, the Sanskrit texts, too), which aren't very easy to place. Perhaps it needs a bit of working out. I think I have mentioned that there is a bit of ambiguity with regard to the precise location of the Asuras. And then, all right, what about the Gandharvas where do you put them? What about the Kinnaras, the Maharaggas(?)? There are all sorts of creatures. There are others whose names I can't remember oh, the Rakshasas, the Yakshas; where precisely do they come in? So I think one mustn't think that there is just the earth plane, and then at once above that there is a beautiful heaven. It seems as though there are all sorts of intermediate levels or grades, and it isn't always easy to know exactly where some of these beings fit. There are all sorts of little what shall I say sort of corridors opening off from these main apartments, as it were.

Cittapala: This reminds me of your analogy of the altered states of consciousness.

S: Yes, indeed! Well, it does correspond, doesn't it? Because a world corresponds to a state of consciousness, and vice versa. So perhaps it's not easy, or even possible, to work out a very systematic plan or scheme with every class of being neatly allocated to a position above or below all the others. I have given some thought to this question of hierarchy of existence, as it were, and I am hoping to write or talk something about it some time. I think it involves a quite important principle well, several important principles. First of all, the principle of

hierarchy itself, and then the principle of a world corresponding to a state of consciousness or a state of consciousness corresponding to a world. If you even take the standard account of the [74] different devalokas, the distinction between devalokas and brahmalokas is pretty straightforward. But what are you to make of the devas that delight in creation their own creations and the devas that delight in the creations of others? What is the basis of that distinction? What does it mean? What sort of state of consciousness does that correspond to? These questions, as far as I know, have never been asked. These are things that need to be gone into; I have been giving them thought over the years and hope to have something reasonable to say about that in due course.

Gerd: In the text, in the Fire Sermon, feeling is described as pleasant, painful, or neither painful nor pleasant. What constitutes such a neutral feeling?

S: I suppose one can only say that feeling which is neither pleasant nor painful! One can't really get beyond that definition. I suppose one has to consult one's own experience and try to as it were locate or identify those feelings that you have difficulty in identifying as either definitely painful or definitely pleasant.

Gerd: We were speculating a bit if it might not be due to a lack of sensibility where one doesn't feel

S: Ah, feeling here means sensation. It does not mean emotion. So, yes, you might be not experiencing pain due to lack of sensibility; but none the less it would still be a neutral feeling, a neutral sensation. Supposing your finger goes numb and someone pricks it; well, you feel something but it's not painful. It certainly isn't pleasant. You could say that was a neutral sensation.

Jayamati: I can understand how a painful feeling or a pleasurable feeling is subject to aversion or craving, but with a neutral feeling, which is how is that a subject of craving? because it does seem from the text that there is no desire for that feeling?

S: Usually craving is a craving for pleasurable sensation and aversion is aversion from painful sensation; so it is as though, when sensation is neutral, the craving is in abeyance, it's suspended. Not that you've got rid of it, because it can come into play, it can come into operation immediately a pleasurable sensation presents itself; but it is at least in abeyance.

Vessantara: So, when the Fire Sermon says: 'Also the feeling, whether pleasant, painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant, that arises with mind contact as its condition, that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of delusion.'

S: Well, this is from the perspective of Insight, because the potentiality is there. But it is not that the neutral sensation itself, in so far as it is neutral, is so burning, but it is like extending the analogy a piece of dry tinder which could be set on fire as soon as it came into proximity with the flame. But it is not literally at that time on fire in that way, but it is certainly potentially so. I don't know whether this point has ever been explained in traditional Buddhism, but that is how it seems to me.

Vessantara: Did you not, on another occasion I think in the Sathipassana Sutra seminar

question whether you could have a purely neutral vedana?

S: I think I would question whether it is always possible to identify sensations definitely as one or the other. I think, to go back to that interesting little book that we've been talking about that is to say, Sex Is Not Compulsory the author of [75] that makes the point that, with regard to a certain well-known experience, it is sometimes difficult to tell, according to her, whether it is actually pleasurable or painful. And we can have certain bodily sensations, for instance, like an itch: it is sometimes difficult to tell whether they are pleasurable or painful, isn't it? So sometimes, even with regard to neutral sensations, it may be difficult to tell 'Is it neutral or are you getting some slight pleasure or pain, or is it even just very, very slightly painful?' and you can't be quite sure. So perhaps a neutral sensation, one could say, is one which is so low-toned, as it were, that it is very difficult to identify it as definitely painful or definitely pleasurable. But certainly there are some sensations which are unmistakably pleasurable, unmistakably painful. There is the whole range of possible sensations, one might say, with the very painful at this end and the very pleasurable at that end, and the neutral as it were in the middle. There presumably must be some completely neutral point at which the pleasurable, however subtly pleasurable, changes over into or is succeeded by the painful, however subtly painful.

Uttara: There is a list I think it is in The Foundations of Mindfulness this is by Lama Govinda of mental states. I think there are about 60something of them. And he makes the point that, I think [there are] ten or something which are painful experiences, there are other ones which are neutral, and then there's this great

S: Yes, he is dealing in that passage with the point of whether Buddhism is pessimistic or not, and he is maintaining that Buddhism is not; and he advances the view that, according to the Abhidharma, or according to the Abhidharma analysis, there are more states of consciousness which are pleasurable than are painful; because one has to take into account all the different heavens. That is no doubt so, but I suppose one could subdivide the hells! It depends how you subdivide, or to what extent.

Uttara: So he is maybe tending to ... ness, in a way

S: No, he is following the Abhidharma analysis. He hasn't altered that; but that as it stands certainly does suggest that there are more pleasurable mental states in existence than painful ones.

Uttara: Do you necessarily agree with what he said in that text? It gives you the impression that why are we experiencing or why are we satisfied with experiencing just the more unpleasant?

S: Well, why are we? Everybody knows, everybody agrees, that dhyana states are much more blissful than those of ordinary consciousness, but you don't very often see people going all out to experience those very blissful dhyana states. So one has to ask oneself. It's no use asking me! You have to ask yourself. You know the answer. It is what you presumably are sometimes doing! I suppose the answer is it's not easy to enjoy these more subtle forms of pleasure or subtle forms of bliss.

Uttara: You get so used to experiencing the grosser

S: There is that Indian parable about the woman who took her fish to market and stayed longer than she had expected, and was accommodated in a florist's shop; and she couldn't sleep because she was troubled by all these sweet smells; so she got hold of her dirty old fish basket, which she'd brought the fish to market in, and put it right under her nose, and that was all right, she went straight off to sleep! So these fish baskets can take various forms! (Laughter.) Anyway, let's pass on to the next question. How are we getting on with them?

