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

All hyphens were missing from this file. Spellchecking replaced some of them.

Questions and Answers with the venerable Sangharakshita on Canto 37, The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava; Rivendell, June-July 1987.

PRESENT: Sanghadevi, Vidyasri Vajragita, Sridevi, Vidyavati, Punyamegha, Dayamegha, Ratnamegha, Tessa Harding, Christine McCluskey, Caroline Gutt, Maggie Graeber

6 July 1987

Sangharakshita: What are we going to do? Are we going to go round the circle reading a bit at a time, or what?

Sanghadevi: I think if we read the whole of that first section, and going back through it, maybe a few lines at a time.

S: That's what I mean, doing a few lines at a time. OK. It's going to go on to that little design in the middle of p. 236. Do you want someone to read it all through first, to get an idea of the section as a whole?

(Passage read.)

S: So the canto is called 'The Glance of the Region to be Converted'. I think here as elsewhere in the work we must not forget that it is a translation of a translation: it is an English translation of a French translation of the original Tibetan text, so it is natural, perhaps inevitable, that there should be some obscurities, sometimes obscurities of language, sometimes grammatical obscurities. We will deal with those as we come to them.

So first of all:

"Now having seated himself on Mount Ghrdhrakuta, Padma said:' - "

What do you think is the significance of that? Padmasambhava seating himself on Mount Ghrdhrakuta? What and where is this Ghrdhrakuta?

Sanghadevi: Is it meant to be the summit of mundane existence?

S: It could be regarded as that, but it isn't really. It is not like Kailas, because it is a peak in a range of mountains near Rajgriha. It is not very, very high.

Punyamegha: [Does not] the Buddha sometimes speak from Mount Ghrdhrakuta?

S: Oh, yes. The White Lotus Sutra was delivered by the Buddha, according to the sutra itself, on Mount Ghrdhrakuta, and there are many other important sutras. So, if it is said that Padmasambhava seated himself on Mount Ghrdhrakuta, it is equivalent to saying that Padmasambhava functions as a Buddha. He exercises the functions of a Buddha, or he is the Buddha. In Tibet, of course, the Nyingmapas called him the second Buddha. So the fact that he seats himself there has this suggestion, at least, about it.

Then he says:

[2]
"I have looked where there was a region to be converted. It is like a rising sun in a mirror."

It is not quite clear whether the phrase 'It is like a sun in a mirror' refers to the region to be converted, which is more likely, I think, or to Padma's looking at the region. Do you see what I mean? Because, all right, there is a region to be converted. A region of the earth which is to be converted to the Dharma; so, if one takes it to mean that that region is like a rising sun in a mirror, what does that actually mean? In what way is that region like a rising sun in a mirror?

Sanghadevi: It's got a lot of potential.

S: In what sense would you say that a rising sun reflected in a mirror had a lot of potential?

Vajragita: When the sun is in a mirror, it makes the light stronger.

: I wondered if it meant it was difficult to get hold of - I mean you can't get it, the rising sun in a mirror.

S: Yes, that's true; you can't get at any reflection. But in that case, what would it mean that the region was difficult to grasp hold of?

Christine: They would be difficult to convert?

S: It could mean that, yes, even though it is a little far-fetched; but then in this text lots of things are rather far-fetched. Yes, it is like a rising sun in a mirror: difficult to catch hold of, difficult to convert. You could look at it like that. But also, of course, in Mahayana generally, reflection is a sort of symbol for conditioned existence, isn't it? It isn't absolutely real, because it depends on causes and conditions. The reflection depends upon there being a mirror: in the same way, conditioned existence depends on conditions. At the same time, even though the reflection is a conditioned thing and therefore only relatively real, you do perceive it, so it is not absolutely non-existent. So the fact that the region is like a rising sun in a mirror - or perhaps just like a sun, or anything, reflected in a mirror - suggests that it is to be regarded as neither absolutely existent nor absolutely non-existent; it has a relative reality. You could look at it like that.

So 'I have looked where there was a region to be converted. It is like a rising sun in a mirror.' On the other hand, as I have suggested, you could see it as meaning that Padma was looking at that region and was himself reflected, as it were, in it just like a rising sun, because he was thinking of converting it, being reflected in a mirror. I think that interpretation is less likely. But in a work of this sort, sometimes a phrase or a sentence or a whole passage has more than one meaning. So 'I have looked where there was a region to be converted. It is like a rising sun in a mirror.

It has the form of Cintamani which does not set.

Now what is this Cintamani?

Voices: A wish-fulfilling gem.

S: Mm, a wish-fulfilling gem. It is usually represented, in at least Tibetan Buddhist art, in a definite way, isn't it? So it is further said that this region to be converted is not only like a rising sun in a mirror; it also has the form of [3] Cintamani. You may remember that the world, or India, is called, Jambudvipa in Sanskrit, and this Jambudvipa is surrounded by four sets of islands. Do you remember this from your cosmography? And these are of different shapes:, one set of islands is like the shoulder-blade of a sheep; others are like crescents. So the shape of this region, apparently, is that of Cintamani, the wish-fulfilling gem. Because the Cintamani itself, the wish-fulfilling gem itself, represents something else: what is that? Do you remember? (Silence.) It represents the Bodhicitta; because, just as the wish-fulfilling gem fulfils all worldly desires, the Bodhicitta fulfils all spiritual desires.

But why should it be said that the Cintamani 'does not set'? There has just been a comparison to a rising sun; so here there is a reference to something which does not set, as the sun sets. The Cintamani does not set. So how is it that the Cintamani does not set, if you compare it to a sun? Well, one, you could say it is inexhaustible, and if you compare the Bodhicitta to the Cintamani, the Bodhicitta having really arisen never ...

Sanghadevi: It never fades.

S: Never fades, yes. So: 'I have looked where there was a region to be converted. It is like a rising sun in a mirror. It has the form of Cintamani which does not set.' Then comes another section:

Versed in the Tantras of the wisdom born of tradition,

I do not fear to uphold the Dharma which rules over beings.

Versed in the Tantras of the wisdom born of reflection,

I do not fear the debate of the dogma with the unfaithful.

Versed in the Tantras of the wisdom born of contemplation,

I do not fear to test the limits of the spiritual faculties.

So here there is incorporated a well-known list; do you notice this? The three what?

Sutamaya?

S: Yes, the three prajnas. There is the wisdom born of tradition, the wisdom born of hearing, comes first; then the wisdom born of reflection, the wisdom born of pondering; and then the wisdom born of contemplation in the sense of meditative experience.

Sanghadevi: In the Survey you talk of the wisdom born of thinking first.

S: Do I? One might have ...

Sanghadevi: I'm (?not) trying to catch you out.

S: It might be that one is missing, but it shouldn't be.

Sanghadevi: Well, it seems slightly different from here. Here it's the other way round; it seems to have the reflecting on the suttas ...

S: No: the sutamayi prajna is wisdom born of hearing, so hearing and tradition correspond. Because tradition is something just handed down, something factual, something that you hear, usually. Then there is the wisdom born of reflection, cintamayi, and then there is the wisdom born of contemplation or bhavana. So what have I got in the Survey?

[4]
Sanghadevi: Well, you give a quote from Buddhaghosa, which is: '"Based on thinking" is that knowledge... one has acquired by one's own cogitation, without having learned it from others. "Based on learning" is that knowledge which one has learned (heard) from others. "Based on Meditation" is the knowledge that one has acquired through "mental development" '

S: Yes, it is expressed in a roundabout way, but the sequence is the same. Where is it? Ah. '"Based on thinking" is that knowledge (or wisdom) which one has acquired by one's own cogitation, without having learned it from others. "Based on learning" (literally "hearing") is that knowledge which one has learned ("heard") from others. "Based on Meditation" Is that knowledge which one has acquired through "mental development" in this or that way...' Yes, Buddhaghosa condenses it quite a bit. So '"Based on thinking" is that knowledge (or wisdom) which one has acquired by one's own cogitation, without having learned it from others.' This does not mean that one doesn't hear anything to begin with. Do you see what I mean? You hear something from others; you learn something; but then, on the basis of that, you develop your original thinking, and it is that original thinking which has not come from others, that is your own contribution. That is you making the tradition your own. And then on the basis of that kind of thinking you develop Insight, which is the bhavanamaya panna.

Vidyasri: Usually when I've heard it before, it's the other way round; it's sutamaya panna first ...

S: Yes, Indeed; which is the usual sequence. But Buddhaghosa just puts it in a roundabout sort of way. When it's enumerated in - for instance, I say, yes: 'Digha-Nikaya... distinguishes three kinds of knowledge or wisdom'. I do enumerate 'based on thinking' first; but the experiential sequence is that you hear something, you don't start up thinking just off your own bat as it were. You hear something, you hear the Dharma, and then you think about the Dharma, and then you realize the import of the Dharma through meditation. I am not really sure why Buddhaghosa puts it in that roundabout way. Maybe he just likes being difficult!

But here it is put in the way that it is usually put, in the more usual order, that is to say, the wisdom born of tradition which is hearing, the wisdom born of reflection which is independent thought, the wisdom born of contemplation.

Sanghadevi: Well, it's interesting that each one seems to give you a particular strength.

S: Yes, indeed. But apart from that, there is this question of 'Versed in the Tantras of the

wisdom born of tradition.' This is rather odd, in a way, because in what sense can you have a Tantra which is simply of the wisdom born of tradition? Does it mean there are three different kinds of Tantra - one pertaining to the wisdom born of tradition, one pertaining to the wisdom born of reflection, one pertaining to the wisdom born of contemplation? Perhaps one shouldn't take that too literally. Perhaps 'Tantras' here means just 'teachings', Tantric teachings.

So: 'Versed in the Tantras of the wisdom born of tradition, I do not fear to uphold the Dharma which rules over beings. So, first of all, in what sense does the Dharma rule over beings?

Sanghadevi: The fundamental principles.

S: If you take the word literally, rulership means - well, it suggests sovereignty, it suggests the function of a king. The Dharma is like a king, it rules over beings, [5] it governs beings. So in what sense, in what way does it rule over beings? In what sense does it govern them?

Would it be the authority of Truth?

S: You could say it is the authority of Truth. It is the fact that an ethical or spiritual principle, that is to say the Dharma, governs their lives. Their lives their spiritual lives, are based on that; their moral lives are based on that whether they know it or not, in a sense. So if one is acquainted with the wisdom born of tradition, or if one just knows the tradition, if one knows the teaching, if one knows the Dharma, even just by hearing, one doesn't fear to uphold it.

Sanghadevi: It's as if once you are familiar with the principles, even just the theory, it sort of rings true. You can see the sense of it.

S: Yes. But what is the significance of that phrase 'which rules over beings'? Why is that introduced here?

Sanghadevi: It rules over them even if they don't know it. It has its effect. It's ruling over them even if they don't know about the Dharma.

S: You are not afraid to uphold the Dharma because it's as though you are in accordance with something which, whether they know it or not, is actually ruling people's lives. There is something in a way to which you can appeal.

Dayamegha: It's a bit like not being afraid to let the Dharma speak for itself.

