

## General Introduction to Sangharakshita's Seminars

### Hidden Treasure

From the mid-seventies through to the mid-eighties, Urgyen Sangharakshita led many seminars on a wide range of texts for invited groups of [Order members](#) and [Mitrās](#). These seminars were highly formative for the FWBO/Triratna as Sangharakshita opened up for the still very young community what it might mean to live a life in the Dharma.

The seminars were all recorded and later transcribed. Some of these transcriptions have been carefully checked and edited and are [now available in book form](#). However, a great deal of material has so far remained unchecked and unedited and we want to make it available to people who wish to deepen their understanding of Sangharakshita's presentation of the Dharma.

How should one approach reading a seminar transcription from so long ago? Maybe the first thing to do is to vividly imagine the context. What year is it? Who is present? We then step into a world in which Sangharakshita is directly communicating the Dharma. Sometimes he is explaining a text, at other times he is responding to questions and we can see how the emergence of Dharma teachings in this context was a collaborative process, the teaching being drawn out by the questions people asked. Sometimes those questions were less to do with the text and arose more from the contemporary situation of the emerging new Buddhist movement.

Reading through the transcripts can be a bit like working as a miner, sifting through silt and rubble to find the real jewels. Sometimes the discussion is just a bit dull. Sometimes we see Sangharakshita trying to engage with the confusion of ideas many of us brought to Buddhism, confusion which can be reflected in the texts themselves. With brilliant flashes of clarity and understanding, we see him giving teachings in response that have since become an integral part of the Triratna Dharma landscape.

Not all Sangharakshita's ways of seeing things are palatable to modern tastes and outlook. At times some of the views captured in these transcripts express attitudes and ideas [Triratna has acknowledged as unhelpful](#) and which form no part of our teaching today. In encountering all of the ideas contained in over seventeen million words of Dharma investigation and exchange, we are each challenged to test what is said in the fire of our own practice and experience; and to talk over 'knotty points' with friends and teachers to better clarify our own understanding and, where we wish to, to decide to disagree.

We hope that over the next years more seminars will be checked and edited for a wider readership. In the meantime we hope that what you find here will inspire, stimulate, encourage - and challenge you in your practice of the Dharma and in understanding more deeply the approach of Urgyen Sangharakshita.

*Sangharakshita's Literary Executors and the Adhithana Dharma Team*

## Dhammapada - Chapter 9 - The Section of Evil

Held at Padmaloka, 12-13 March 1983

Prasannasiddhi, Duncan Steene, Roy Parker, Antonio Perez, William Brawley, Tejananda, Vairocana, Chris Pegrum, Abhaya.

S: I think everybody knows that the theme of the weekend as a whole is living ethics, so I thought I would select from the Dhammapada a couple of sections which had mainly an ethical bearing and as we usually do we'll go through those sections verse by verse. The first section is the section on evil, the (?)vagga. And the second is the (?) Alta vagga, the section of the Self. We may be able to get through only the first. It depends how much we can bring out of each verse. In fact I originally did have it in mind that we should just do simply the first section on evil. But I thought we'd better have a second section, the section on "self", ready just in case we got through the first. So we will be in no hurry, we'll go through each verse as thoroughly as need be. All right.

v.116. "Be quick to do what is morally beautiful; restrain the mind from evil; he who is sluggish in doing good, his mind delights in evil."

Perhaps I should explain that the translation which we are using here is my own. I did happen to translate these two sections in Pali some time ago. And I think that in a way that is important because I have translated this first sentence of the first verse a little differently from the way in which it is usually translated, though at the same time not in any way eccentrically; I have translated it completely literally, which, for some reason or other, other translators haven't done, as far as I know. I have translated "be quick to do what is morally beautiful", the word that I have translated as beautiful in the original is simply Kalyana. An even more literal translation would be "be quick in the beautiful", that is the Pali idiom, but the meaning is to be quick in the doing of the beautiful; that is to say that which is morally beautiful. Now, this word Kalyana is really quite important, we get it again in that well known phrase, "Kalyana Mitrata." Here in this context, we usually translate it as spiritual, we speak of spiritual friendship. We could just as well speak of beautiful friendship; it would even be more accurate perhaps, more literal, or "lovely friendship"; sometimes it is translated as that. So we could even translate here, "be quick to do what is lovely", that is to say, that which is lovely in the moral sense.