[76]
Vessantara: We've done two so far out of six.

Ratnaprabha: I'm afraid this is rather a vague question, Bhante, because I am very confused

S: That's very unusual for you!

Ratnaprabha: It's connected with the first question we had tonight about evil, and particularly about observing faults in other people; and it was actually an area that we were discussing much earlier on the retreat while we were studying the Mitrata Omnibus; and in one of the lectures there you talk about taking delight in people and seeing a person as a spiritual being. So the area that I feel rather confused about is: how one regards somebody, taking delight in somebody, when you can see both good and bad qualities in them. Is it that you isolate the good qualities from the bad and you take delight in the good ones and for now ignore the bad ones, or is it that you really need to consider the whole person as a person, with all their faults, warts and all, sort of thing?

S: I think this is my personal view you need to consider the whole person. It's like, for instance, looking at a beautiful painting which is flawed. Sometimes you do find these sort of paintings in museums and art galleries; perhaps they were painted five or six hundred years ago, but they have been perhaps chipped or the paint perhaps has faded or maybe someone has damaged them in some way; so you appreciate the beauty of the painting but at the same time you do see the damage, you do see perhaps the spots, quite literally, on the painting. So you rejoice in the beauty of the painting but you regret the spots and you wish they could be cleaned away or that the damage could be repaired. Do you see what I mean? So it's like that with people; sometimes you can really appreciate them and really see their spiritual potential, or in an even deeper way see what they really are, but as it were on the surface you no less clearly see these terrible blots and blemishes. And you can also see how much more clearly the intrinsic beauty of the person would be manifested if only those blots and blemishes could be cleared away. So I think it's a question of seeing the whole person as he or she at present exists; as it were taking a double view, having a double vision: what they are in a sense in reality to use an expression which might be misunderstood and what they are concretely, in actuality, at this moment. I think you have to keep both in view. So when you point out a fault or a blemish or even criticize it, it's like saying, 'Well, look: you'd be so much better without that, because what you really are would manifest so much more clearly. Please get rid of it. Please clean it.' That should be your spirit; not one of carping criticism, or antagonism, or anything of that sort. Just thinking or feeling how much better the person would be without those blemishes. Well, it's just like a handsome or beautiful person with unsightly pimples on the face; well, the pimples don't prevent you seeing how handsome or beautiful that person really is, but you can't help feeling they would be a lot better off without those pimples; you might even advise them to get some cream, or something of that sort, and treat them. It's rather like that, or in that sort of spirit, rather than in a spirit of fault-finding. Sometimes

people like their pimples. that's the difficult part! Sometimes they think the pimples are not blemishes at all, they are ornaments! They are rather proud of their pimples, so to speak, prize their blemishes or their warts.

Ratnaprabha: So your phrase -

[77]
S: When are we coming to the vagueness? (Laughter.)

Ratnaprabha: The vagueness, perhaps, is more in my mind than in the question. But your phrase 'seeing somebody as a spiritual being' this refers to what you have now called 'seeing them as they really are underneath'.

S: Yes, I indicated the

Ratnaprabha: Inverted commas.

S: Yes, the ambiguities of this or the possibilities of misunderstanding here. Perhaps it would be safer to just speak in terms of seeing their potential. It reminds me of Milton's description of Satan, or Lucifer, after his fall: what does he say? Who's a Milton scholar? 'Not less than an archangel' what is it? Anyway, he goes on to give this famous comparison with the sun, 'shorn of his beams', that the archangel, after his fall, is still glorious, but to some extent he is shorn of his glory, just like the setting [sic] sun, which is 'shorn of its beams', as it were; you can sort of look at it. Yes, 'the excess of glory obscured', he says. 'Not less than an archangel ruined,' he says; so there are those two as it were contradictory ideas. Lucifer is still an archangel, but he is a ruined archangel. That is also, or very nearly, the title of a biography of Coleridge, isn't it? Damaged Archangel. So you should think of yourselves in those sort of terms; you are wounded angels, as it were. There is a painting by a Finnish painter which I saw in an art gallery in Helsinki, quite an impressive painting, called The Wounded Angel, and there is this poor angel, with his head bandaged and his wings rather torn and he is sitting on a sort of stretcher, and he is being borne along by two men, rather sadly! So perhaps that is a better way of looking at people, especially one's own friends, because you can't ignore the blemishes but you mustn't lose sight of the potential of the person, or mustn't lose sight of their good qualities that exist even now, despite the blemishes by which they are accompanied or by which they are overlaid. Some people, unfortunately, are so susceptible and even defensive that if you just point out a tiny blemish they think that you are criticizing them as a person or rejecting them even totally, or disapproving of them totally. That makes things rather difficult.

[actual quote reads:] his form had yet not lost
All her Original brightness, nor appear'd
Less then Arch Angel ruind, and th' excess
Of Glory obscur'd: As when the Sun new ris'n
Looks through the Horizontal misty Air
Shorn of his Beams

[78]
Ratnaprabha: I don't know if this would add anything to it, but in trying to understand the question I was looking up to see what Blake had to say about it. I found that he does make a

definite distinction, as it were, between people's evil qualities, if you like, their faults, and their good qualities. There is a short passage in Frye, which I could read out to see whether this does correspond to your point if you think that would be appropriate. He says (this is Frye paraphrasing Blake): The real enemy is the spirit that looked out of Hayley's eyes' (this is Blake's friend and enemy, if you like, Hayley) 'when Hayley was angry, that is Hayley's selfhood or spectre, the Satan in him that hates and tries to destroy all the imagination it finds. It is a weakling's charity to say that we must love our friends in spite of or including their faults. Their faults are their diseases, and to love a man's diseases is not very friendly to the man.'

S: Yes, right: pimples!

Ratnaprabha (continuing): 'All men are composed of imagination and selfhood, and , all men should cherish the former in themselves and love it in other men, while hating all selfhoods and trying to annihilate their own.'

S: Well, that does just about sum it up, doesn't it? Only one must understand exactly what Blake means by 'selfhood'. I mean he uses that expression in that purely negative sense, sometimes corresponding to something more like egotism or self-centredness. Yes, that does sum it up. But it's no sign of friendship to condone your friend's weak points, or even his evil qualities or his blemishes. This is why one speaks, presumably, of fierce friendship; not a sort of cossetting friendship.

But, before you can be a fierce friend, you've got to be a friend. If you are fierce with somebody, that other person has got to be convinced that you are his friend, otherwise it will just be taken as an attack on him, so you must be quite sure that the friendship is firmly established before you start introducing that element of fierceness. One shouldn't do that prematurely; there must be strong mutual trust for that sort of fierce friendship, that sort of criticism, to be possible.