S: Well, yes, that is so, but there is this phrase 'which rules over beings'; the significance of that really needs to be brought out.

Sanghadevi: Does that link up with your paper on The Bodhisattva: Evolution and Self-Transcendence, where you talk about the whole universe, all living beings, in this process of, well, urge to self-transcendence, even when they are not conscious [of it]?

S: Right, yes. You don't fear to uphold the Dharma because - well, let me give an example Supposing you are, let's say, an officer of the law; maybe you are a policeman or a magistrate. You don't have any fear to uphold the law because you know that the law governs the whole

country; so, by upholding the law, you are acting in accordance with what is governing the whole country, so you have no fear to do that. So 'I do not fear to uphold the Dharma which rules over beings' - you are not going against what rules over beings, you are upholding the Dharma. You are acting very much in accordance with what rules over beings, so you have no fear.

Ratnamegha: And that isn't just the point of understanding it.

S: And that you can do even when you have a relatively superficial understanding of the Dharma, just based upon hearing.

Sridevi: Is there a comparison with a king ruling over ...

S: Yes, there is an implied comparison, as I said, yes.

So then: 'Versed In the Tantras of the wisdom born of reflection, I do not fear the debate of the dogma with the unfaithful.' Don't take this word 'dogma' too literally, nor the word 'unfaithful'. 'Unfaithful' here means, presumably, those who don't have [6] faith in the Dharma, those who don't have faith in Buddhism. But if you have the wisdom born of reflection, if you have not only heard the Dharma, if you don't simply know the letter of the teaching, but really understand it yourself and have really mastered it, then you don't have any fear of entering into debate about the Dharma or about Truth with those who don't believe in it.

Sanghadevi: The implication of that is that if you are still at the previous level, you would experience fear because you are not so sure ...

S: Yes, you can only repeat what you've heard; which is all right as far as it goes, but you can't justify it, you can't defend it, you can't answer objections. In order to be able to enter into debate with those who don't have faith in the Dharma, you need at least the wisdom born of reflection.

Dayamegha: It's like when you've only got personal(?) knowledge, It's outside you, you can't (make it) part of you.

S: Yes, right. Because supposing someone asks a question that just doesn't happen to occur in the Buddhist scriptures or Buddhist tradition, there is no traditional answer; you have to answer out of your own independent understanding of the Dharma. The letter of the tradition doesn't help you, because that question hasn't been dealt with, perhaps. Do you have much experience of coming into contact with, engaging in debate with, the unfaithful, and if so how do you get on?

: With difficulty!

Vajragita: I quite like it. It's a chance to see if I can find an answer. Sometimes you can't (find the?) answer, but you have to think about it yourself.

Tessa: Even talking to people on introductory weekends, it isn't necessarily that they are unfaithful, in a sense, but they don't know very much, and actually you can only talk from

your own experience because that's what makes the situation real.

S: Right. I don't suppose you often come into contact with really adverse people, really hostile people? Do you sometimes?

: Not really.

S: Not, probably, at the centre, but if you went out, say, to a school you might find somebody of that sort, maybe a teacher. Someone recently, I forget who it was, had the experience of going to a school and giving a talk, answering questions, and there was a teacher there who all the time tried to turn the point of what he had been saying, and he said he found it a rather difficult situation because he didn't know whether to be as it were impolite and just tell the teacher that he was just distorting Buddhism, or just to go along with it and hope that the students would understand; which in fact they did seem to do. But you can't really enter into discussion or debate unless you have an understanding of the Dharma, as distinct from simply having learned the various traditional teachings and lists and so on. You really need to have thought about what you have learned.

So 'Versed in the Tantras of the wisdom born of contemplation, I do not fear to test the limits of the spiritual faculties.' Spiritual faculties here might be the five indriyas or they might be even the abhijnas, more extraordinary faculties. But whatever it may be, if you have the wisdom born of contemplation, which is real Wisdom, then you are not afraid of trying to find out the limits of your spiritual faculties. What do you think that means? (Pause.)

[7]
Sanghadevi: Would that be when you were really, I suppose, being truly creative, stepping into quite unknown areas, and yourself in the sense of your action in the world? Testing how you - well, challenging to you, how you would ...

S: Yes, you're not afraid to see to what extent your spiritual faculties have developed.

Sanghadevi: It must be to do with actually extending yourself, too.

S: Yes, you could paraphrase it like that: that if one has the wisdom born of contemplation one is not afraid of extending oneself, because one has something genuine on which to fall back.

Vidyavati: So he is suggesting also that even though we may develop that wisdom of contemplation for its own sake, we still do have limits that we've still got to reach beyond.

S: Yes, because the wisdom born of contemplation itself can have degrees. We come to that in a minute. So you need to test, in a way, how far you've gone, because only then can you be sure that you haven't got something further to do, that you haven't got farther to go.

Also you notice in all three cases it says 'I do not fear': 'I do not fear to uphold the Dharma'. 'I do not fear the debate', 'I do not fear to test the limits'. So this suggests that absence of fear, fearlessness, is a quite important characteristic of Padmasambhava. There is an emphasis on that.

Sanghadevi: How far do you think - when people talk about something in the Movement and teach - I would say a lot of the time they are going far beyond their own direct experience. Can you see any dangers in that? Or don't they have any choice?

S: Well, in a way one hasn't any choice, especially if people ask questions. But I think you should always make it clear, and it should always be clear to yourself, to what extent you are just repeating what you have heard; to what extent you are trying to present your own personal understanding of things, and to what extent you are just talking about things that you haven't as yet experienced but you believe it will be possible for you to experience if you carry on.

For instance, if somebody says: 'What exactly Is Nirvana?' you shouldn't answer as though you had personally experienced it. You can say, 'Well, according to the tradition, it is such-and-such and such-and-such. This is what tradition teaches.'

Ratnamegha: You have said somewhere it is important to have a feeling for it at least, so it ...

S: Yes.

Sanghadevi: Have you got any views on people being quite innovative in talks, and perhaps not bothering to make use of the traditional formulation?

S: What do you mean by innovative?

Sanghadevi: Well, maybe giving a whole talk which doesn't ostensibly make any connection with any traditional - well, not acknowledging the sources, perhaps, in tradition.

[8]
S: It would be a bit difficult; because supposing you said something about impermanence - well, that's one of the three lakshanas, isn't it?

Dayamegha: But (if) you are not referring to it as a lakshana?

Sanghadevi: Yes, never mentioning ...

S: Well, you can speak of death, you can speak of impermanence in some way without mentioning the Sanskrit terms for those things. One can certainly do that. But perhaps you meant something more than that?

Sanghadevi: Well, it's perhaps more a tendency to, say, actively avoid using the lists and trying to be creative and original, an maybe some ...

S: I think it's all right to be creative and original, but not prematurely. Otherwise it's like the person who is trying to improvise on the piano but they've not really learned the piano yet. It's not easy to improvise. It's not just banging the piano! I think, from a traditional point of view, before you can be really creative and innovative, you need to know your tradition really quite well. Unless, of course, you have a quite deep spiritual experience of your own and can fall back on that with confidence; but that, presumably, will not often be the case.

Padmasambhava goes on to speak about something like that. He says:

If I am not Buddha by name, I am he from having attained the four degrees of saintliness of the sramana.

So what are these four degrees of saintliness of the sramana? What is the sramana?

Sanghadevi: The wanderer.

S: Yes, it means really the monk, it's equivalent to bhikshu; or it might refer to the Buddha, who is the Mahasramana. But in any case, what are these four degrees of saintliness?

Dayamegha: Stream Entrant plus.

S: Yes, the Stream Entry and so on. So what is Padmasambhava saying? He is saying: 'If I am not Buddha by name, even though I may not be actually called the Buddha, I am in fact the Buddha because I have attained what the Buddha attained: that is to say, the four degrees of saintliness.

Sanghadevi: I find that quite, well, unusual in some respects, because - well, certainly for technical things, historic points of view, the arhant wasn't regarded as being in the same position as this text is ...

S: Yes. Certainly in the Hinayana.

Sanghadevi: It seems (not?) to take that into account... It seems quite surprising, really, to have - I mean, considering the whole text is so bizarre in a way, it sort of goes straight ...

S: So 'If I am not Buddha by name, I am he from having attained the four degrees of saintliness of the sramana' - so 'What's in a name?' he is saying; 'What does it matter whether I am called Buddha or not?' The substance of the thing is there.

[9]
"The chief and guide who proclaims the Dharma has disappeared,

And his following no longer supports him."

What does that mean? 'The chief and guide who proclaimed the Dharma' is obviously the Buddha; he has disappeared, historically speaking; the nirmanakaya is no longer there. But what is meant by saying 'And his following no longer supports him' How do you support a Buddha who has disappeared?

By practising.

S: By practising the teaching. Yes. So he is in effect saying this. Not only has the Buddha disappeared, but those who are supposed to be his followers no longer support him, as it were, by following the teaching. Then ...

Sanghadevi: I was just going to say it is the best gift you can give to yourself (?) - the

practice.

S: Right.

Dayamegha: Mustn't (?) give support like food, give ...

Vidyavati: It seems to be referring here to the region to be converted; the Dharma has disappeared from it.

S: It's not clear. I'm afraid there are a lot of things not clear in this section. He may just be referring to Jambudvipa - to India in general. Then he says:

"Although the ancient root text has been carried away,

The Dharma is not extinct.

There isn't a very logical sequence here. You mustn't expect it in this work. So 'the ancient root text' - a root text is a text on which other texts are based, or of which other texts are the branches. So the ancient root text, whether it is a Tantra or whatever - has been carried away'. But he is saying. 'Never mind. The Dharma is not extinct.' So in what way is the Dharma not extinct, even though the ancient root text itself has been carried away?

Dayamegha: Because of his attainment?

S: Because of his attainment, or because of anybody's attainment.

Punyamegha: Because of - well, is it to the principle?

S: No, the Dharma is not contained just in texts, it is contained in people's lives when they actually practise it. So even if you don't have any books, if the books have disappeared, if someone is practising the Dharma, the Dharma is still extant, the Dharma is still alive.

And then he goes on to say, going off at another tangent:

"No more than fat lasts in the mouths of hyenas that carry it away

Does faith remain en route (?). "

Not a very pleasant comparison, but perhaps typically Tibetan. Hyenas. of course, kill creatures, don't they? So they carry away mouthfuls of flesh or fat, but the fat doesn't last in their mouths, it sort of melts away or perhaps they swallow it. No [10] more does faith remain, so to speak, in the hearts of the disciples, or at least some disciples, as they follow the path.

Sanghadevi: It's jumping back a couple of lines.

S: Yes. So it's not easy to maintain one's faith. It's like the fat in the mouth of the hyena. it can quickly melt away or be swallowed.

Sanghadevi: We shouldn't take it for granted.

S: We Shouldn't take it for granted, yes.

Sanghadevi: This happens, doesn't it? When you feel inspired, you think you'll always remember it. Then your state changes and you forget.

S: Then there is a fourth statement, again at another tangent:

"By making moderate oaths one does not acquire boon companions."

What's that all about? What is a boon companion?

: A light one.