Now what do you think is the significance of bringing out this fact that what is usually spoken of as the good is in fact in a sense the beautiful? Not so much the beautiful in the purely aesthetic sense, the artistic sense, but the beautiful in the sense of [2] morally beautiful, what is the significance of using this sort of term in an, as it were, ethical context ?

Chris: If you use the word good, then it demands some sort of judgement as to what is good and what is bad, whereas if you say beautiful, I think most people appreciate beauty, and they respond to beauty.

S: I think that this is the main point, that ethics is not a question of do's and don'ts; ethics is basically a question of being attracted towards an ideal if you like, which is actually appealing. Do you see the difference ? Of course it assumes that you have some sensitivity to

what is kalyana, what is beautiful, or what is lovely or what is good in that sense that you are capable of being affected by it, capable of responding to it. If someone has no sense of what is morally beautiful or ethically lovely, well, then he has to be restrained perhaps by do's and don'ts. But if one can simply feel the beauty, as it were, of the ethical ideal, well obviously, that is a much better way of going about things.

But is this usually the way in which we think about an ethical ideal, or think about anything of an ethical nature, that it is beautiful?

Vairocana: Most people don't.

S: Most people don't. But there is also another question which is what exactly do we mean by the morally beautiful?

Abhaya: I thought it was brought a little bit by Ratnavira, last night in the Ideal of David, the image, of summing up all those virtues as being expressed by that figure. I know that was an aesthetically beautiful thing but it also brought home the moral beauty of someone actually following an ideal and...

S: But the question still arises! Well, what do we exactly mean by moral beauty? Well in a sense it raises even the question what do we mean by beauty? But presumably an important element is that of attractiveness, we feel naturally attracted. The beautiful appeals to us; the morally beautiful appeals to our, what we can only call our ethical sense; the actions seem to fine one, a noble one, a lovely one, a beautiful one. But if, for instance, suppose you think of some, say well known ethical act, well, one could go back to ancient Greece, one could think of Socrates, one could think of the death of Socrates, one could think of Socrates' voluntary death for the sake of the principles which he believed in, for the sake of standing by the principles as something which was ethically beautiful; one could well apply that praise to the death of Socrates, but what exactly makes it ethically beautiful? Why does it impress us in that sort of way? [3] Why is it that we feel a sort of quasi-aesthetic feeling when we read about the death of Socrates? What makes us say it was a very beautiful death, a morally beautiful death?

Chris: It is quite moving to read.

S: It is moving to read, yes, but it also seems fitting, it seems appropriate. And that fittingness and appropriateness have a sort of, well one might even say elegance; there is going to be a talk on "Elegance". Sometimes one reads in connection with Mathematics, that mathematicians talk about an elegant demonstration, that is to say, an elegant mathematical demonstration, so here in the mathematical demonstration there is a sort of element that appeals to an aesthetic sense; it doesn't just appeal to the sense of Truth. So in the same way, here, the morally beautiful action doesn't just appeal to the moral sense, it also in a way appeals to the aesthetic. It somehow seems to be elegant, to be fit, to be appropriate.

Chris: It's as if there is some intuitive understanding, some sort of..

S: There is something in human nature which derives deep satisfaction, from contemplating the good, a satisfaction that is almost aesthetic in nature. It gives you the sort of satisfaction that you get from great Art. It is as though a great action, a great ethical action has a sort of

artistic value as it were. It is so appropriate, so fitting. But the verse, or the Buddha in the verse says "Be quick to do what is morally beautiful." Now what does that suggest?

Abhaya: It suggests the tendency that to do the morally unbeautiful is predominant.

S: Well not only that, but even if there is a tendency to do the morally beautiful, we don't, we tend not to do it very quickly. I mean, it's as though you are attracted by the morally beautiful, you are inspired by the ethical ideal, that response is there, but if you don't act upon it, you delay. Sometimes we find that we have sort of ethical impulses, we may have noble impulses, we may have an impulse of generosity, but unless we act upon it immediately, very often we will have second thoughts and decide that it is not such a good idea after all to be as generous as all that, or maybe we'll reduce the scale of the generosity, or some thing of that kind. Very often our immediate response is of a quite noble nature, a quite strongly ethical nature, but unfortunately we do allow these second thoughts to come in, we give them perhaps undue weight.