Peter: It's a question about the beliefs of the matted-hair fire-worshipping ascetics. Kassapa's verses explaining why ... says: 'Sights and sounds and tastes and concubines are the rewards promised for sacrifice.' Do we know who promised these rewards?

S: Ah! Presumably in the Vedas.

Peter: And whether they were expected in this lifetime or in subsequent lifetimes?

S: Usually the sacrifices described, or rather enjoined, in the Vedas, was for the fulfilment of all sorts of worldly aims. This is why, for instance, kings and wealthy people engaged brahmins to perform sacrifices on their behalf for certain specific purposes; and, of course, the brahmins performed them on their own behalf. Some very important sacrifices were held to help one even achieve heaven after death. But what Kassapa comes to realize is the inefficacy of all such sacrifices. But sacrifice of that sort, or in that sense, was the mainstay of Vedic religion. We talked a little bit about that in connection with Ambedkar's article, didn't we the yagans and yagas were very much of this type.

[79]
Peter: Would Kassapa and his other ascetics be expecting a sort of payoff for themselves?

S: Presumably; that does seem to be the implication, yes whether they were thinking in terms of enhanced prosperity in this life, or a more fortunate existence after death.

Vessantara: Bhante, in this chapter there's the Fire Sermon, which the Buddha , preaches to the previously fire-worshipping ascetics. Clearly, fire must have already been a very powerful symbol, so that the Buddha's teaching using that image must have been very strong. Could you comment on the fact that it seems that, presumably, before, fire would have been a very positive image, but now, in a way, it has been used as something negative, almost, to get away from?

S: One does sometimes find in the Pali Scriptures the symbolism of fire and sacrifice used positively, but it's comparatively rare. I think one can say that, looking at it quite neutrally, fire can very easily be regarded as a very positive symbol; or perhaps one could even say as a neutral symbol, in the sense that it can be used very positively or very negatively. I mean fire can be used to warm one, to cook food, to give a light; but it can also be used to bring devastation, to bring destruction. So perhaps one could say that fire is neither positive nor negative; so the symbol fire can be used in a positive or in a negative sense. So, on that particular occasion, the Buddha chose to use it in, so to speak, a negative sense. Possibly he wanted the Kassapas and their followers to see the other side of the picture; it's difficult to say. It has been suggested I think it was by Dalkay(?) that fire can be seen simply as not just a symbol but as what shall I say? a representative or an exemplar of the principle of change. Because what happens when fire is burning? There is a process of combustion, isn't there? So what is combustion? I am sure Ratnaprabha can tell us that. I personally can't put it in the sort of technical way that I would like. So what happens in the process of combustion?

Ratnaprabha: Well, one substance changes into another substance, and during the process a lot of energy is liberated.

S: So the symbol of fire therefore becomes quite a good symbol of change and even of transformation. One might even say that perhaps on the whole it is a positive rather than a negative symbol. It has been suggested that the Buddha, when they all went up that hill, saw in the distance forest fires burning and at once took that opportunity and said that everything is burning, it's not just the trees of the forest, everything is on fire; which really means everything is changing; also everything is capable of being transformed. We don't necessarily have the whole of the Buddha's discourse on that occasion; or it might have implications that the Buddha himself didn't care to draw out at that particular time. So everything is in a way undergoing a process of combustion; the energy of which it consists is in process of change and transformation all the time.

Vessantara: There's that verse in the Dhammapada about transforming(?) fire.

S: That's true, yes. Yes. It burns up his fetters. So that has a somewhat positive connotation. Fire is certainly a very powerful symbol, it arouses all sorts of primitive associations, presumably.

Derek: There was actually a film about primitive man called 'The Quest for Fire'.

[80]
S: Ah, yes, right.

Derek: They ... and when they got it home to ..., it was a symbol of power and survival to them.

S: Well, we have some reference to that at the beginning of Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound, don't we? Because Prometheus was the fire-bringer, he gave the gift of fire to humanity, and was punished by the gods for that because as a result of the gift or discovery of fire, man became civilized and started becoming like the gods. Without fire you can't protect yourself from wild beasts at night, you can't see at night, you can't cook food; so fire makes the difference between barbarism and civilization, almost. You need fire for not only cooking food but manufacturing pots and for forging weapons and implements and Perhaps it would be an interesting little piece of research for someone to go through the Pali Canon and extract all the references to fire, all the different ways in which the symbolism of fire is employed.

: Bhante, in the western tradition we have the alchemical symbols, where you have fire transforming the prima materia, which is yourself; which is to actually make gold from base metal.

S: Well, to mention that, in the Indian tradition, including Buddhism and including the Pali Canon, you have got the conception of tapasya; and the word tapasya is usually translated as penance, though it is much more than that. It comes from a root meaning to burn or to heat. It is the sort of inner fire which transforms.

: Is this the tummo heat that is transformed

S: Ah, no; tummo is a Tibetan word. That is quite different. That corresponds to the er

: Chandali?

S: That's right, chandali, the blazing one. It is similar, but it is not the word tapasya.

: Isn't the process the same? In other words, you are burning up the impurities?

S: You could look at it in terms of a burning up of impurities. What I was meaning was that the word tummo in Tibetan is not a corruption of the Sanskrit word tapasya; it has nothing to do with it, it belongs to the Tibetan language. But tapasya has all sorts of associations, and it is a word that doesn't occur so frequently in Buddhist literature but has a quite important place in Vedic and Upanishadic literature. For instance, you've got the expression tapuban(?), a grove, usually translated as 'a penance grove', but it is a grove where people retire to devote themselves to intensive spiritual practice. This is probably how it is best translated: intensive spiritual practice; usually involving some form of yoga or meditation. It is not penance in the sense of self-punishment.

[81]
Side 3

The Dhammapada also speaks of purifying the mind just as the smith purifies the silver.

Alan Pendock: At the second last paragraph in the chapter I'll just read a short section "Suppose I present the Bamboo Grove to the Community headed by the Enlightened One?"

Then he took a gold jug, and he dedicated the Bamboo Grove to the Blessed One with the Washing of Hands. Is this the traditional way of handing over property?

S: Yes, indeed. The meaning or the significance seems to have been that you poured out water and this is still done in Buddhist countries, when you make a ceremonial offering you pour out water, and just as the water, once poured out and absorbed into the ground, cannot be recalled, in the same way you make the gift without any possibility of recall. You make it absolutely. This is what it signifies. In the Transference of Merits ceremony, especially for a deceased person, one does this, and there are appropriate Pali verses to recite on that occasion.

Alan: In this instance, though, it is with 'the Washing of Hands'.

S: I am not sure what that signifies, but it is clearly a reinforcement, in a way, of the same symbolism, I suppose.