S: Not a light one, not basically. A boon companion is usually a companion with whom you drink, a close friend. Isn't It? A sort of drinking chum. Someone with whom you develop a close relationship in that sort of way. When you are passing the time in that sort of way, people get a bit drunk and they make all sorts of promises and swear all sorts of oaths of friendship and all that kind of thing. But you don't acquire boon companions - here it's a bit as it were metaphorical - by just making moderate oaths. When people get really drunk, they make all sorts of rash promises; so, in the same way, when you are really somebody's friends, you commit yourself wholeheartedly. That is roughly what it means.

Sanghadevi: Just using it in a metaphorical sense. (?)

[11]
Side 2

S: Yes. If you want real friends, boon companions as it were, you won't get them just by making very moderate sort of promises or undertaking very moderate things. You've really got to give yourself and promise the earth, as it were: that's the only way to make real friends and to get a real response from other people. Do you see this?

Sanghadevi: ... It doesn't quite tie up with the idea of friendship being a gradual process that you gradually get to know

S: Well, you get gradually drunk in the course of the evening! making more and more immoderate oaths!

Dayamegha: Yes, it does, because you would be foolish to promise something wholeheartedly before you got to know someone. So, because it does need a wholehearted response, you would need to get to know someone before you could take that step.

Sanghadevi: I thought Bhante was saying that one won't make strong friendships unless one makes strong

S: Yes, but you won't necessarily do that all at once. Just as you get drunk step by step and then speak more and more rashly, you don't start talking in that way after one little glass not usually. You get the impression that Padmasambhava is trying to create.

Maggie(?): Why does he bring in this point here? I can't quite understand the sequence.

S: Well, it isn't a logical sequence at all, but that is, again, the style of the work. There is a sort of logic, but it's not very clear.

Sanghadevi: Do you think perhaps there is a link about spiritual friendship, although it's not spelt out that perhaps the Dharma and faith would last longer if one did really make commitments?

S: Yes, right, yes. There is that sort of link.

Sanghadevi: It's as if he is weighing in his mind actions...

Dayamegha: ' Having stirred up these thoughts' that's quite a good description, isn't it?

Sanghadevi: Sort of rousing himself.

S: Yes. Anyway, this line simply means that if you want real friends you have to commit yourself. This is what it really means. 'By making moderate oaths one does not acquire boon companions.'

Having stirred up these thoughts, he looked with the eye of intuitive knowledge.

[12]
Yes, it's interesting, 'Having stirred up these thoughts' he rouses himself with these thoughts and then he looks 'with the eye of intuitive knowledge' presumably he looks on this region to be converted; and what does he see? He sees The karma of ignorance was obscuring the minds of all beings. That's clear enough, isn't it? Because they are ignorant, they are just living in spiritual darkness. Not seeing even what was near them, they misunderstood their own minds. What was near them presumably meaning their own bodies and material things; they don't even see them clearly, and it is not surprising, therefore, that they misunderstand their own minds. How does one misunderstand one's own mind?

Dayamegha: Quite easily, at times!

S: I mean, what mind?

Sanghadevi: Well, the mind you associate with you-as-you-are-now. That mind.

S: Yes, you can understand it in the sense of misunderstanding the workings of your own ordinary mind.

: It seems like the conditioned mind.

S: Yes. Also you can understand it as meaning misunderstanding one's own relative mind for

Absolute Mind, absolute consciousness. One can understand it in that way, too.

Sanghadevi: Something wrapped up in your own world, ... your own world being. You think that is the world...

S: Not hearing even the explanations Presumably of the sacred texts they were in enormous obscurity. They haven't even got as far as the wisdom born of tradition. They haven't even heard the explanations; they haven't even heard the Dharma, so they are 'in enormous obscurity'. Calling out for happiness, they found only the cycle of suffering. There are many references to this in Buddhist literature: people want happiness, but they want it so desperately that they just land themselves in suffering. They try to grasp it. So in this way, for this reason In the region to be converted, not one of them was saved. Not one of them gained Enlightenment, not one of them gained emancipation.

Sanghadevi: I wonder how conscious it seems to come up often in Introductory Weekends how people start debating how aware other people are of 'looking for something' -

[13]
S: In what way?

Sanghadevi: Well, I just wondered how conscious people are about calling out for happiness. There seems [to be] the implication that there is some dim sense of

S: Well, usually people move in the direction of what they consider to be pleasant, don't they? Usually they take it for granted that certain things are pleasurable and therefore worth pursuing. They don't give it too much thought. They just acquire certain ideas, perhaps, from their environment. Most people, for instance, would consider that having a lot of money was a pleasant thing; it would give you happiness. So, yes, they go after money perhaps not very vigorously, but they would certainly rather have it than not have it, even if I mean, perhaps they do the pools every week or something of that sort; always hoping for a bit of extra money, or perhaps a lot of extra money. So in that way they don't [exactly] call out for happiness but they are looking for it, at least sort of vaguely, in a sluggish sort of way. Well, what about food? You don't consciously think, 'Food will give me happiness'; you don't call out, 'Food, food!' unless you are really hungry, but there is always a movement in that direction. You don't really go very far away from food, do you? It's always within easy reach. If you think of it, it's a very remarkable thing that you are never, under modern conditions, more than, say, a few minutes' walk away from food. (Laughter.) You are very careful not to go too far away from it. And if you do ever get into a situation where you are hungry and food is just not available, you can feel really panic-stricken. Some people seem to be genuinely under the impression that if they don't get food for 24 hours they'll die. Actually it takes much longer than that, doesn't it at least three or four weeks? But some people really feel that, it seems: that if they don't get food for 24 hours, they'll die. So they are very careful not to stray very far away from food. They always stock up with plenty of the stuff! And then, if you think of other things, other sort of pleasurable worldly things, like sex and like possessions of various kinds there's always this sort of half-conscious movement in the direction of those things, under this sort of impression that they will give you some kind of happiness.

Dayamegha: I was quite shocked when I worked with unemployed people to discover that they assumed that those things should be given to them immediately. There just seemed to be

no conception that they had to work for it. It seemed very much from, say, television and things, they had been given that image that that was their right.

Sanghadevi: What, food, do you mean?

Dayamegha: Not so much food, but car, money, house, everything.

S: As though society owed it to you. So 'Calling out' not exactly that they call out, but they at least look for happiness. I remember in the very early days of the FWBO, people quite resented the idea of having to pay for anything. They thought that everything should be provided free, that they shouldn't have to put any money in the bowl after a class; they thought that was quite wrong. They even quite resented it, and didn't like the idea of having to pay to go on retreats. They really thought it should all be provided free. And some people, I discovered, even had the idea that there was some very wealthy foundation behind the FWBO that was providing everything, and that if we weren't letting them have everything free we were in a way cheating them, because here was this wealthy foundation behind us and we weren't actually passing on the benefit of it to people. Presumably, we were just either [??] hanging on to the money ourselves or just refusing to spend it. Some people did actually believe that. It seems quite extraordinary, but that was what we found. [14] So even when people do vigorously go in pursuit of happiness, they often look for it in he wrong place, and so, unfortunately, they very often encounter only suffering. And 'In the region to be converted not one of them was saved.' So then it goes on: It was then that, to the lake, dazzling immaculate Udiyana(?) In order to explain the Dharma to the dakinis and thinking to develop the meaning, presumably the meaning of the Dharma The saint Padmasambhava appeared in Dhanakosha. Dhanakosha meaning, or being, apparently, the name of a region. The geography of this work is sometimes a bit chaotic. Dhanakosha I think it's a lake, isn't it? That must refer to his birth. The word Dhanakosha literally means 'a bow sheath': dhana is 'bow' as in bow and arrow, and kosha is sheath, sometimes treasury. So I don't know why the lake was called Dhanakosha. Perhaps it was just shaped like the sheath of a bow, who knows? It's the same as in Abhidharmakosha, which is the sheath or treasury or container of the Abhidharma. Then: As after a rain The sun and the rainbow make a prism in the clouds, That's not quite right, is it? It's the sun and the rain act as a prism and make a rainbow in the clouds, isn't it unless I've got it wrong? Any scientists present? (Murmurs of agreement.) That's a quite important image in Mahayana Buddhism, especially in Tibetan Buddhism: there's the sun and there's the rain, and then there's the rainbow.

Sanghadevi: It's in that form that the Dakinis appear.

S: Mm?

Sanghadevi: It's giving a suggestion of what the Dakinis are like.

S: Yes, indeed. Again, it's like a reflection: they are neither existent nor nonexistent. They are relatively real. The four Dakinis of the sea islands assemble. The sea islands are presumably these islands surrounding Jambudvipa. 'Sea islands' is an odd expression, isn't it? I don't know whether that reflects the Tibetan or not, because islands are usually associated with the sea, aren't they?

Dayamegha: Unless they are in a lake.

S: That's true, yes.

Sanghadevi: Do you think there is well, there is some meaning in the fact that he goes to these Dakinis? He is communicating.

[15]
S: Well, Padmasambhava is always surrounded by dakinis, isn't he? In some ways, I suppose the dakinis are aspects of himself.

Pronouncing the secret mantras The symbolic language of the dakinis. This is a quite mysterious subject, of course: that the secret mantras in particular, the guhyamantras, the mantras given at the time of initiation, represent the symbolic language of the Dakinis, the language which is able to evoke the powers, so to speak, which are represented by the Dakinis; something non-rational, non-conceptual. Not only the Dakinis following the diamond path that is to say, the Vajrayana like its shadow, that is, keeping very close to it, being inseparable from it; The nagas of the seas, the gods of the planets and stars of space assembled. He explained to them the Dharma and, when oaths were exchanged,

All promised to serve him.

Sanghadevi: There's a lot of heights and depths.

S: Yes, indeed.

Tessa: It sounds like he's just summoning up all his energies before going to Zahor.

S: Yes. Then there follows a whole series, or at least several, of those rather inconsequential sayings: In the practice of worldly actions, one often acts amiss. Well, one knows that very well, doesn't one? 'In the [16] practice of worldly actions, one often acts amiss': even with the best of intentions. Seeing by the eye of intuition what must be won over, Padma knew that it would be so with the kingdom of Zahor. What's the relevance there? What's the application? Is he referring to his own actions, or to the actions of the beings in the kingdom of Zahor?

Sanghadevi: Isn't there meant to be a contrast made between

S: Mm, 'Padma knew that it would be so with the kingdom of Zahor'. Therefore he considered this region to be converted Yes, I suppose it must be taken to mean that in the kingdom of Zahor people were performing worldly acts which often went amiss. He saw that the kingdom of Zahor was no better than any other place, and he therefore considered it to be a region that needed to be converted: 'what must be won over' presumably meaning the basis of those worldly acts that had to be changed, that had to be converted. So 'In the practice of worldly acts one often acts amiss', because of unskilfulness. 'Seeing by the eye of intuition what must be won over', that is the unskilfulness must be converted to skilfulness, 'Padma knew that it would be so with the kingdom of Zahor'. It doesn't quite logically follow, does it?

Sanghadevi: It's not meaning that actually he knew that he would succeed in a way that worldly actions wouldn't?