Abhaya: There is the famous example of the person who had the strong impulse at the end of the metta bhavana to buy someone a book, and goes to the book shop, takes the book off the shelves and starts reading it and keeps it to himself. (laughter)

[4]

S: What often happens with money is that someone might be in need of money and ask for help; your immediate response is to give them ten pounds, but if you don't give it on the spot, well after a while you'll start thinking, well maybe they could manage with five. And then you might think if a further period elapses, well maybe they don't need it really all that much, but anyway I'd better give something, so you give two. And this is what happens. It is as though you do perceive the moral beauty of the ethical action when it appears before you or when it is suggested to you quite quickly; you do respond to it, but you do not act upon that response ... and if you don't act, sometimes that has fatal consequences, so you must be quick to do what you see, or what you perceive as being the morally beautiful thing to do. Otherwise it gives an opportunity for all sorts of other forces and factors to arise and to eventually prevent you from carrying out your original intention.

And then, "restrain the mind from evil"; more literally, that would be hinder the mind from evil"; the word is nivarana, which is connected with the nirvarnas, the hindrances; it is "hinder", "restrain", "prevent" the mind from evil. I mean this obviously suggests that to some extent at least, there is a tendency of the mind to go in the direction of evil, there is a definitely unskilful tendency in the mind that needs to be restrained.

Vairocana: Do you think that people have a greater tendency towards good rather than evil or is it a mixed mixture of both?

S: Well there is a mixture we know; we know that people are not wholly evil, not wholly unskilful; on the other hand they certainly are not wholly good or wholly skilful. Exactly what the proportion is of good and evil is very difficult indeed to say, because sometimes underneath the good there is evil, but again underneath the evil there is good. Mixed with the unskilful there is the skilful; mixed with the skilful there is the unskilful. It is very difficult to dismiss people as either good or as bad, so to speak. And your opinion about different people may change from time to time; one time you may think that on the whole he is a good chap,

but another time you may think, well on the whole he is pretty awful.

Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps it goes in waves as well, in terms of societies like a whole society may happen to have more of a tendency towards perhaps being a little more evil, or more unskilful at certain times and being better at other times through history.

Vairocana: Evil tends to be life-denying and good is life-affirming and this came up recently in study at Sukhavati. I remember you [5] saying something in the Survey, that you thought that the Universe was essentially an ethical Universe. It seemed that, overall, life has a greater tendency towards good if you want to call it good, that there is something in everybody that wants to evolve, so that they have an affinity towards something higher. I was wondering whether that impulse was stronger. It seems to be.

S: I think very often what happens is that the mind, in the sense of the reason, though it has many good qualities, gets in the way. I mean your impulse may be towards what is good, or your impulse may be towards, say happiness, a state of emotional positivity, but then you've got all sorts of wrong ideas as to what constitutes happiness, as to what constitutes emotional positivity. You start thinking, for instance, that, well, some external objects can give you it, so you think that you have to go in pursuit of that external object. So even if there is a good impulse, or an impulse towards the good, that can often be obscured or distorted by the wrong ideas that you have about what constitutes the good, or how to go about attaining or realizing the good.

Vairocana: So that is why you cannot really be good without wisdom?

S: Yes I think that ... this is why the Buddhist term, "Kusala", that is to say, skilful, is such a useful term because it makes it clear that some element, at least, of intelligence is required to be, what we usually call, good. I think I have mentioned before, that in Buddhism, there is no such thing as, or no such person as, the holy fool, the character that you get, say, in Medieval Christianity, you know, the half-witted saint. This is an impossibility in the case of Buddhism.