Alan: It reminds me of the incident in the Bible of Pilate and Jesus Christ.

S: Well, in the case of Pilate, he washes his hands and 'washes his hands' of the responsibility of the execution of Christ. So there might be something of that sort you've washed your hands of the matter, you've washed your hands of the property, it no longer is anything to do with you. As I've said, it is a reinforcement of the basic symbolism of the pouring of the water. Presumably it is a golden jug because he is a rich man; it doesn't have to be gold.

Vessantara: That's about it.

S: Oh, that's it; oh. So what are you going to do next? Which chapter? Or have you not decided?

Vessantara: Is there a gloss in that chapter which we didn't bring out?

S: I don't think so. I did go through it myself. Let me just have a quick glance. Ah, you realize that where Nanamoli translates 'Magnificent, Lord, magnificent', it's sadhu which is usually translated as 'It is well' or 'Bravo'? You also notice the social class of the first converts: so many of them come from the merchant class do you notice that? In the case of the first five, as far as I remember, they were all from the Sakya clan. Yasa and his companions were from merchant stock, and the Jatilas, the Kassapa brothers, were brahmins, and presumably their followers too.

Vessantara: Would the first ones, Sakyans, [be] kshatriyas, like the Buddha, necessarily?

S: Yes.

[82]
Ratnaprabha: It does seem to be a very, very rapid expansion, doesn't it, in that society?

S: Indeed, yes, indeed; amazingly so.

Ratnaprabha: Even if you don't take 120,000 absolutely literally, it is still a very big spread of

the movement.

S: I was reading somewhere that someone had analysed religious movements and had found that their period of most intensive activity, during which, in a sense, everything, at least embryonically, happened, was the first eight years; the first eight years were the really creative period, and then the first 80; and after that, it was a period of sort of stability and then decline, over a period of, say, 300 or 400 years. They as it were I don't remember the details made a comparison with the development of the human being: the rapidity with which cells divide and multiply during the first few minutes of life, I believe, is something quite amazing, but then the process of growth very quickly starts slowing down. It is slowed down dramatically even before you are born! So I was wondering, obviously, whether that was true of the FWBO that the first eight years were its period of most intense activity, as it were embryonically; not that the greatest number of activities were conducted then, but that the main lines of development were definitely laid down. I am not sure about that, because we didn't even have single-sex communities. But perhaps principles were laid down out of which that grew, or out of which they grew, those single-sex communities and so on. But certainly, during those first eight years, the principle of Going for Refuge was firmly laid down, wasn't it? And that it was that that was primary, and not lifestyle.

Cittapala: Do you think that might extend to the formation of centres?

S: Well, that's quite interesting; yes.

Cittapala: Because I've noticed that certain centres that we've got in more provincial towns don't seem to have mushroomed, exactly. I've often wondered whether [there was] a sort of quantum leap which perhaps they need to engage in to get any bigger, or whether indeed they ever would get any bigger beyond the present size.

S: Yes. Of course, the size of the town in which they are situated in very often a limiting factor, isn't it? But, on the other hand, how much bigger, say, is London than Norwich? Roughly 100 times? Is, say, the London Buddhist Centre 100 times bigger than the Norwich centre? It doesn't seem to work out quite like that, does it?

Cittapala: There might be other limiting factors which come in, once you get beyond a certain size it's not feasible to

S: And also the beleaguered(?) Order Members who are there. Some individual Order Members seem able to do much more than others.

Alan Pendock: Did the book say anything that you can do to actually slow the decline? You've got this 300 to 500 year decline.

S: The book seemed to suggest I can't remember definitely that it was more or less inevitable. Though, as a Buddhist, I wouldn't agree with that, because there can be upsurges, there can be renaissances as it were. For instance, to give an example [83] from Christian history, you have the very creative period of the early Benedictine movement; then it gradually stabilized and became a bit rigid; but then you had the Cistercian movement, via the monastery of Cluny, growing out of that, and a tremendous Cistercian revival, and Aelred's Spiritual Friendship was one of the literary products of that. But then the Cistercians themselves

declined. But then again, in different countries you had a revival in different ways some hundreds of years later. And so it goes on, very often.

Alan: But those revivals are in

S: Those revivals have to come from individuals, just as the original inspiration came from an individual or individuals. So I don't think that decline is inevitable, though there will always be that tendency. And if left to itself that tendency will run its course and there will be decline. But individuals can always counter that tendency with their own creative effort. That isn't the case with human beings, of course; there the analogy breaks down.

Uttara: That would mean that individuals couldn't then grow as such.

S: That's right; yes, that they were all individuals within that particular system or tradition, it couldn't grow and develop. They would necessarily share in the decline. So that's putting things the wrong way round. The decline is due to their lack of individual initiative; they have the capacity to take that individual initiative, and if they do that in sufficient numbers, the trend of decline will be reversed and there will be a renaissance. So it does basically still depend on the individual or on a number of individuals working together. Decline is not necessarily permanent.

Jayamati: Perhaps that just indicates the typical time it takes for institutions to gain their solidity and their full strength. I mean their faith. The other thought I had, Bhante, in that connection, was how long after you started the Movement was it before you decided to take that break in Cornwall?

S: Six years. That's why I called it a sabbatical; I was away in 1963.

Jayamati: You're sure (?) it wasn't eight? It would fit rather nicely into it.

S: It was the seventh year.

Uttara: In 1973.

S: '73, yes.

: Bhante, I think before the eighth year was out we did have single-sex communities, and also you had Pundarika and you had the formation of a strong team to spring out from that, so you had Subhuti, Lokamitra

S: That's true. Well, we did have a weekend men's retreat, if that counts! even before I left London. Maybe that was the tiny seed from which everything sprang of this kind!

: Maybe I'm trying to fit the facts. I'm sure we had single-sex communities, though.

S: Well, in a way, we did without knowing it. Well, I was living at Muswell Hill with Siddhiratna and Kevin.

: But then there was Lokamitra and Subhuti in No. 5 ... Street.

S: That's true, they were certainly there.

: and Dhammadinna was in her own community with the women.

S: But I think that all that was, in a way, more by accident than design, if you see what I mean.

: Experimental.

S: No, not experimental, but it just sort of happened. Not that a principle was laid down, a principle of single-sex communities and we thereupon started to apply that. When I moved to Muswell Hill, I didn't consider, I didn't think in terms of 'I want to live in a men's community'; it was a question of who was available to share the flat, and Siddhiratna and Kevin happened to be available and I got on with them quite well, so we moved in together. I wasn't thinking consciously in terms of setting up a single-sex community; in fact, I don't suppose I was really thinking very consciously in terms of a community at all! if you see what I mean. Though that is in effect more or less what we had.