S: Yes, it could be, yes.

Sanghadevi: He was able to see this intuitively.

S: Yes, he knew intuitively that he would be able to win over what needed to be won over if the people of Zahor were to be freed from what made them act amiss in the practice of worldly actions.

Sanghadevi: There's an element of the (?) subconscious between if one's acting in the world without taking into account all aspects of the situation. You are not fully aware of the implications, of things that can go wrong; whereas if you've got some intuitive

S: Yes. Obviously that is true. So 'Therefore he considered this region to be converted'. So where was it? On the north-west frontiers of the land of Udiyana, In the centre of the capital of Zahor So there seems to be the country of Udiyana and then, on its north-west frontier, there is Zahor, and then in Zahor there is the capital, and in that capital is the master palace city of jewels. In the palace is the head of the kingdom, Arjadhara(?). And he was surrounded by 360 queens

Sanghadevi: Must be symbolic!

S: Must be symbolic! I should hope so! By 720 ministers One hopes that was symbolic, too; 720 ministers seems an awful lot foreign and domestic. And held all Zahor under his jurisdiction. A sort of stereotyped description of a king, in a way. A short time later, the queen Hauki(?) had a dream That a turquoise stupa was coming forth from her head And that the kingdom of Zahor was scorched by eight suns which arose together. Why eight suns, do you think?

: (inaudible)

[17]
S: It could express a tremendous brightness, but there could be a significance in the number eight. We know that Padmasambhava has eight forms. It is possible I don't know that Mandarava, who is going to be born, has eight forms. Because if Mandarava is the consort of Padmasambhava, and if he has eight forms, she must have eight forms so that she can be his consort in all his eight forms! You see what I mean? It's logical, isn't it? So the fact that she dreamt that 'the kingdom of Zahor was scorched by eight suns which arose together' could be a reference to the eightfold Mandarava who is about to be born. She told the dream to the king. Who, after thinking it over Kings should always think things over before acting offered a great sacrifice in celebration. We are not told what sort of sacrifice. We hope it wasn't an animal sacrifice; probably it wasn't. Now, to the aged queen, who was [visited by the dream, An uneasiness arose, the happy omen of the birth] What is the significance of 'aged queen'?

Sanghadevi: She couldn't have children.

S: Yes, so that the birth was a sort of miracle; as in the Bible, do you remember? In the Old Testament, there is Abraham and Sarah, and so on. She felt light and agile in her feet. Quite unusual for an old lady, especially for a pregnant old lady! 'She felt light and agile in her feet,' A number of sons and daughters of the gods surrounded her with reverence. She felt wellbeing. This is the kind of description you always get in Buddhist and Hindu literature, when some great being is about to be born. Her understanding did not waver. On her were a

hundred thousand octillions of splendours, I suppose an octillion is eight trillions, or something like that, isn't it? It doesn't really matter exactly how many and accumulated benedictions. The ecstasy which she experienced completely exalted her. There is one [word] misspelled, by the way. This announcement was carried to the king Who, joyously seeing in it the promise of a son, He was rather jumping to conclusions!

[18]
- had great honours bestowed upon the queen.

This passage is more straightforward, isn't it?

Vidyavati: What's the significance of the turquoise stupa right at the beginning of this section, in the dream?

S: I suppose a stupa does symbolize an Enlightened being, and a turquoise stupa well, the Tibetans are very fond of turquoises. Turquoise is something precious and beautiful, so a stupa made entirely of turquoises would be something really very precious, very extraordinary. It is a dream ...

: Could the scorching of Zahor in the dream, would that be like purifying it through scorching?

S: You could look at it like that. Clearly it is a beneficent scorching. Maybe the word isn't to be taken too literally. It certainly couldn't be destructive.

Sanghadevi: It raises the question how much one can rely on dreams well not rely on, [but] can read messages

S: Well, as I said, the king did jump to conclusions, didn't he? 'He saw in it the promise of a son.' Presumably that is what he wanted. In fact, the next section, which you are going to be studying later, does go on to say: Though they were hoping for a prince, a daughter was born. The king, vexed Oh, I'll leave you to deal with that yourselves! (Laughter.)

Sanghadevi: In a way it seems a bit odd, I suppose, the leap from Padmasambhava to Mandarava. In a way it doesn't make a direct connection at this stage between Padmasambhava and Mandarava.

S: Right, yes. Perhaps one is to understand that that in a sense Mandarava is Padmasambhava. Well, she is an aspect of Padmasambhava; she is his Dakini, or one of his two principal Dakinis, the other being Yeshe Sogyal. But, yes, in the text sometimes it rather sort jumps from one subject to another. I suppose it is not meant to be very logical or consistent in its arrangement, and also there is the question, possibly, of some obscurity in the actual translation.

Sanghadevi: It is very rich material.

S: Oh, yes, indeed. Maybe someone should read it right through now, since we've maybe got a better idea of it, and see whether we understand it better or whether it produces a more vivid impression, now we've gone through it in this way. Who wants to do it? (Passage reread.)

Sanghadevi: It struck me that I must ask something. The 'ancient root text' it seems a bit odd that [there was] just one ancient root text.

S: No, I think it's to be taken as meaning an ancient root text has been carried away; not 'the' in the sense of that there is just only one. [19] I also remember, in connection with these three wisdoms, they are sometimes explained as meaning sutamayi prajna, the wisdom that one realizes by listening to somebody else, and the second, the wisdom that one attains without having listened to somebody else and Buddhaghosa may have that in mind but then that leaves the third kind, as it were, unnecessary; do you see what I mean?

: The contemplation?

S: Mm, because that becomes as it were superfluous; because, in that case, the wisdom that is attained by hearing is the wisdom of the arhant; the wisdom that is attained without hearing, by independent thought, is the wisdom of the pratyekabuddha and the Buddha. So in all three wisdom in the highest sense is implied. So then what happens to the third category of bhavamayi prajna? So that kind of explanation would seem to be not very logical. Therefore, it would seem that sutamayi prajna is simply, as I called it the other day, I think, knowledge; cintamayi prajna is understanding; and bhavanamayi prajna is realization or intuition.

Dayamegha: I seem to remember reading somewhere three levels of faith that seemed to correlate with each of these.

S: Ah, you mean the yearning faith and so on?

Dayamegha: I can't remember.

S: I am not sure that they are levels of faith. They are certainly different kinds of faith.

Sanghadevi: It's like the intuitive level, and then yes, first it's the intuitive response, like to the Buddha, then you read and hear all about his teaching, and then

S: Ah, right, yes, it could be.

: you experience.

S: Maybe someone should try to work it out in detail. Anyway, do you feel you've understood that section a bit better now? Is it a bit clearer? It needs a little bit of sorting out, doesn't it?

Punyamegha: Why did the Nyingmapas call Padmasambhava the second Buddha? Was that just to emphasize his importance?

S: In a way, the Nyingmapas considered Padmasambhava as more important than the Buddha. I have heard Nyingmapas say that the Buddha was born from an ordinary human womb, whereas Padmasambhava, 'our Padmasambhava', was born apparitionally from a lotus in the middle of a lake! So it is not easy for us to appreciate that sort of point of view. But they regard him as the second Buddha in the sense of the Buddha come again, as it were, in an even greater manner, an even spectacular manner, being born apparitionally instead of in the ordinary human way. For Nyingmapa Buddhists at least formerly in Tibet the Buddha was a

comparatively minor sort of figure. Yes, don't forget that they regard Sakyamuni as one of the forms of Padmasambhava! which seems rather odd to us.

: I can see that if you had that kind of outlook, then you would come to see Sakyamuni as just minor.

[20]
Sanghadevi: That would imply that Padmasambhava preceded was more like this eternal Buddha.

S: Right, yes. Of course, apart from that, the Tibetans got their chronology terribly mixed up. They believe that I forget the exact number of years but I think they believe that Padmasambhava came, I think they say 100 years after the Buddha; which was not so at all. In The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava, he is presented as sort of contemporaneous with Ananda, isn't he? which really does mix up chronology then.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS with THE VENERABLE SANGHARAKSHITA on

Canto 39, The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava

Rivendell, June-July 1987.

PRESENT: Sanghadevi, Vidyasri, Vajragita, Sridevi, Vidyavati, Punyamegha, Dayamegha, Ratnamegha, Tessa Harding, Christine McCluskey, Caroline Gutt, Maggie Graeber.

8 July 1987

Sangharakshita: So we are still on The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava, though actually we are dealing more with Mandarava, aren't we? So seven questions tonight. What are the eight directions of space referred to in the Canto? It seems directions of space in Buddhist cosmology can be enumerated in several different ways, e.g. the six directions four cardinal points, zenith and nadir; the eight, nine and even the eleven directions in which Avalokitesvara looks. Is this just a difference in traditions, or can we not be too defined in how directions of space can be perceived? That is really quite simple. There is only one system, but sometimes it is completely enumerated and sometimes it isn't. First of all, you have the four directions of space: north, south, east and west. And then there are the intermediate points: north-west, south-east and so on. That makes eight, doesn't it? Then there is the zenith, which means up, and the nadir, which means down; which gives you ten. And then there is the central point, which is the eleventh. So sometimes four are mentioned, sometimes eight, sometimes ten, sometimes eleven; but whichever number is mentioned you are to understand just space in its totality. And Avalokitesvara has eleven heads because he is looking in all possible directions from that central point, which in a sense is not a direction at all but the point from which you perceive the directions. Is that clear? That is really quite simple, isn't it? Second question: The cosmology that you described in the Golden Light series, i.e. Mount Sumeru, Jambudvipa, the different levels of gods, Indra etc., is drawn from Indian mythology. The Buddha used this in acknowledging Brahma as king of the gods, and yet putting him in his place with many more realms above him. Do you think it is possible, and a useful exercise in integration, to derive a cosmology in a similar fashion from our Christian backgrounds e.g. God, the saints, angels etc., with perhaps some other myths

thrown in, e.g. fairies, the Little People, the Grail? I suppose you could. The best-known example of a complete Christian cosmology is, of course, Dante's Divine Comedy, which is of course based on the Ptolemaic system of astronomy.

Dayamegha: The what system?

[22]
S: The Ptolemaic, with the earth at the centre and all other planets, including the sun and the moon, circling around. You could say that those planets, in their spheres, correspond very roughly to Mount Sumeru and its different levels, together with the sun and the moon. And then, of course, Dante has got his Hell realm, and he has got his Heavenly realm. His mythology of angels, if one can call it that, goes back to a famous Christian work which is sometimes thought to be not purely Christian: the Celestial Hierarchies of Dionysius the Areopagite. Have you heard of that work? It's a very influential work in medieval Christian thought. It is available in English. He describes the nine different orders of angels. You find those nine different orders of angels in another Christian cosmology, also Ptolemaic, in Milton's Paradise Lost. So you could; but of course you would encounter difficulties just due to, so to speak, theological differences. Take, for instance, the gods. In Buddhism the gods that is to say, the gods of the Round as distinct from what the Tibetans call the Gods of the Path, which means the Bodhisattvas are part and parcel of the samsara: they are born and reborn in those higher spheres; I suppose corresponding to the gods, or perhaps the higher gods would be the angels. But the angels aren't born and reborn in that way, are they? They are created by God. I suppose you could regard them as being like Bodhisattvas, but on the other hand they are not like Bodhisattvas because they are reversible; because some angels have fallen and become devils, and that never happens to Bodhisattvas. So there are some incompatibilities that you would find it really very difficult to adjust. But none the less, it might be an interesting exercise to try to arrange all the gods and goddesses of Greek and Roman mythology, and Scandinavian mythology, Teutonic mythology, Irish mythology, Welsh mythology, Christian mythology in a more or less comprehensive system, and see what sort of result you would come up with. Classical mythology in particular is a very interesting study. It is very meaningful, it is very rich.