So, "restrain the mind from evil, hinder the mind from evil, prevent the mind from doing whatever is unskilful"; that is the counterpart of being quick to do what is morally beautiful. "He who is sluggish in doing good, his mind delights in evil"; do you think that this is true? Here, the word for good is "punya". "He who is sluggish in doing punya, his mind delights in evil." It is as though the mind needs to be occupied with something and perhaps under certain circumstances the tendency to evil is stronger than the tendency to good, the tendency to the beautiful; the mind will naturally tend to linger over the evil, so if you don't make a strong, determined effort to do what is good, the chances are that your mind will get in to the habit, so to speak, of delighting in evil. There is the well known proverb of, "Satan finds mischief for idle hands to do." It is a bit like that. The best way of keeping out whatever is evil is to have something positive and good and inspiring and beautiful, so to speak, to do. [6] It is like the small boy who hasn't anything to do, no one to play with; he gets a bit bored so what does he do? He starts tormenting the dog. So he who is sluggish in doing good, his mind delights in evil. It is a very simple little phrase, he delights in evil", but in a way it represents a quite terrible thing, "(ramatimino)"; "the mind delights." "(Papa asmin ramatimino)"; the mind, "mano", delights, "ramati", in evil, "papasmin"; the mind delights in evil. So if you think of it, it is really a very terrible thing for a human being to be in such a mental state that he actually

delights in evil, he actually takes pleasure in doing things which are evil, saying things which are evil, thinking thoughts which are evil, that is to say, that which do not conduce to his own development, his own happiness, his own welfare, nor to that of other people.

Chris: What is the delight? Is it sort of experiencing energy... ?

S: Well, what does everybody think? Everybody must have had this experience, presumably of delighting in something which, at least in your better moments you recognize as, lets say, unskilful. Take a very simple example: gossip, especially idle gossip, or malicious gossip; I think everybody at some time or other has taken some delight or pleasure in this, even though, as I have said in their better moments, they know that it is a very unskilful activity to engage in. So why is this? Why do we take delight in evil in this sort of way? What is it that virtually compels us to engage in, not only engage in, but to enjoy engaging in unskilful activities? I mean, I am speaking of activities which are unskilful from the point of view of living ethics, not from the standpoint of dead ethics.

Abhaya: It does suggest that there is a need for energies to be involved in something, and the absence of the better.

S: It does suggest there is a sort of reservoir of energy waiting to be tapped, or maybe the image of the reservoir isn't a very appropriate one; it is more like a sort of underground fountain which is struggling to find an outlet. It will force an outlet somewhere or other if you don't open for it a positive channel, presumably, it will find a negative channel. I mean, for instance this question of gossip, especially idle and malicious gossip, why do people engage in it? Why does anybody engage in it, what is the source of the pleasure?

Vairocana: It is a feeling of security that you get from that. I think that when you have been good spiritually, the tendency is for the energy to go out the way a bit more. And people somehow don't like that tendency, they do not feel secure with that tendency. Maybe they have to do something with their energy...

[7]

S: Well I mentioned a very simple example, idle or malicious gossip. But one could mention other ones of a much more serious nature. Well, I mentioned the small boy tormenting the dog; there are people who take delight in actually inflicting extreme pain and suffering on other living beings, even on a quite grand scale.

Tejananda: Maybe it is in the area of the love mode and the power mode, like just experiencing yourself as superior to whatever you are inflicting pain on.

Vairocana: You want an experience of some kind.

S: Yes, you want to feel something, and perhaps a need to feel something is so great that if you cannot, for one reason or another, feel something which is positive, well, you would rather feel something negative rather than not feel anything at all. Of course you may regard, mistakenly, that negative feeling as something positive.

Vairocana: If you are an emotionally dead type of person, then you have to have certain kinds of things to bring yourself to life. So if you cannot use your energies creatively, then you have

to do something destructive in a way to get that same experience.

S: Well that seems to be the case with a great deal of juvenile vandalism, there is no outlet for one's, well, constructive, if not creative energies, so one indulges it would seem, without making too many excuses, it would seem that one indulges in destruction instead.

Abhaya: So it does seem, from what has been said, that the basic underlying influence is in itself either good or neutral, but it is the need to experience, the need to feel emotionally alive.

S: And the need to express, the need to find an outlet for energies.

Prasannasiddhi: Is the delight that one gets from performing unskilful actions, is that the same as the delight one would get... ?

S: Ah, is it? It would seem to me that it isn't just a question of a sort of neutral feeling of delight that can be attached to skilful actions or unskilful actions; it would seem that the quality of the delight varies according to whether it is experienced in connection with skilful, or in connection with unskilful activities.

Chris: After a good old gossip most people feel awful.