Peter: Do you see from that analysis that Buddhism itself fits into eight years of rapid growth, 80 years of slower growth, and then decline?

S: You could say that. But then you could say that the Mahayana came along and there was a tremendous spiritual renaissance as a result of that, and a few hundred years later, when the Mahayana itself had declined, along came the Vajrayana; and, in China, along came Ch'an or Zen.

Peter: It does seem to be a sort of process of something like boom/slump rather than a continuous event, a widening circle.

S: It does rather seem to be like that, yes indeed. But the boom always originates with individuals. By the very nature of spiritual life and spiritual movements, it must do so.

Cittapala: Bhante, have you ever allowed yourself to speculate as to how large the Western Buddhist Order might become?

S: How large it might become? I don't speculate, because I think that, in principle, well, the sky is the limit, as it were. So I speculate as to by what number of people, it might fall short of that! I must say I am a little, just a little, disappointed at the rather slow rate of growth so far, and especially this year. We haven't had all that many Order Members, though the ladies have picked up a little bit, I am glad to see; there are seven women ordained so far this year. I don't suppose there'll be any more, not as far as I know. But it is certainly better than last year, and a lot better than the two years before that, when I believe no women were ordained; so they are certainly picking up, and I would like to see the men pick up correspondingly. I have often spoken in terms of every individual Order Member every two years producing, as it were, another Order Member which I think is possible if one has a sufficiently close friendship with a promising Mitra. I think so much can be done by personal contact and personal friendship. It seems to be almost a crucial factor. But, anyway, I do gather that there

is probably going to be quite a large number of people on the Request Retreat next year, and let's hope quite a large number of them going off to Guhyaloka. But, yes, I would like to see things moving a bit faster; not that one wants to push things in an artificial way, [85] but, yes, it would be if the whole Movement was more alive, especially the Order, and that that showed itself in perhaps even a quite dramatic growth of the Order, with all that that implies in multiplication in the number of centres. There are still pitifully few centres anywhere, even in Britain. I made a list once, I think, of some 75 major towns and cities where we should have centres, and we haven't got them in more than a tenth of that number. There are so many good places, especially in the Midlands and the North, [not] to speak of Scotland. But we are covering Scotland; we are starting up now in Edinburgh, so you get Glasgow and Edinburgh what's the third town? Dundee, or ?

Uttara: Dundee.

S: Well, you are covering Scotland pretty well then. You've sort of triangulated it.

Vessantara: Bhante, we keep talking or you have been talking, for years now, about if Order Members spent time with one Mitra after another so that they should be ready, and if that happened then the Order would grow in size much quicker. Would it not be worth reconsidering, and making quite major changes in our emphasis, the way we do things, so that that really becomes much more of a priority and ... whether we are genuinely encouraging that?

S: Yes. It's up to the Order Members, and it's up to the centres so to organize themselves that it is possible, perhaps, for Order Members to spend more time in one way or another with Mitras. Perhaps it means, in the case of some Order Members, spending less time in other ways.

Vessantara: When you say 'two hours a day', presumably that is not just working alongside somebody ?

S: No; in theory, working with someone is quite good, but it doesn't seem always to work like that in practice. It depends what sort of work you do together. If it is work that requires a lot of consultation and discussion and actually doing things then together, well, yes; I think you can develop a friendship in that way quite easily. But if you are simply sitting at two different desks in the same room, dealing with two different sets of papers and not exchanging many words, that doesn't really help in the development of a personal relationship not that actual situation itself.

Cittapala: So I am just playing around with the idea ... what about, say, Order Members taking on a Mitra as an apprentice, almost

S: I have talked about this for years, as Vessantara has mentioned, but it doesn't really seem to happen. Maybe this has just occurred to me not all Order Members have the confidence that they can actually do it, that they can produce those sort of effects just by themselves, almost.

Cittapala: But presumably one of the reasons might be that, in normal Western terms, it might seem rather inefficient to have two people doing a job or an occupation where one person could suffice to do the job; but

S: No, I am not thinking of just the work situation. I am thinking of just spending time, say, in the case of the Order Member, with the Mitra just for the sake of spending time with him. That is how I mentioned my two hours, you know, years ago. There was something that I came across just going through that little work on Spiritual Friendship the other day: the author makes the point that you must this isn't quite his language, but I think it is his meaning you must take delight in [86] the company of your friend. I think, in the case of quite a lot of Order Members, they regard spending time with Mitras very often more as a duty than as a pleasure. They definitely think of spending time with members of the opposite sex as pleasurable, but I think it is very difficult for them to think of spending time with Mitras as pleasurable in the same way; I don't mean in the sexual way but in as it were the emotional way. I think this is a very big difficulty from a practical point of view. You don't feel there is much in it for you. You feel as though you are on duty. It is not an enjoyable two hours, necessarily. Well, sometimes it might be, but not anything really delightful. You don't experience the same sort of pleasure and happiness as you do in the company, perhaps, of your current girl friend or even your wife! if you see what I mean. But you get the point? I think a lot really depends on this. I think this feeling that there is not much in it for you, just spending time with a Mitra, that it is not really an enjoyment. I think this comes in the way of Order Members spending time with Mitras. Some of you still are Mitras; I don't know whether you've got anything to say about this. Have you found, or noticed, that Order Members do delight in your company? Maybe it differs; maybe some favourite Mitras have got too many Order Members flocking around them. Others, not perhaps so superficially attractive, don't get so much attention. Well, you don't often hear of Order Members taking Mitras away on holidays with them, which would seem to be an ideal way to spend time with them and get really to know them. It does sometimes happen, but I think not nearly enough. They very often prefer to go away with well, some other kind of person! (Laughter.)

Uttara: Can you not have both?

S: Not at the same time! It depends how much time you've got. But I'm afraid, only too often, that the Mitra gets the worst of the deal, and I think this is one of the reasons why Mitras don't always come on as quickly as they might.

Sudhana: I was just thinking about the kalyana mitra ceremony, the relationship there, in relation to this. I wonder in fact whether it may have a slight inhibiting effect, inasmuch as one sees that, yes, that is a firm commitment to seeing somebody; but until you do that time, you don't have a firm commitment, you don't sort of say to somebody, 'I definitely want to see you every day for two months,' etc.; you don't have that contact, do you? And the kalyana mitra list, that is the Order Members on that list that are recommended to be kalyana mitras to Mitras, is a short list, because [they are] those people who you think are integrated.