Dayamegha: So many words in our language come from them, as well.

S: Yes. Think of the days of the week. They were never Christianised, except Sunday to some extent, which is sometimes called the Lord's Day. But we still call Monday after the moon, don't we? Tuesday after who is it? the god Tiw. Wednesday is Wodan's day; Thursday is Thor's day; Friday is Friga's day, the goddess of love and beauty, you know, the Scandinavian Aphrodite. And Saturday, rather incongruously, is Saturn's day; that's from Roman mythology. And of course Sunday, the sun's day. So we do have a link in a way, don't we?

Dayamegha: I thought perhaps it might be a good way of looking at the legends we've been brought up with, and

S: Yes, if one has been brought up with them; because nowadays sometimes people do grow up not knowing the Old Testament stories, not knowing the stories from Greek and Roman mythology. I personally became acquainted with them at a very early age. I remember reading a little book called The Story of the Iliad when I was very, very young: five or six, I think. And as soon as I was old enough I joined the children's library of the local library, Tooting

library; and I remember the first books I read I must have been seven or eight the first books I read from that library belonged to a very well-known series of fairy books edited by Andrew Lang, who was a well-known anthropologist. You must have come across some of them The Red Fairy Book and The Blue Fairy Book and the Silver, the Gold, the Rainbow Fairy Book I read all of these with great avidity; these sort of fairy tales from virtually all the mythologies of the world. I think this is very good material for children to be brought up on. It sort of nourishes the imagination. I think even in later life we [23] should read from time to time things like Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales, the Mabinogion or the Kalevala.

: What was the last one?

S: The Kalevala. Have I said it right?

Sridevi: Well, the stress would be on the first syllable there. Kalevala.

S: Oh, that's it. Kalevala. Yes, that's the great Finnish national epic.

: The Welsh one?

S: The Welsh one is the Mabinogion. Translations of all these things are available.

Sridevi: Do you think when we get a Buddhist school it is important to educate children in Greek and Roman myths?

S: I really don't know. I think they should be acquainted with some of them the more well-known stories. Children usually enjoy these. They can be told them [orally]; there is no need to wait till they go to school mother can tell them, you know, bedtime stories. Do children have bedtime stories still?

Voices: Oh yes!

S: Oh! I used to have them. My mother never used to tell them; she was too busy, I suppose, with other things. My father used to come and tell me all sorts of stories. You don't even need to be a mother or a father; aunties can tell stories. I had an aunt who was a great story-teller. She used, when I was very, very small, to tell me a story that went on and on endlessly; she used to make it up as she went along, a sort of saga. Yes, do this by all means. You can even draw up an enormous chart, putting in all the gods and goddesses. Of course, you've got to learn all about them first, so that you have some idea of their position and function, their significance; read up about the angels. There's quite a few books on angels available.

Dayamegha: There's a painting in the National Gallery, isn't there I can't remember a very big one, of all the different angels enormous golden ?

S: Who is it by?

: (inaudible)

: t's in the quite early section, it's very big.

: (inaudible)

S: Yes, there are lots of paintings of angels. Sometimes of Paradise. There is a famous one by Fra Angelico in San Marco in Florence [?Venice]. So, yes, draw a chart or a picture. Right, here we seem to come on to the text proper.

Is the significance of the 500 serving women also becoming ordained at the end of the canto the Princess Mandarava needed a Sangha?

[24]
One could certainly look at it like that, but one finds this sort of thing happening quite a lot in Buddhist scriptures. Someone becomes a monk, and his ten companions or 100 or 500 companions, or her 500 companions, do likewise. The Indians believe very strongly that what the great man does other people just imitate. That thought is expressed in the Bhagavad Gita quite clearly. But also, perhaps, it represents a sort of reflection or echo of what is happening at other levels: do you see what I mean?

: ...

S: Well, no, not quite that. Er what you do affects society, affects other people. It sets up echoes, it sets up reverberations, it sets up reflections. But yes, as I said, at the same time one can regard it as signifying the fact that the princess Mandarava needed a Sangha. Also perhaps it represents an early or ancient conception of loyalty: if your master does something you must do something, if your mistress does it you must do it.

: To sort of express your faith in their ...

S: Perhaps not even that: just that it's your duty to be with them and to serve them and look after them in whatsoever form, in whatsoever capacity. In a way, it's the old sort of feudal principle but non-individualistic.

Punyamegha: With Ambedkar, I suppose his people converted because they believed in him.

S: Yes, indeed, it's a very good example of [that] just because of their faith in him, without knowing anything of Buddhism except that it was something good, because he said so and they believed in him. They felt they trusted him. It is a very different situation from what it is in the West. Here you get people one by one, but there you get them by the family or by the village or whatever. They can be sincere none the less, though, of course, in the end they have to make a personal and individual commitment. But that collective 'commitment' can often prepare the ground.

Punyamegha: Even in this country, if someone quite famous becomes a Buddhist or something, it does seem to

S: Boy George, it seems. (Laughter.) So I am told; I had never heard of him before. Apparently he's a Buddhist, too, is he?

Voices: Boy George rock singer pop stars

S: Oh, you all seem to know!

Punyamegha: There are quite a few pop stars, yes, become Nichirens, and it does seem to then encourage others to follow in their footsteps.

S: But that isn't because of trust; it's more that they set the fashion. Well, there were the Beatles: they took up with the Maharishi, and even went off to India and spent a few weeks in his ashram. It seems to have been a slightly disillusioning experience. When I was in England I think this was before the days of the FWBO there was much talk about this: the Beatles and the Maharishi. It's ancient history to all of you, I expect!

Dayamegha: I think one of them didn't George Harrison continue with it for quite a while, I think?

[25]
S: It's as though Mandarava has this retinue and they go with her wherever she goes. If she becomes a nun, well, they become nuns too. If she had stayed at home, they would have stayed at home.

Punyamegha: It doesn't sound very individual.

S: It doesn't, no; no, it doesn't. Let's hope they became individuals none the less. Anyway, the next question, in a way, is concerned with that question of the individual. (a) A contemporary Tibetan teacher, when asked for ordination by a Brazilian woman disciple, told her she has to ask the permission of parents first. The story goes: she has to spend a number of months winning them over. To what extent do you think it is advisable, if not necessary, to obtain your parents' acceptance before being ordained? The question doesn't say what ordination the Brazilian woman disciple asked for, but historically speaking before you can be ordained as a bhikshu or a bhikshuni you are supposed to take permission from your parents. This is according to the Vinaya. and this is usually observed; in a Buddhist country there is usually no difficulty in getting that permission. But it isn't absolutely necessary. Supposing you don't ask for permission, and don't get permission, you can still be ordained. It's only that there is a slight irregularity in the ordination. But the irregularity does not invalidate the ordination. There are some irregularities which would invalidate the ordination: for instance, before being ordained as a bhikshu or bhikshuni you are interrogated, you are asked various questions. One, for instance, is: 'Are you suffering from any contagious disease?' If you say 'No,' but you are suffering, and if that is discovered later on, your ordination is invalidated; you are not ordained, it's null and void. But in the case of seeking your parents' permission, even if that condition is not fulfilled, it is not considered sufficiently serious to invalidate your ordination. So it is therefore, one might say, considered as desirable rather than absolutely necessary to ask your parents' permission. Whether that is really in accordance with the spirit of Buddhism, that's another question. Supposing your parents have got no understanding, no comprehension, of spiritual life? Or perhaps they have got a completely different idea about it; perhaps they are orthodox Christians. Perhaps they regard Buddhism as devil worship. Well, are you going to be held back by them? It is really not possible that you should; though, obviously, you will want that they should understand the step that you are taking and, if possible, rejoice that you are taking that step. But you cannot make it is psychologically impossible for you to make the fact of your taking that step dependent upon their wishes. That simply is not possible. In a way, you don't have any choice, because you

cannot deny your own genuine feelings. So I don't really know what this contemporary Tibetan teacher was thinking of. The Tibetans don't have bhikshunis, so it wasn't technically required.

Dayamegha: ... it might have been just the case of that particular person; I think it was more just to ask the question.

S: Yes. He might, of course, have been putting her off, one never knows. It might have been a polite way of saying no. In some Buddhist countries, of course, if parents do refuse permission, the method to which one usually has recourse to win them around is just to go on a fast to death. They usually come round! when they [26] see you getting thin and pale and weak; they usually relent. Better having a son or a daughter who is a monk or nun than no son or daughter at all.

Sanghadevi: Perhaps that does link up with well, in our group we discussed quite a lot Mandarava's initial actions, [which] seem very extreme, as if she ... her hair out and scratched herself and said she renounced her ... birth. It's as if her parents were brought up against her determination and in fact she was able to

S: Well, her father in particular seems to have been a rather determined sort of person; perhaps his daughter took after him. And perhaps that was the only way in which she could make them understand she really was serious. It's not a very big thing to cut one's hair; after all, it will grow again.

Sanghadevi: No, it sounded more as if she yanked it out.

S: Yes, that was rather extreme; and scratched her face. She probably wanted to make herself unattractive. Somebody else did who was it? there was a Christian saint who seared her face with a hot iron to discourage her numerous suitors. No, it wasn't sorry, it was a Zen nun, that's right. I remember the story; it appears in one of these books on Zen, Zen stories. Apparently a certain Zen master refused to accept a young woman as a disciple because she was extremely beautiful and he thought, no doubt rightly, that would distract his male disciples. So she went home and burned her face with a hot iron and then returned and said 'Will you accept me now?' (This is within historical times.) And he said 'Yes, all right, I'll accept you now.' So she was accepted and eventually became a Zen master. It just shows people's determination, doesn't it? So you see, if you can get your parents to understand the nature of the step that you are taking, that's good, but I think very often it may not be very easy, especially if they don't have any knowledge of or sympathy with Buddhism in the first place. It's difficult enough explaining what Buddhism is all about.

Sanghadevi: Is there a question on it? how does that link up with our ordination? Is there a subsection?

S: Oh yes, I'm coming on to that; there's a (b) here. (b) Is the verse 'in harmony with friends and brethren' in the public ordination ceremony referring to our friends and relations and therefore referring to the need of harmony No, that wasn't my intention. 'Brethren' here means fellow disciples. Unfortunately, we don't have a word of this kind in the feminine gender, do we? We have 'brethren' but we don't have

: Sistren.