S: Yes, people say that they feel drained, that they feel tired, even exhausted, whereas after, say, a session of meditation or positive communication or reading in the course of which you have experienced delight, you wouldn't be exhausted afterwards; so there does seem [8] to

be a difference in that the delight that you experience in connection with skilful activities would seem to be a nourishing delight. So where does that leave the other feeling of delight? That would seem to be just, one might say, an ego-satisfaction, which is quite different from delight in the more positive sense. I think that we can usually tell the difference, if we have had, at some time or other, the experience of both, you can then differentiate between them. We do come to know that they are really quite different things even though we use the same word for delight, but an ego-based satisfaction is quite different from of a more disinterested kind.

Tejananda: There is an element of conflict there if it is the negative kind. It's something that makes you aware that you are engaging in something unskilful. The pleasure that comes is...

S: Whereas in the case of the delight you take in doing good, it is much more wholehearted because it has the approval of your conscience, so to speak; it is much more genuine. Though again, there are people who do seem to take, in a sense, a genuine, in the sense of a wholehearted satisfaction in doing what is unskilful. They seem to get quite a kick out of it. But it is difficult to believe that they're in the same state of mental delight as someone who is performing a really skilful action. They don't look as though they are in that sort of state.

Chris: Presumably those sort of people are dedicated to a downward path.

S: Yes.

Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps the feeling of delight from the skilful action, perhaps it has a universal, cosmic significance which also kind of adds to the experience

-----: (unintelligible) It also makes it subha.

S: Yes, if you are doing what you know to be morally beautiful, you can feel that you are sort of putting your shoulder to the wheel of evolution or wheel of higher evolution and that you are on the side of life, on the side of progress in the true sense.

Tejananda: Would you say that the third positive nidana has that quality, priti, which also includes just the delight in knowing what you are doing is morally beautiful.

S: Yes. "Pramodya". Delight and satisfaction and that can be intensely energizing. So, "Be quick to do what is morally beautiful, restrain the mind from evil, [9] he who is sluggish in doing good, his mind delights in evil". It is as though the Buddha is saying, allow yourself to be attracted by the good, you are capable of it.

Vairocana: Evil has a tendency to destroy itself. Is that really the case? If a person went to extremes, is it not as though there could be an enlightenment at the end of evil, so to speak, that the enlightenment at the end of a path of evil would be self-destruction? I think that some people may not know that they are doing evil, and if a person knows that they are doing evil, indulging in gossip, then there is a sort of kick-back afterwards; they think, well I have done evil, but supposing a person didn't know that they were doing evil, and indulged in inflicting a lot of pain, there may not be the same kick-back.

S: Well, there may be objective consequences, which will make them aware of what they have done perhaps.

Vairocana: I wonder why the whole situation tends to get worse and worse with some people.

S: Mm, it is as though in the case of some people, there is a downwards spiral, and once anyone gets into that, then they are in a quite difficult position.

Vairocana: Somebody like Hitler or like that.

S: Well, you can find even humbler examples nearer home. People who get into quite negative states, seem to work themselves, I won't say, up into more and more negative states, but work themselves down into more and more negative states, and you might try to help them, but it is like trying to extend your hand to someone who is being sucked under in a whirlpool; you may be dragged down with them if you are not careful. Very often you are not strong enough to pull them up and there is a tremendous strength, in a way, in the negativity of some people and if you are not careful, they can pull you down, they can drag you down. Sometimes, it seems that they don't want to be pulled up. They are much happier dragging you down, than allowing you to pull them up. So one has to be very careful when one is dealing with such people.

Vairocana: It is quite strange, because they must be suffering quite a bit.

S: But they seem to derive at the same time a sort of satisfaction from their suffering. They



are sort of satisfied, not maybe from the suffering itself, but from the point that they are making in a way. I mean sometimes the point is, "look what you have done to me, look how miserable I am, look what a terrible state I am in, I am in such a bad state that [10] no one can help me. You can't." They seem to get a satisfaction from the fact that they are in such a bad state, and perhaps that it is somebody else's fault they get great satisfaction out of being able to blame somebody else. And the reasons for that, no doubt go quite deep in their psychology. So I think that we have to be very careful ourselves never to allow ourselves to get into a state where, with outside assistance, we can only deteriorate.

Vairocana: That is why you need a Sangha all the time.