S: Right. But one must remember that a name can always be added to that list. In fact, that sometimes does happen, that someone, say a Mitra, wants a particular Order Member as his kalyana mitra that is not on the list, and then that can be referred to me, and quite often I agree to that in the case of that particular person. If your name is on the kalyana mitra list, it simply means that you are available as kalyana mitra to any Mitra, without reference to me. But that doesn't preclude a particular Order Member, who isn't on the list, being the kalyana mitra for a particular Mitra.

Sudhana: What about the fact that you should have two kalyana mitras in order to go through

that ceremony, when just now we were talking more or less in terms of one friend to one

S: I think two are better, because in the case of Order Members they have got their own particular personalities and ways of looking at things. It is good if you can have a balance; that you've got perhaps two kalyana mitras of different temperaments or different ages or different ways of looking at things. For instance, we have [87] often found that it is good for Mitras to have one kalyana mitra who is quite older than them, to make them definitely look up, as it were, and on whom they can rely, and another one who is much nearer their own age, who is much more like an ordinary friend with whom they can relax more easily and open up more easily. Do you see what I mean? That is often a good combination. Or one who is a bit strict and another a bit easy-going, or whatever combination you like. Recently, some of the women Order Members have been thinking in terms of providing every woman who has asked for ordination with kalyana mitras. I think it would be good if that could be done generally that every Mitra who has asked for ordination gets two kalyana mitras. And I am sure if they do their job that Mitra will be able to prepare himself for ordination all the more quickly.

Sudhana: I would see that form as a real firm commitment to doing that kind of thing. I feel that our problem is a sort of vagueness and lack of communication over this, and

S: Over what?

Sudhana: Well, that friends may have. They sort of have a mutual feeling of enjoyment and joy, but do you actually make a firm commitment to doing that?

S: You can do so if you wish, there is nothing to stop you.

Sudhana: Oh yes, I know

S: It doesn't have to take necessarily the form of an official kalyana mitra ceremony. You may not feel you can commit yourself to that extent, but spend as much time as you feel like spending with the Mitra or the Order Member

Sudhana: What I am suggesting is that people are inhibited as ...

S: I don't know why they should be. Perhaps they are.

: Bhante: is it important that the Mitra chooses the kalyana mitra?

S: Well, the Mitra does have some say, you know! (Laughter.) It's just like marriage, you know: both parties have to agree.

: Yes, but I'll say it sometimes Mitras seem reluctant, I don't know, for one reason or another.

S: Reluctant in what way?

: Perhaps to engage in a stronger bond.

S: That may well be the case, yes. But I think, from what I've heard from Devamitra after his

recent tour in the UK, interviewing every single Mitra, male and female, with whom he could spend an hour or two, Mitras are only too anxious for more contact with Order Members. That was the report I got. There was only one centre where practically all the Mitras did not complain that they were not getting enough contact with Order Members. So it would seem that Mitras do just want more contact. Perhaps if they did have that greater contact, they would then find it easier to think in terms of having kalyana mitras. But if you find it difficult to get an Order Member to spend even half an hour with you every month, you won't be thinking [88] very seriously in terms of asking anyone to be your kalyana mitras. So it may be that some of the reluctance is of that kind or of that origin.

: I suppose what I had in mind was making sure that Mitras do have someone well, ideally there would be a link with an Order Member or two or more: a sort of natural link in a way. But I was wondering whether it would be good for the chapter anyway to perhaps well, we do at chapter meetings talk about Mitras someone to

S: Well, yes, that is one of the needs that [have] to be attended to. But my impression is that the Mitras are willing enough; they are like Barkis in David Copperfield: 'Barkis is willin". (Laughter.) Only not quite in the way that Barkis meant, but in a general way.

Sin Choon: Once I was told that if you are not an Order Member you won't get much support from the Order. You have to prove yourself that you really want to Go for Refuge first [and] that until you get ordained, before that you won't get much support, emotional or any kind of support, from the Order. I wonder whether that's true, whether that kind of attitude has been adopted by the Order.

S: I am not sure what you mean, quite.

Sin Choon: That sort of I can't remember who told me that but if you are not an Order Member but a Mitra and got in trouble, you won't get much support and help from the Order.

: That's rubbish.

Sin Choon: So only Order Members will get help from ...

S: No, I wouldn't say that at all. If anybody did think that, I would think it was a quite wrong impression.

Sin Choon: Well, that is the impression I was given, that I had to prove that I am really capable of handling myself before I can really Go for Refuge.

S: Obviously, one mustn't expect well, nobody must expect somebody else to do for them what they really ought to be doing for themselves; but I certainly wouldn't say that Order Members shouldn't help Mitras in whatever way they can. They are not going to find it easy to get ready for ordination, without that. Even supposing a Mitra isn't making all the effort that he could make, how can you even know that without really getting to know him well, and being a good friend of his?

Sin Choon: My experience is that you get feedback from them when you go on the request Retreat, but apart from that you are not given any feedback.

S: This is a complaint that Devamitra did come across, and I think the Order as a whole needs to well, particular chapters need to look into that and make sure that any comment is relayed back to the Mitra. I know this very often doesn't happen, and it really should happen, so the Mitra knows what he has to work on or what is expected of him. So, yes, there is quite a lot of room for improvement in that particular area. But it all seems to be a matter of common sense. I really wonder why it isn't attended to more. But I think well, these things are being discussed currently in chapters quite a lot, partly as a result of Devamitra's comments and partly because there has been a quite systematic review of recommendations with regard to the ordination process; all chapters are now considering recommendations [89] made by a particular sort of group of Order Members that went into the matter and produced papers on it. So there should be some improvement all round, I hope, quite soon. But also, of course, I also say this sometimes: if any particular Mitra feels that he isn't getting what he needs, he should raise his voice and say 'I really need this, I need that, I need more contact, I need more study, I need more help with this or that.' This is what I have said for a long time.

Jayamati: You mentioned a few moments ago the central flaw in the Order Member/Mitra relationship being that the Order Members don't seem to be taking delight in the Mitra.

S: Yes, I won't be absolutely certain that this is really the central issue, the centre-of-the-mandala issue; but it is at least very, very important, I think.

Jayamati: Well, given that it is very, very important, can you offer any advice as to how an Order Member might begin to take delight in a Mitra?