S: 'Sisterhood' doesn't sound right. You've got brotherhood and sisterhood,but brethren and You've even got fraternity and sorority, but brethren is sometimes not restricted to the male sex, it means just fellow disciples. 'Friends' can be considered to include relations, if you like, in a broad sense. In eighteenth century English, 'friends' often means relations. For instance, if a young woman received a proposal of marriage, she might say, 'I have to consult my friends,' meaning 'my relations'. So I think 'friends' can be taken as including all those with whom you have as it were a non-spiritual connection, just ordinary friends, relations, and well-wishers [27] of various kinds; and 'brethren' those who have the same spiritual commitment as yourself. That was my idea when I framed these verses. Of course, it may not be easy to live in harmony with 'friends', in the sense that they may sometimes misunderstand you because they don't share your spiritual ideas, but at least you are in harmony to the extent that you wish them well and you hope that your Going for Refuge will benefit them too in some way.

Sanghadevi: So it's more to be taken from your side rather than their side.

S: Yes. Though one obviously hopes that, in the case of the 'brethren', the fellow disciples at least, the harmony will be so to speak mutual, a two-way thing. Harmony really means that. And obviously maintaining harmony within the spiritual community or the community where you live is very, very important. Anyway, we seem to be disposing of the questions a bit more quickly this evening. No. 5: Is the Vajrayana approach to dealing with defilements and negative mental states, i.e. that of transforming them into the five wisdoms, similar to two of the methods recorded in the Pali scriptures for dealing with the hindrances, i.e. Going for Refuge with your hindrance, and cultivating its opposite, e.g. developing love to counteract hate? In a way, it is. It has the same sort of effect, the same sort of result, except that the Pali scriptures don't speak of actual transformation in the same way; they don't use that sort of term. But, yes, I would say it has the same effect. You are replacing, say, hatred by metta, so you could be said to be transforming the hatred into metta. The energy which was formerly expressed in a negative manner is now expressed in a more positive manner.

Punyamegha: Are there particular practices for the Vajrayana transformation of that energy?

S: Well, in a way, all the Vajrayanic meditations are intended to do just that; especially when they have a ritual side. For instance, in the Mahayana, on which the Vajrayana is based to a great extent, you have meditations on sunyata; meditations on the sort of teaching that is contained in the Heart Sutra, where rupa is sunyata, sunyata is rupa. That is the sort of philosophical basis of the possibility of transformation. Because if rupa can be sunyata, klesa can be bodhi. But in the Vajrayana you sort of face the klesas more directly, for instance by visualizing the wrathful form of a Bodhisattva. Well, in a sense anger is there, anger is brought out into the open, anger is sort of integrated into the figure of the Bodhisattva. It ceases to be anger in the mundane sense, ceases to be a klesa; but the energy of anger is there.

Punyamegha: Is that only possible to make use of when you have been practising for a while, or could one start off with it and ...

S: Yes, I think, whatever the Tibetans may say, I think you need to do a lot of preliminary work. Otherwise it's just a matter of words. You say 'Oh, these klesas are bodhi, therefore no need to control them, no need to eradicate them.'

Punyamegha: So you have to learn to control them to some extent first and then ?

[28]
S: Yes. Otherwise you cannot develop the Insight which enables you to see their fundamental voidness, which is the basis of the transformation.

Christine McCluskey: What about in terms of visualizing the wrathful form, in terms of just putting the energy of that anger into just seeing the wrathful form?

S: If you visualize a wrathful form, the form is wrathful, and the wrath in the form doesn't represent a klesa. But when you visualize a wrathful form, you feel as it were some sympathy with that wrath, with that anger. It draws it out of you. You in a way enjoy it. But you do that with a clear conscience, because the wrath, the anger, is there in a highly sublimated form in what you are visualizing; which, to the extent that you visualize it, is in a way a part of you, an aspect of your psyche. So that raw anger in you is being refined and it's being integrated into what you visualize which, as I have said, is in a way a part of you. In a way, you can do it sort of verbally, if you talk about something, especially with other people; you bring it out into the open. In that way you integrate it, say if you admit your anger. To the extent that you are able to talk about it, to bring it out into the open, to recognize it, it ceases to be anger, it ceases to be a klesa. The other day we were talking about samaya sattva and jnana sattva, do you remember? It occurred to me afterwards that you can regard the words of the scriptures as a samaya sattva. One can regard conceptual formulations as a samaya sattva.

Punyamegha: How?

S: Well, think about it; it's pretty obvious, isn't it? The words of the Scriptures are a samaya sattva.

Sanghadevi: If you take the lead from the words, you can gain Insight

S: Yes, right. They are the verbal, the conceptual formulation of an Insight, and therefore can become the basis for the realization of that. As words, just words, in the ordinary sense, on the conceptual level, they are just samaya sattva, they don't contain Insight; but they can be made the basis for the attainment of Insight. If you are sufficiently receptive, pondering on those words, you find that Insight descends into them.

Sanghadevi: What made you suddenly bring that in at this point?

S: Oh, just so that I should get it down on tape! (Laughter.) This point occurred to me, because it was in consequence of what we were talking about, either yesterday or the day before. So afterwards, just reflecting on it, this point occurred to me. I have never made this point before anywhere, so I thought, well, I must; in case I forget it or don't get the chance to talk about it, I'll just pop it in somewhere.

Vajragita: Was it in connection with this metaphorical language?

S: No, just ordinary as it were straightforward language, whether metaphorical or non-metaphorical. But I mean you sometimes do have that experience, don't you? not just with the Buddhist scriptures, with almost anything, anything of a profound or a more serious

nature, even with great literature. The first time you read it, well, you understand it in a way, but it's just words. But you read it again, perhaps years later and it is so full of meaning.

Dayamegha: It's not the words themselves, it's what you bring to them.

[29]
S: Yes, in a sense it's what you bring to them, but none the less, the words are the means for evoking that understanding from you. It's not that that meaning has no real connection with the words; it does have. But so far as you personally are concerned, sometimes those words don't mean very much; sometimes they mean a great deal. Sometimes words and phrases go on ringing in one's ears, don't they? They seem to mean a lot, and one can reflect on such words and phrases.

Vajragita: ... to learn something by heart.

S: Yes, indeed. Especially, say, something like the Heart Sutra. I think it's good to do this, if one possibly can, when one is young. One is able to learn things by heart so much more easily when one is young. I learned a lot of things by heart when I was young, sometimes just by reading once or twice. I find it quite difficult now to commit things to memory. I have to repeat over and over again, many times.

: (inaudible) Laughter.

S: You should have started earlier! It is quite good to have something which you know by heart and which you can just recite to yourself when you are quiet when you are travelling, perhaps and just reflect on the meaning. You are not dependent on a book, then. Poetry is often easier to learn by heart, because of the metre and the rhyme. It helps you to remember. Has anybody ever tried to commit poems to memory?

Voices: Yes.

S: Favourite bits and pieces?

Caroline(?): The one I have done most recently is Ananda's poem to Vajrasattva (?), which I was given to read on the ... retreat and I liked it so much, each day I wanted to read it three times, and I soon knew it. That means well, I say it every day to myself.

S: Good, yes. And that's without rhyme and metre! Good for you!

Caroline: Well, I liked it!

Dayamegha: You read it beautifully.

: [Do you think] the more you learn from memory, the more your memory improves?

S: I think so, yes. I won't be completely sure; yes, I think so.

: It seems to be quite an important

S: Yes, one can develop the memory. I think we are rather lazy in this respect nowadays, just because we do have books. Some people in the past have had phenomenal memories. Dr Johnson, for instance: he quite often could remember a piece of poetry, even many lines, after hearing it read or himself reading it just once. Prose he could commit to memory after reading it twice. Macaulay had a similar memory.

Caroline: I knew someone like that who was at the same grammar school, and he used to ..., when he was in about the first or second form. He used to tell the story of [30] King Solomon's Mines on first go... and he just did it because he had been reading it. I don't know what happened to him!

Sridevi: But do you think this faculty was much more common in ancient India, because the monks seemed to ?

S: Oh yes, I am sure, not just the Buddhist monks but the brahmins.

Sridevi: Do you think it might be a useful experiment for us to recite the scriptures together, and try to

S: I'm not sure. I certainly like hearing them recited by one person really well. I'm not sure about hearing them recited by a lot of people, or joining in a recitation by a lot of people. I'm not sure about that. We could experiment.

: We have had some ...

: Call and response. It's a bit different.

S: Ah, yes.

: I certainly don't think it would ... if we just spoke it right through.

S: That's true, yes. One of course can tape-record things, or have things tape-recorded and play the tape. One of our Friends in the old days used to play a tape of the Sevenfold Puja every evening before she went to bed. We did a recording on a retreat, and she couldn't get along to classes; she lived a long way away from a centre, but every evening she played the tape of the Sevenfold Puja, just sat and listened to it quietly before going to bed. She got quite a lot from that.

Sanghadevi: Going back briefly for a moment to the original question about transforming energies, and these wrathful deities. Do you think people in the Order would, in future perhaps, do this practice, or do you think we would get so used to it as making more of a communication, as you suggest, talking about ... experience in that we just won't have to have recourse to it ... ?

S: I don't know, because after all we have only been gong for 20 years. All sorts of things could happen in the future. We could explore all sorts of theories of experience, especially as regards meditation. But, of course, in the case ...

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Side 2

- of the Tibetan wrathful deities, or rather the Tibetan representations of the wrathful deities, they are really very Tibetan in a way. They are not even Indian. I think it is a question to what extent they would be meaningful to us or really appeal to us or affect us. That is another whole area we need to look into.

: Actually some of the psychotherapies now often say, 'Think of an image for what you are feeling, don't they? So on a lesser level than

Sanghadevi: Surely the wrathful images aren't any more alien than the peaceful ones? In terms of ...

S: I think in a way they are, because they are much more likely to have lots of arms and legs and animals' heads and tusks, whereas the peaceful ones are much more common, as it were. I know White Tara does have her seven eyes, but they are rather discreetly distributed, if you see what I mean! But thank of the Amantaka (?), with that bull's head. Or think of Hayagriva, with the horse's head. Or think of the Lion-headed Dakini. Think of some of the ancient Egyptian gods: does one feel really comfortable with a cat-headed goddess? Or a hippopotamus-headed goddess?

Punyamegha: But they have quite a strong effect.

S: They do, that's true.

Punyamegha: They do sort of get you in the guts.