S: But no doubt one sometimes can have the experience of someone being in a mental state where he doesn't want to be positive, and resists your efforts to help him to be more positive. You don't get much co-operation from such people, sometimes. It is as though they almost enjoy being in that somewhat negative state; it gives them a sort of satisfaction, and sometimes they derive an even greater satisfaction from defeating your efforts to get them into a more positive state, which again isn't very positive. So one has to be quite careful how one sort of handles these sort of people, otherwise you start getting disappointed that they are not responding to your efforts; you might even end up getting angry, that they are not responding to your efforts, which means that in fact, you have switched from the love mode to power mode, presuming you were operating in the love mode to begin with. Anyway, perhaps that is enough about that particular verse.

Tejananda: Could I just... about the morally beautiful aspect, could you say that, in so far as what is moral, so to speak, is a more skilful state of mind, and therefore, a higher level of consciousness, you could say it is more beautiful in the sense that it is more subha, so that is why we are attracted towards it.

S: Though this of course assumes that we are of such a nature as to be so attracted. It doesn't really explain the nature of the attraction. But if we are, as it were, born to develop, presumably we'll be naturally attracted by whatever represents the next stage in our development.

Tejananda: Would you think that that is actually the case?

S: Well one can certainly look at it in those terms. Perhaps one couldn't say anything more than that. But it does occur to me that it is therefore quite important that ethical ideals should be embodied in aesthetically pleasing forms. Maybe that is one of the significances of the figure of David, as depicted by Michelangelo; maybe that is one of the things that Ratnaprabha was getting at yesterday. An ethical ideal of a certain kind is depicted in an aesthetically pleasing form, so that the ideal is [11] I won't say, is made attractive, but the attractiveness of the ideal, the ethical attractiveness is expressed in aesthetically attractive terms. This is perhaps a great feature of the best Buddha images; the ideal of enlightenment is embodied in an aesthetically attractive and inspiring human form.

Vairocana: I think Shakespeare said something about somebody standing up and giving a speech, and he came over very convincing, but something beautiful is always convincing whereas ugly things are not convincing. Something that stuck in my mind is that beauty is convincing. You can be convinced by beauty. I think that it is psychologically correct to say

that very attractive people can get away with a lot more. Maybe that is another matter.

S: Well that is another matter.

Vairocana: But there is an affinity towards beauty.

S: Yes, I think the example that you were thinking of is that of Alcibiades in Greek history where he could always sway the Athenians; they would always follow him; he had only to make a speech, because he was not only the tallest but the most handsome of the Athenians and exercised great influence over them, but unfortunately he didn't always give them good leadership, he seems to have been a rather slippery sort of customer, even though he had been associated in his younger days with Socrates.

Duncan: There are some actions which do appear beautiful and harmonious which presumably can be morally dubious. But in what way would you say that they were, I mean how are you able to ...?

S: Well this raises the whole question of what does one really mean by beauty, what is beauty, what is elegant? You can imagine performing ethical actions which are unskilful, that is to say, which were unbeautiful in a superficially beautiful way. Their style could be, as it were, beautiful, they could act with a sort of elegance, even though they were doing things which were quite unbeautiful, and that might take in someone perhaps whose perception of beauty didn't go very deep, or very far. For instance, I was talking the other day about the late Madame (Chankyecek) who was of course the wife of Generalissimo (Chankyecek); she was a very beautiful elegant lady, one of the famous (Suma) sisters, and apparently at a dinner party in New York, someone asked her, at some big presidential dinner party, how it was that they had no trouble with the opposition; I don't know whether it was at that time in China, or whether it was in Taiwan, but anyway, the question was asked how she knew how her husband dealt with the opposition, how it was that the opposition seemed to give [12] them no trouble, so apparently Madame Chankyecek gave a beautiful smile and she drew her elegant gloved hand across her throat like that; (laughter) well, what she was saying was something very, very unethical, unbeautiful. But she did it as it were with a certain style one might say, superficially, even a very beautiful gesture. But it wasn't truly beautiful, in fact it was, one might say, quite hideous; and the fact that she did it with a certain style, in a way made it worse because for anyone who could really see that, there would be that glaring contrast between the real ugliness of what she was saying, and the superficial elegance with which she said it, and that contrast could be quite shocking.

Duncan: I was thinking particularly of Samurai warriors who kill people in a really very beautiful and elegant way, and even in a sort of mentally unified... and without any negative feelings even..

S: Well, one is told that they do this without any negative feelings; one is perhaps rather doubtful about that...