S: Well, you've got first, there are some Mitras you can take delight in quite quickly and easily, just because they look delightful and all that; but they do not all fall into that category. So I think you have to remind yourself that you mustn't go by appearances; that everybody has got some really good and valuable qualities that you could really appreciate and take delight in, if you just got to know those people. We all know, perhaps, that from time to time we are just thrown into somebody's company by sheer force of circumstances, when we wouldn't have chosen to spend time with that person, but circumstances oblige us to; maybe we don't naturally find that person attractive or anything of that sort; but none the less, after spending a lot of time with them over perhaps even years we really start to like them, even though we would never have chosen to be friends with a person like that, and even develop a strong friendship with them. Because due to the amount of time we spend with them we do get to know them better, and we discover that there is much that we can take delight in and that we can develop a relationship of friendship. So we mustn't pick and choose too much. I know some Order Members like to go straight for the young Mitras who are bright and maybe good-looking and intelligent, or at least a bit perky, if you see what I mean; and the dull old plodders often, I think, I suspect, get a bit neglected. But I think one has to realize that you can really take delight in everybody, or anybody rather, if you just got to know them a bit better. I think this often happens here at Il Convento, because people can't help getting to know one another better, and I am sure people do discover all sorts of unsuspected qualities and possibilities of friendship. I used to notice this in the army not to reminisce too much because people are just thrown together willy-nilly there, and you see the most unlikely sort of people forming quite close friendships after they have spent months in the same barrack room or whatever. There used to be some very odd assortments of friends; but they got on very well together, apparently just in an ordinary way, without any spiritual basis; and in the case of the FWBO, we can always tell ourselves 'There must be something in this person; he

has become involved in the Movement. He has become a Mitra, or even he has asked for ordination. We must have a lot in common. I have got to look a little deeper if I am not attracted by this particular person; there is a lot that I could appreciate and take delight in. There must be, by virtue of the mere fact that he is in the Movement at all.' So don't be put off by superficial unattractiveness, if someone is not good-looking, or he is not very witty or not a very interesting personality, as far as you can see, [90] just casting a quick glance over him. It is not love, you know, it's friendship, that you are concerned with. Love [friendship?] is more reasonable, it takes longer to build up; you need to get to know the other person. In the case of love, you are just projecting massively, and of course you are attracted and find it all very interesting and exciting. But friendship is a rather different thing. In some friendships there might be a little element of projection, but if it's more than a little element it will just become something else. Friendship is a plant of comparatively slow growth, so you've got to give yourself time to get to know the other person. That means spending time with him. Whereas, in the case of love, it can be begun and consummated and ended in the course of a weekend or even a day!

Sudhana: Bhante, would you say, then, that you can't be a fierce friend to develop friendship with somebody? You could say that there is a natural progression from being a Mitra to becoming an Order Member; you should expect, in a way, fierce friendship to be in the Order

S: Yes, of course.

Sudhana: and not necessarily in the Mitra stage.

S: Not necessarily, depending on the stamina of the Mitra concerned.

Sudhana: Would you say, on a general level, that that should be pervading throughout the whole Order?

S: Well, yes, inasmuch as Order Members are not perfect, there are some little blemishes, you know, here and there, in the case of most people; and those need to be indicated and, as I've said, that is fierce friendship. But you have to be quite sure that you've got an individual friendship with a particular Order Member before you take it upon yourself to engage in fierce friendship. Friendship comes first. But, in principle, any Order Member ought to be able to take any such criticism from any other Order Member, without even knowing them. There should be that general sense of good will and friendliness within the Order as a whole. But probably the Order hasn't quite reached that point yet.

Sudhana: Just a long shot, Bhante, going back to that problem of difficulty of developing the friendships. I wonder sometimes if it is a case of we take each other for granted in the FWBO, we take each other for granted because we've lived with one another, we've worked with one another, and half the time we want to get away from one another, because you're with people all the time. But, say, if there was no FWBO, I am sure any single one person that is in the FWBO would seem like a gem to come across in the world one person who is interested in the Dharma.

S: That's true.

Sudhana: So I am just wondering whether we sort of take it for granted

S: Well, perhaps we are spoiled.

Sudhana: We are spoiled, yes, in some ways. Spoiled for choice, spoiled for friendships. We want some kind of

S: Also we are not content, we don't want always to go deeper, we want the distraction of another person, a different person, or a different scene, different surroundings.

[91]
Side 4

: ... and wanting distraction rather than to go deeper? It's a ... point.

S: I think this is true in quite a few areas of life, even with regard to study. Going deeper means, very often, coming up against obstacles. It means making a further effort. So we may very often shrink from that, so we just change to something different; maybe something different of the same kind. I have often thought of that in terms of books, for obvious reasons, perhaps. Think how few books there were around, say, in earlier times say, in the Middle Ages; so usually you had a small number of books, if you had any books at all, that you knew very well. And this was one of the things I found in Kalimpong; because my natural tendency is to read or even to buy all the books I can, but in Kalimpong, for obvious reasons, I just had a relatively small number of books well, about 500! which I read again and again! (Laughter.) I don't mean that I read all of them again and again. Otherwise it's a bit like that famous occasion on which Oscar Wilde was asked if he had read Gibbon's Decline and Fall, and he said 'Oh yes, often'! So I don't mean to suggest that sort of thing. But there were texts, like the Saddharma Pundarika Sutra or the Sutta Nipata, that I went over again and again, and hopefully went into them more and more deeply. I [might] not have done that had I been back in England with many, many more books at my disposal at that time. It may have been a blessing in disguise; I often suspect that in fact it was. Do you see what I mean?

Dharmamati: Tying up the idea of friendship with also the growth of the Movement, as we were talking earlier, I am wondering whether, because of the emphasis on the expansion of the Movement, we haven't in fact thought in terms of quantity rather than quality, to the detriment of the actual expansion of the Movement, in the sense that if we had been going more in the sense of the quality of the individual we might have expanded more, because we would have been spending more time with an individual rather than considering how big classes are going to become, etc.

S: I am afraid my personal impression is that the time that we could have spent deepening our contact with people has on the whole not been spent expanding instead. I think it has just been spent on other things. I think also that you need say, take the question of classes classes of a certain size so that you get at least a few people who are going to become genuinely and deeply interested. Also you need a number of people just to support classes and a centre, even economically. So, no, I think that it isn't that expansion has taken place at the expense of personal contact; I think that it is other things that have taken away time, more often than not, from what one could have spent more with people.

Vessantara: You say that Order Members often perhaps don't see spending time with Mitras as a pleasurable activity. Order Members spend quite a lot of time working in different ways,

that they may not necessarily see as pleasurable. Possibly they more often just even spend time with Mitras seeing it to begin with as a job of work they would actually ...

S: Yes, indeed. Perhaps one shouldn't expect dividends in the form of delight too quickly. But I was going to say also that I have a sort of feeling that I have said all this before to quite a number of different groups of Order Members. I have a feeling I have said it, probably, at almost every Tuscany; and I think I have sometimes said, to those who were still Mitras in Tuscany, 'When you become Order Members, please remember what it was like to be a Mitra and do more for the Mitras.' I have a suspicion that it doesn't happen; that, when you become an Order Member, you very [92] often forget what it was like to be a Mitra or to have been a Mitra, and don't recollecting what it was like take more trouble to spend time with Mitras. It seems not to happen. So I give you all, those who are as yet Mitras, that warning: mind you don't slip into the same sort of groove when you become an Order Member. Do remember that there are these people called Mitras who are just almost begging, sometimes, for contact with now you as an Order Member.