S: Mm. One just has to familiarize oneself with them. I think really it is quite a good thing just to walk around the Egyptian galleries at the British Museum. The Egyptians were remarkably good at producing these animal-headed gods and goddesses; they are very convincing. The heads fit the bodies really well. I remember there is one I was especially impressed by: that was the, I forget her name, the hippopotamus-headed goddess. It really looks like a living figure, you could really imagine that old lady she looks like an old lady walking around with this hippopotamus head. It doesn't seem extraordinary. It must be due it may be due partly to the strength of religious conviction on the part of the Egyptians, and perhaps the skill of the artist. There is the jackal-headed god, the ibis-headed god, Thoth; the hawk-headed god, the goat-headed god. That brings us, of course, close to Christian mythology, because the devil has got a goat's head and horns and hooves. And there's Pan, isn't there? There are the Centaurs. Well, there's the Sphinx. This is quite an interesting field, this field of (I hope I'm not going astray or digressing!) the animal-headed gods and goddesses. They do have a very strong appeal. In the case of the Egyptian figures I am thinking more of the sculptures, not paintings. Sculptures perhaps always seem more real than paintings. But if one is interested in this field one should perhaps just familiarize oneself with the figures; ask oneself what they mean, what sort of effect they have; what you feel within yourself when you look at them, when you see them. I remember one quite extraordinary figure this is not an animal figure which I saw in the Archaeological Museum in Naples, the first time I went there, and that was the figure of Ephesian Artemis. Do you know this figure? (Silence.) You know the goddess Diana or Artemis? Well, the Ephesian Artemis has a special

form as Mistress of the Beasts, and she is standing with her hands like this; her feet or her legs are bound together, and decorated with pictures of animals. But she has got rows and rows of breasts, multiple breasts; and this produces a quite strange sort of [32] impression. But it is a very real image. You must have seen representations of it, pictures of it. It's made of alabaster, mainly; I think alabaster and bronze. It's a very beautiful image. She has a sort of crown or tower-like crown on her head. There must have been about 30 breasts arranged in rows.

: You wouldn't necessarily have anything against one taking up a wrathful practice?

S: Oh no, not in principle. Just a question of whether it would be suitable, simply.$

Punyamegha: To return to that question, you said you thought the Vajrayana approach of transforming the poisons into the wisdoms was similar, but they are Insight practices is that what you were saying, that they are based on Insight?

S: In a way that is true, yes; because if you identify, or if you transform by identifying well, the active identification constitutes an Insight. If you see that the conditioned and the Unconditioned are both sunyata, the samsara and Nirvana are both sunyata, or that klesa and bodhi are both sunyata, this is a Mahayana-type Insight. You don't have that sort of development in the Hinayana; you don't get that in the Pali scriptures. There, it is a question of a definite transition from the one to the other.

Punyamegha: Would it not I was thinking, though, the final way of dealing with your hindrances is to Go for Refuge with them, and I wondered if you couldn't say that in a way that was the same?

S: I'm not sure about that. When you Go for Refuge with them, you are as it were saying, 'I may have these hindrances, but anyway, even if I do have them, even if I can't get rid of them, they are not going to stop me Going for Refuge. I'll take them with me.' If you have that sort of feeling sufficiently strongly, well, that can enable you to deal with those hindrances.

Punyamegha: So that can transform you?

S: And can have what, from the Mahayana point of view or Vajrayana point of view, we can call a transforming effect, though the Hinayana doesn't speak in terms of transformation. It doesn't have a philosophy of transformation. It doesn't have a philosophy of metaphysical non-duality. It doesn't have, in a sense, a philosophy at all; it just has practices, one could say. But the effect is the same. The Mahayana seems to think that if you could only realize that the so-called klesa and the so-called bodhi are non-dual, that will liberate you, or help liberate you, from the dualistic attitude on which the klesas are based.

Dayamegha: ... about the animal gods? We were talking about last night in terms of perhaps touching slightly taboo combinations, and, if we did go and see if those particular ones had any effect on us, what would we do with it, in terms of

S: Well, just try and see why that was so. Supposing you do find that you respond very much to the cat-headed goddess or the cat goddess: what does that mean? There is a feline element in you? Do you see what I mean? Or is it as simple as that? One would just have to ask

oneself: what was it? There must be some reason for it, rational or irrational, why for instance you should be really attracted to the hipppotamus-headed goddess whereas the ram-headed god left you cold. There must be a reason of some sort. So just look into yourself, follow that clue, like following a clue into a labyrinth. There isn't a rational meaning that you can look up in a book [33] or a dictionary of mythology. It will probably be a very personal thing, personal to you.

: It does seem to be quite a common thing, that half animal and half human.

: Is it wholesome? (??)

S: Well, in the Tibetan Book of the Dead you have them, don't you? A lot of dakinis with animal heads. So what exactly does that mean? Perhaps it goes back to primitive feelings about animals, because to primitive man animals were often very interesting and fascinating creatures. Don't forget they had no idea about evolution, or even about creation by God. They found themselves in a world with other living things, that in some ways behaved like human beings, in other ways behaved not like human beings. Some of them were dangerous, some of them were not dangerous; some of them were big and strong, others were small and weak. Some of them were of importance in their economy. But they found themselves in a world with these other beings, so it must have been quite a strange experience for primitive man. Sometimes he felt that they were as it were superior. We always think of the animals as inferior; primitive man didn't always feel like that.

Dayamegha: Especially the buffalo.

S: No, that wasn't just a question of physical strength. It could have had some economic basis. Think of the Egyptian reverence for cats. If you killed a cat, it was a capital offence in ancient Egypt. If a cat came into the house, you should allow it to eat anything it wanted to eat. People would be glad to do so, it was good luck. We still regard black cats as bringing good luck. It is said that the original reason why the cat was regarded as sacred was that Egypt was an agricultural country; it grew rice watered by the Nile, and that rice was stored in great barns: what about the rats? Cats were necessary, and cats became domesticated by living around barns, and people encouraging them to do that. And that may have been the origin of the sacredness of the cat. But then, on the other hand, not all agricultural communities regarded the cat as a sacred animal. Perhaps the Egyptians did because they were quite primitive, in the sense of quite early. And perhaps they put a sort of taboo on the cat, a taboo against killing it for economic reasons originally, and over the centuries and Egypt had a very long history gradually the cat evolved into a sacred animal. But what about the ibis, and what about the hawk? How did they become sacred? The jackal? So perhaps there is some level in our own psyche where we have a sort of primitive feeling towards animals: who knows?

Sridevi: Do you think it could be a sort of memory back to our animal level?

S: Well, it wouldn't be an individual memory, would it? It would be a collective memory. I am not so sure whether the existence of a collective memory is recognized. I don't think it is recognized by science, except in the form of the what do they call it? the DNA code? But that's a memory only metaphorically, isn't it?

Sridevi: But maybe these gods and goddesses with animal heads ... integrate ... lower level.

S: Yes, but Here we are attaching a definite meaning to 'animal' something lower. But primitive man didn't, I think, regard animals in that way. They were just different, and sometimes they had sort of divine powers. We have got this fixed [34] idea, as it were, that animals are lower. Well, yes, evolutionarily speaking, they are. But primitive man didn't see them like that.

: So it would be important, possibly, if you were noting the effect of these gods on you, not to be judgemental ...

S: Yes, right. But in fairy stories animals often have magical qualities, don't they? Perhaps that's a leftover from primitive times. Animals speak; even at a very late and sophisticated stage of development like that represented by Aesop's Fables, animals speak. In the Jataka stories, animals speak. The golden deer speaks. In D. H. Lawrence's animal poems, you get that very strong impression or experience of animals as existing quite separately in their own right: the tortoise, the kangaroo, the leopard, the snake. D. H. Lawrence had that very strong empathy with animals in a way that is very rare in modern times. Do many of you know those Birds, Beasts and Flowers poems? They are very, very appealing.

Dayamegha: The aborigines have the 'dream time', when all the animals had human form, and there are all these mentions about how the kangaroo got its tail and all these sorts of things; how [they] became the form they are, in some senses, because of something they did.

S: Right. Yes, we have animal fables of that sort, don't we? Sometimes how the animal lost something or other lost its wings, or whatever it was. Yes, there is a story of why the elephant's trunk is long; things of that sort.

Dayamegha: The Just So Stories.

S: Yes, that's right, yes. Anyway, let's come back to human beings.

Sanghadevi: ...just one thing. You said the Hinayana doesn't have a philosophy of transformation. You could say it just has the practice, the effect.

S: It doesn't even have practices of transformation, though the effect of the practice is to transform. It doesn't think in those terms. It thinks in terms of getting rid of the negative, the klesa, throwing it away, replacing it by something else. It doesn't think in terms of transforming it, though the effect will be that. This is not to say that in the later Hinayana there wasn't an attempt just to suppress, just to hold down, and that was partly responsible for the development of the Mahayana and the Vajrayana. But in the Buddha's original teaching, as far as we can tell from the Pali Canon, there wasn't just a repression of the klesas. But at the same time there wasn't any philosophy of transformation, in the sense of a philosophy based on a non-dualistic position. The theoretical position though it's usually only implied is definitely dualistic. You get, so to speak, from the conditioned to the Unconditioned, from samsara to Nirvana. You leave the samsara behind. You get rid of the klesas. That is very much the Hinayana way of looking at things, or the Hinayana way of expressing itself; not transforming, not sublimating. But the effect is the same.

Sanghadevi: What I was going to ask was: do you think it therefore only appeals to the person who perhaps, well, doesn't feel the need to think so much ?

S: That's true, yes. I think so, yes. Some people want a sort of philosophical reason for their practice; others don't bother. Yes, that's true.

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Punyamegha: I was wondering if sometimes it's not with our Christian conditioning of being quite judgemental about our 'sins'; whether the Hinayana approach of getting rid of the klesas is sometimes not helpful, whether we impose on that a sort of Christian theory of repression, I suppose.

S: You might. But most people aren't brought up with a very sort of Christian conditioning these days, are they?

Punyamegha: Maybe Catholics have been, more.

S: On the other hand, one could say the philosophy of non-duality could be even more dangerous, in the sense that you might just rest satisfied with a purely theoretical understanding of that philosophy, and think that you don't have to do anything about the klesas because they are bodhi anyway. I'm afraid some Tibetan lamas seem to encourage this way of thinking, with the result that there may not be much practice, there may not be much regard for ethics. 'What does it matter if you get drunk? drunkenness and Enlightenment are the same.' The non-dualistic approach! Well, a cautiously dualistic approach is the best for most people in the West.

Sanghadevi: Would you say that's what our approach is?

S: I think yes; though we, of course, do know something about non-dualistic philosophy, but we don't bring it in too much, do we? The Zen people emphasize 'You are the Buddha; just wake up to that fact.' But if you just superimpose the idea that you are Buddha on your present unenlightened state, far from helping you that can be a great hindrance.

Punyamegha: Would you say that Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell is a little bit sort of similar to the Vajrayana approach?

S: A little bit, perhaps.

Punyamegha: Sort of like the devil being well, he's a devil but he is inspiration as well.