Perhaps it would be useful to look at the opposite case, in which someone does a really beautiful action, but does it sort of clumsily, in a not very elegant way. It might be that maybe you are in difficulty, maybe you need money, someone just comes and gives you some money, but they have no social graces, they do sort of clumsily, inelegantly, in an awkward

sort of way. But you can see the real generosity there, so you see the real beauty of the action shining through that lack of superficial elegance and in a sense manners or culture or whatever. So in the same way, you should be able to see the real ethical ugliness of an action, I won't say shining, that is hardly the word, but sort of manifesting itself, despite the superficial charm and elegance and one mustn't be misled by the superficial charm and elegance, one mustn't be misled by someone's smart suit or beautiful car, those things shouldn't prevent one from seeing the really ugly character, if the character is ugly, or the fact that someone has a beautiful Oxford accent shouldn't prevent one from detecting the fact that what he is saying is really quite ugly. That sometimes may be quite difficult. I mean, you might not be quite sure whether the action is ethical or unethical, beautiful or unbeautiful. But I think that there is a lot of real ugliness covered up by superficial elegance and charm.

Abhaya: Going back to Tejananda's original point, it does seem to me the need to be stressed here in the West, the beauty of ethics, the fact that it [13] is attractive. I think that we have got this idea that ethics is definitely sort of dull, it seems to me to be a very ingrained view of ethics.

S: Perhaps, we do need more, as it were, of the beautiful embodiments of the ethical ideal, we need more sort of really beautiful bodhisattva like figures. (pause)

One could say quite a lot about these as it were beautiful embodiments of the ethical ideal, especially in so far as they are presented to children, even to young people generally. Because it does seem to be quite important to instil quite early in life the idea of a conviction that "the good is the beautiful", that the ethical life is something attractive and inspiring, not dull and depressing. You might even say to use the current idiom, that "it is fun to be good". Because very often it doesn't sound like fun at all, in fact it sounds just like the opposite.

Prasannasiddhi: One thinks of the Western ethical ideal as being embodied in Christianity, there is the figure of Christ on the Cross.

S: Which are, one could say, quite displeasing sort of images, no wonder it shocked people in the Ancient world.

Vairocana: That is why it is so important to have pleasing centres, rather than sort of drab...

S: Yeah, I remember when I was in Crete, we looked in quite a few antique shops and there were quite a lot of icons for sale, and many of these icons were of saints of the Orthodox church, and it was amazing how grim and forbidding their features were, in almost all cases, I don't think there was a single one of them, which could have been described as attractive or appealing or beautiful. Their faces were usually long and thin and mournful, sharp, angular, frowning, disagreeable, as though they were suffering from a theological indigestion. (laughter) To such an extent that in the end, Kevala, who was with me in Crete at that time, just refused to look at any more of them, they just made him ill, he said. He just wouldn't stop and look in the windows of any of the shops that were displaying those sort of things. They really were quite, well one might even say dreadful. And there was such a uniformity. The corners of their mouths of all these Saints were always turned down. And their lips were always thin, and tightly pressed together. No doubt there is an element of effort, even in a sense of suffering, in the spiritual life which needs to be taken into consideration, but it is, after all, only an element. Most of those saints were people who one wouldn't like to meet on

a dark night anywhere.

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Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps it reflects the idea of the spiritual life as presented by Christianity.

S: There have been saints of another kind, even in Christianity, like St. Francis, who was by all accounts a quite joyful person but joy is certainly not the characteristic note of Christianity, one might say, despite their protestations. So it is quite important, in the case of Buddhism, that whatever embodiments of our spiritual and ethical ideals we do have about are quite beautiful. In other words that they do justice by their form to their actual content, we're not saying that you should prettify the ideal, but we are saying that you should make sure that the genuine beauty of the ideal is able to manifest, is allowed to be manifest. This is where presumably the importance of heroes springs from, in the lives and actions of heroes there is an element of nobility which appeals to people, especially when they are young. An element of heroism, which is clearly of an ethical nature. Very often at least in principle. At least it contains the makings of something ethical.

Vairocana: That image of Shakyamuni when he was fasting, seems to portray that. The Buddha seems to be suffering quite a lot.

S: Yes, it is a Gandhara image.

Vairocana: It doesn't seem to me to be ugly in any way, it is actually quite beautiful.