Alan Turner: Bhante, taking up Sudhana's point a little, about the way it is easy to take one another for granted when you see people every day or work with them at a centre: have you any thoughts on ways that centre activities could be geared to enhancing friendships in some way or other, which could be brought to people's attention, or [on how] the actual value of contact with one another could be encouraged?

S: It probably rests more with the Order Members, the chapters, as such, rather than with the centres though, of course, those are run mainly by Order Members. I think Order Members through their chapters have got to keep alive this whole question of the need to take an interest in the Mitras. They will then, in their capacity, say, as members of their local FWBO council, make whatever practical arrangements will help to do that; and encourage one another in that way. I think it's not easy just to set up a structure which would ensure that more Order Members spend more time with Mitras, but the Order Members themselves, individually and collectively, have got to constantly bear this in mind.

Uttara: Bhante, in relation to what Alan said about people taking the Movement for granted and what we've all got. I was thinking [about] the times I sort of rejoice more in what we have in the Movement well, not all the time, but it's when I've been, say, working outside. So many people are working within the Movement, and you get people coming along to the regulars' class, and they attend every class; they are holding down an outside job and still they come and when they come to the class they see there is somebody upstairs and hasn't even come down to the class or something. They just can't understand it; so that is probably yes, we do take it for granted. Whereas if there are more people working outside the Movement, then you may well see them

S: That's true. And sometimes, I find, when people go away maybe travelling for, say, two or three months or even longer, they really appreciate the Movement all the more when they get back. People have said this again and again.

Uttara: And even solitary retreats you have time to reflect on what has

S: That's true; yes, indeed. It's as though one loses one's beginner's mind. Perhaps there is a general tendency to take things for granted. We don't realize how lucky we are that we are

living, for instance, in a country where we are in no danger of starvation. This was often the case in earlier ages of history. For the ordinary person, there might be several times in the course of a lifetime when they were very definitely in danger literally of starvation; but none of us have ever experienced that, as far as I know. But we take it all for granted. We take it for granted that we'll have food, we'll have shelter, we'll have clothing, we'll have the things that we want or need or fancy. We take all that for granted. We haven't even had a war in which we've been really involved in Britain, apart from the little Falklands episode, what? for nearly 40 years now, which is quite a long time in history for the whole of Europe to go without a war for 40 years! You think, for instance, of Britain in the fifteenth century, the century of the Wars of the Roses; or, before that, the wars between England and France. Or if you think of the Thirty Years War in Germany; and so many other wars, one war after another. [93] I have been reading recently a little bit about the early history of Rome. There was hardly a year in which they didn't have two or three wars. It was amazing how keen they were on wars themselves and the different groups of people living round about. It seemed to be their main interest in life apparently; one can't think it was really like that, but anyway they had these wars so many of them. But we've never undergone that. We've never experienced having our cities sacked and our homes set on fire. Maybe a little bit of that during the blitz on London, but not to any great extent, compared with, say, the size of the cities involved. Very few of us have had any sort of experience of anything like that. So we've had it so easy, and we take it all for granted, and perhaps we take our spiritual facilities for granted, too. And we cease therefore to appreciate them; we think it's all as it were due to us, it's our right. So I think we just need to remind ourselves, or remind one another, that we have got these tremendous advantages, and make the utmost use of them. In the Mahayana scriptures, or the Buddhist scriptures generally, they are constantly reminding you to appreciate how precious is the human life that you've got. That probably is the basic thing that we take for granted; we take it for granted that we are alive, we take it for granted that we are young, we take it for granted that we are in enjoyment of health and strength. We take it all for granted. And we don't prize it, we don't make the best possible use of it; very rarely do we do [so]. We waste our life, waste our youth, waste our health and strength, very often; just fritter away our time. So our failure to appreciate what we have in the Movement and what we have in the Dharma is probably just one particular aspect maybe the most lamentable aspect of our failure to appreciate all our different advantages, including that of human life itself. Think of the people who don't enjoy good health; think of the people who are old and weak and can't do anything with their lives any longer, and think of the people who are living in various states of deprivation, as so many are, say, in India. It is really always a joy every time, if one goes to India, to see how much people do appreciate the Dharma when they get it. I have mentioned this in my little book. It is a very noticeable feature how pleased everybody is if they get a lecture on the Dharma, how so many of them flock to it. Some of them spend the whole day trekking to the meeting place; they are so overjoyed, and they show it, just to hear the Dharma for an hour or so. But, in our case, very often, we think: 'We can hear the Dharma any time; there's a good film on tonight, don't want to miss that!' That is sometimes, I'm afraid, the attitude. So perhaps we don't appreciate ourselves enough, don't appreciate other people in the Movement enough. And maybe we should think much more in terms of deepening our contact with them, deepening our friendship with them. It used to be so strange, years ago I don't think it happens to nearly the same extent now when I was sometimes staying down at Sukhavati, and practically everybody in the community would be looking at Time Out, seeing what was on so that they could go out for the evening. Apparently no one was thinking what a wonderful thing it would be to spend time together! Though that did change, and the situation is different now; but it used to be like that, with almost every person in the community leafing

through Time Out. An evening off meant an evening out, not an opportunity to spend time with other members of the community. But, as I said, that has changed now, and not too soon.

Alan Turner: Bhante, I can't remember the name of the American professor, but he said one of the reasons why there is a strong sense of apathy in England is that England was the first country to start up the Industrial Revolution as such, and it [94] hasn't had a real revolution since. It hasn't had and he doesn't necessarily mean an industrial revolution

S: Well, it's had the FWBO!

Alan: I was getting along to say that. It's almost as if, if we are caught in the apathy ourselves, we are not there in the revolution which we are trying to create.

S: I think there is a lot of apathy, as it were, in the air in Britain, and I think those who live and work in Britain very often have to counteract that.

Alan: I am not using that as an excuse for not. I am just saying

S: No, indeed not. So I think one just needs to be aware that there is this atmosphere of apathy, and it is apathy; it is not just a normal atmosphere. It is something that one has got to strive against and counteract, so that, at least in the FWBO centres and communities and coops, there is not an atmosphere of apathy. Well, I know on the whole there isn't, but there is something much more lively and joyful. Anyway, maybe we'll close on that note and then you can have a lively and joyful Puja!

Spellchecked and put into house style, Shantavira November 1998