S: Well, no, it's not quite like that. Blake's view is that the devil, in a sense, is not really the devil. The devil represents energy, and energy, according to Blake, is a good thing. But, according to Blake again, Christianity, due to its repressive attitude, has come to regard energy as bad. Blake is saying energy is not bad; energy is eternal delight, he says. Anyway, let's pass on. Two more questions left. If consciousness is born into a male or female body, to what extent can the consciousness itself be considered male or female? See p. 246: Though this body does not shelter a male soul... The expression 'male soul' is rather odd. There isn't anything quite like that in Pali or Sanskrit, though in the Abhidharma masculinity and femininity are considered as indriyas. There's a list of 22 indriyas. You are familiar with the list of five the so-called spiritual faculties but the full list is of 22 indriyas, and masculinity and femininity are there included: purushindriya and ithiyostri(?) indriya. So this does suggest that masculinity and femininity, or the distinction of sex, is not merely physiological, that

there is a psychological aspect too. But I wouldn't like to say that that sort of psychological aspect of masculinity and [36] femininity, or rather maleness and femaleness, let us say, amounted to a separate soul. I would say that it's as though there are different levels. On the physical level there is a distinction of gender; some are male, some are female. But then there is the mind, there is the consciousness associated with that male or female body, and the consciousness associated with the male body cannot but be as it were tinged with that maleness, conditioned by it to some extent; likewise for the consciousness associated with the female body. But then the higher you go, you come to reaches of the mind, levels of the mind which transcend not just the physical level but transcend even those psychological levels on which there is still some influence of the physical gender. Do you see what I mean? So it's as though, yes, on the physical level you are male or female. On the lower mental level you are still a bit male or female. But on the higher mental levels you are neither male nor female. As I mentioned in The Ten Pillars, when you get up into the dhyanas, to the extent that you are in the dhyanas you are neither male nor female. You are angelic, as it were. You are just an individual. And one should try to live more and more on that level, not considering oneself exclusively a male individual or a female individual. This is what the asuras do.

Dayamegha: Do you think there is a danger of perhaps doing that prematurely not in the sense of ...ing the dhyanas, but in the sense of perhaps not knowing the extent of what masculinity or

S: Oh yes, indeed. I think people who say that if men and women are on the spiritual path they should be able to mix freely are being a bit premature. Because, yes, if men and women are really established on the spiritual path and really consider themselves individuals and human beings first and foremost, of course they can mix freely. But the fact is, they don't do that, and you come to that position only after a long spiritual struggle. It's very difficult not to think of yourself as male or not to think of yourself as female, and act accordingly. But I would deprecate the use of this expression 'male soul' or 'female soul'. I think that is a gross overstatement. If one had to speak in that sort of way, one could say that part of the soul was male or female, but if one uses the term soul at all that the larger part of it is not so at all, at least potentially. It is very difficult, usually, not to treat people as either male or female, because you see their physical bodies and you can't help noticing the difference of gender. But if they are genuinely individuals, and as you get to know them more and more as individuals, the fact that they are either male or female becomes less and less important, and you relate more and more just on the level of your common humanity and common spiritual commitment. This is presumably what Padmasambhava and Mandarava were doing. To confuse Padmasambhava and Mandarava with the ordinary couple going along to a centre is just like confusing Vimalakirti with an ordinary layman. I could risk a rather extreme and paradoxical statement and say: if you and your boy friend do a night's meditating together in cremation grounds, well, have a boy friend by all means! You don't need to live in a single-sex community! (Be careful how you quote me!) (Laughter.)

Sanghadevi: They'll go shooting off to the local cemeteries!

S: You mustn't forget that, good as single-sex situations are, they still only a means to an end. They are not ends in themselves.

[37]
Sanghadevi: The end being individuality?

S: Yes, individuality, Enlightenment, whatever one chooses to call it. Once I gave a talk years and years ago at the International House for students, and there was a young Turkish student there and he said: 'My belief is that you can get Nirvana through sex.' So I said, 'All right, if that's what you believe, go ahead. When you gain Nirvana, come back and tell me!' I don't know whether he has gained Nirvana. It might be possible, I don't know at least in his case. Who can tell? I am a bit sceptical, all the same. But still, one must keep an open mind! All right, last question: Please discuss the difference between compassion and pity. Is it just that pity has an element of selfishness, or is there more subtlety involved? Accepting the distinction between the two terms that the question assumes though they are often used as synonymous in the case of pity, you are really sorry for yourself. You see someone suffering and it makes you feel sad, it makes you feel uncomfortable, and you want to relieve the suffering because you want to get rid of the feeling of uneasiness on your part. This is more of the nature of pity. Compassion obviously isn't like that. But at this point I'd like to recommend a book I read last year, which I recommended to lots of people, which deals with this very topic. You may have heard of it: Beware of Pity. Anyone read it?

Ratnamegha: Yes, I have, it's very, very good.

S: It's good, isn't it? It really makes the difference between the two things clear.

Ratnamegha: Quite subtle as well: the ease with which kindness changes into pity.

S: It is remarkable; one of the best novels I've ever read.

: It's a woman writer?

S: Yes, it's very, very good as a novel. It's Stefan Zweig, the Austrian writer. He is famous, actually, for his biographies. This is the only novel that he has written. It is an extraordinarily good novel, one of the very best I've ever read.

: Do you know the publisher?

S: Oh, it's in Penguin: a Penguin Modern Classic. Beware of Pity, it's translated as; the Austrian title is not quite that, but that's a good title.

Vajragita: (Long inaubdible comment)

S: Ah, good! But the story has such momentum, it's written with such intensity; insight, in a way. But the story is a fascinating story, a very moving story. So emotional!

Vajragita: [You] enjoyed it!

S: Yes. I think it's sometimes good to read a book, whatever it may be, which really stirs one emotionally. You may find you are only able to read it in little bits; it does stir you up so much. It's a thrilling story. And also it's interesting because [38] it reveals a whole different world the world of pre-First World War Austria. It's very interesting.

Vajragita: It gives quite an insight into that as well.

S: Yes; there's the world of the military man, the world of well, the old merchant, who is of Jewish descent, with all that that implied in the days of the old Austrian Empire. It's an extraordinary piece of work. It's very difficult to put down, once you pick it up. This is what I found. I found it just by accident; Adam(?) had a copy of it at Il Convento, and I just saw it lying around and I picked it up and started reading it, and couldn't put it down! So when I came back I recommended it to people, partly because it is intrinsically good, it's a good story, it's good literature; but it also illustrates so well this difference between compassion and pity. You couldn't put it better than that. So there is no real point in giving a theoretical explanation; just recommend the book, tell people to read the book. It makes it so clear. Putting it crudely, there's the young officer who represents pity, and the old doctor who represents compassion. But they are not wooden figures just illustrating a moral. They really do come alive, this very gauche young officer and the old, experienced, slightly world-weary doctor. But, yes, it's available in the Penguin Modern Classics. So get it and read it and pass it on to a friend. I sent a copy to Buddhadasa, as I thought he would enjoy it, and I believe he did. Reading a book like that, you can see the power of the modern novel. In some ways, it takes the place of philosophy, even of religion up to a point. It's able to put across so much, and influence people; though it isn't often used in that sort of way. Often it is used in a very trivial sort of way, which is a great pity just as the medium of film is, just as TV is; all trivialized, even degraded. So 'beware of pity': it's compassion that you are after, not pity. On the other hand, don't be misled by words. Very often 'pity' is used in the sense of compassion. When Blake uses the word pity he means compassion. He speaks of 'Mercy, pity, peace and love'. If you do permit yourselves to read one novel per year, well, let it be that one this year or next year.

: One?

Vajragita: Could you recommend a few more?

S: Oh dear, oh dear! I have recently been rather enjoying George Gissing. He is a late Victorian novelist. He is a realist. His pictures of ordinary working-class and lower middle-class life, in London mainly, are very, very vivid, but he has some very interesting ideas. His best-known work, which perhaps one could start with, is The New Grub Street. He has been reprinted recently; he is easily available now. You know what the old Grub Street was? It was the street in London where, in Johnson's time and before, hack writers lived; so to live in Grub Street means to just be a very poor writer and journalist living from hand to mouth just writing what you can and getting it published. So this is the new Grub Street, so to speak, the Grub Street of late Victorian times. The basic question he is concerned with is of artistic integrity and how there is a constant pressure on the writer, on the artist, to sacrifice his artistic integrity for the sake of worldly success; for the individual to succumb to the group. This is where he is very interesting. So this is really the theme of The New Grub Street. But read that, and if you get a taste for him you'll go on with some of the others.

Tessa: Any others?

[39]
S: Well, in a way there are lots. The collected works of Dickens, the collected works of Scott, Thackeray, George Eliot. George Eliot is very popular, isn't she?

Dayamegha: She can be quite hard going, though.

S: Mm, especially the later novels; not so much the earlier ones. I have always had a soft spot for Charlotte Bronte, I must say; Jane Eyre was one of the very first novels I ever read. I read it when I was eight, and I still remember the impression it made on me. Especially that first chapter: it's so vivid. She is an amazing writer. She's got all sorts of faults, because she's a sort of self-taught writer, but a tremendous power of imagination.

Vajragita: Very emotional, too.

S: Yes. Another classic which I have enjoyed very much, and which could be recommended, is Moby Dick, by Herman Melville Moby Dick being the great white whale that the mad Captain Ahab is pursuing and trying to kill. It's all very symbolical! D.H. Lawrence has got quite a lot to say about the symbolism, or alleged symbolism, of Moby Dick in his Studies in Classic American Literature.

Sridevi: What about Henry James? What do you think of his books?

S: Hm, yes, I must say I haven't read all that much of Henry James, especially the later Henry James; but one novel of his that I did really enjoy very much was The Bostonians. It's in Penguin Classics. It's a very readable, fast-moving story, a bit satirical; it satirizes the feminists the early ones.

: I've seen it as a film.

S: Ah, have you? How did it come across as a film?

: Good, actually.

S: It's very dramatic.

Sridevi: ... feminist, isn't it? I don't think it criticized them.

S: Oh, perhaps they left all that out didn't dare to include it.

Sridevi: Yes, it was quite sympathetic. I thought it was a bit sentimental, but

S: Well, why be afraid of sentiment?

Dayamegha: It was a bit critical, actually. It didn't show her in the best of lights in the end not just in the film, it didn't really portray her as very happy.

S: Dickens is always so readable, I find, always worth while.

Sridevi: Have you read all the Russian classics?

S: I have, I'm afraid; well, nearly all of them. Yes; it's difficult to say. They are very good, but I think you have to be in a definite or particular mood to read some of them. I must say I like Stendhal very much; he is, I think, quite a favourite with some of our Friends The Charterhouse of Parma and Scarlet and Black.

Sridevi: I couldn't get on with Scarlet and Black! I liked the title!

[40]
S: Another foreign classic I liked very much and enjoyed immensely is Manzoni, The Betrothed I Promessi Sposi. It is the great Italian novel, written in the earlier part of the last century. It is a very fine historical novel, I think early sixteenth century. It contains a wonderful character, the old priest, Fra Abbadio, who is a born survivor, ha ha! He has got no idealism whatever; he is a kindly old soul, but his only concern in life is to just survive which he does; but he is so vividly drawn.

Punyamegha: Did you read this book, The Name of the Rose?

S: I did, I enjoyed it. Yes, it's interesting; not the sort of thing you would want to read a second time, but interesting, yes. I have always enjoyed D.H. Lawrence. Thackeray's Vanity Fair, that's a wonderful novel. I must say I really liked the character of Becky Sharp; she quite appealed to me, I thought her quite an attractive little woman, in a way, though resourceful and wicked. I didn't like her good friend Amelia at all! Amelia seemed a trifle wet, as Mrs Thatcher might say!

(ENDS)

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