S: It does convey the impression of the Buddha making a tremendous struggle, and a tremendous effort, but not that he is deliberately inflicting suffering upon himself. The suffering is incidental, the suffering is not an end in itself, this is what one feels in this case. And the Buddha made it clear that the suffering was not an integral part of the spiritual life for everybody. At least he did say in (?) "Some have it really hard all the time, others have it hard at the beginning, but not at the end, and vice versa and others who have an easy time, so to speak, a pleasant time, from the beginning to the end of the spiritual life". Well how fortunate they are.

Vairocana: It all depends on your past karma really.

S: Presumably, one can no doubt console oneself with that reflection if one is not in the fourth category.

Prasannasiddhi: You don't know what may happen in the next life.

S: But this also raises the point that it is not only a question of embodiments of the ethical ideal in wood and marble and metal and all the rest, [15] but in terms of real live people. So in the case of people functioning or officiating at a Centre, you are the leading embodiments of the ethical ideal, and a lot will depend on your smile or your frown. Because, say supposing someone comes along for the first time, the first real live Buddhist, the first Order Member that they see, or even the first humble Mitra, is a happy person, well, at once the message flashes across, well Buddhists are happy people, the Buddhist ideal is a happy beautiful, attractive ideal. Or otherwise, so one has to be extremely careful. Make sure that one does remain in a good positive healthy state, not convey the impression that Buddhists

are tired overworked, disagreeable sort of people; otherwise, how can one expect other people to see the beauty of the ethical ideal that you are supposedly devoted to or dedicated to. Anyway we had better go on.

v.117: "Should a man once do evil, let him not make a habit of it, Let him set not set his heart on it. Painful is the heaping up of evil."

S: It is as though the Buddha is saying anybody can make a mistake once, anyone can commit an unskilful action once but if you do commit an unskilful action, be very careful that you don't do it again and again and again. Be very careful that you don't allow it to become a habit. It would seem to be a sort of rule or law, that whatever you do, the fact that you have done it, even if it is only once, means that you have got a greater tendency to do it, than you had originally. The more often you do something, the more easy it is for you to do it, other factors being equal as we say. So if you do something once, you must be very careful if it is an unskilful thing that you don't do it again, because you are more likely to do it again; in as much as you have done it once already. Therefore the Buddha says "Should a man once do evil, let him not make a habit of it". It is very easy to fall, to slip, into habits whether good or bad, skilful or unskilful. Even with regard to quite simple things.

Supposing, say you have two cups of tea this morning at breakfast, assuming, say, that you never had tea at breakfast before well, the chances are that tomorrow also you'll have two cups, and then in a course of a week, a habit will have been confirmed. One notices, for instance, even with regard to quite simple things, like where people sit: now, you'll notice the chances are if you come here tomorrow, that you will always sit in the same places that you have sat in today. Well it doesn't matter, it is a quite neutral thing, but if it is a question of skilful or unskilful, one [16] has to be very careful the first time that you do anything to make sure that it is a skilful thing to do, because there will be a greater chance of your doing that thing than there was before, and therefore the possibility of a habit being formed. Once you have started doing something it is easy to continue. One finds that for instance with writing, don't bother about the fact that you have got a hundred pages to do, just think in terms of doing one page today, and then another page tomorrow, in that way you will finish the hundred pages automatically. You have only got to start and to keep on, to get into the habit of doing something. One can apply this in all sorts of ways, obviously.. man does seem to be a creature of habit, so since it is very difficult to live without forming habits, make sure that whatever habits that you form, are good ones, are skilful ones, which help you in your development. And that means that when you are doing anything new, when you are forming a new habit or when you are at least tending to form a new habit, by doing something which you have never done before make sure that that particular thing is a skilful thing, because having done it once, there will be a greater likelihood that you will do it again and again.

One sees this in the case, for instance, of relationships; you see someone once, well you want to see them again, then if you see them a third time, well the chances are that you will start seeing them regularly, so think very carefully the first time. Try to ascertain whether the particular action, the habit that you're likely to get into is a skilful one or not.

And you see the sequence: first of all you do a thing once, and you make a habit of it, and then you set your heart upon it. The habit becomes confirmed. The fact that you do that particular thing becomes part of your identity almost, if your heart is set on it. You are determined to do it. You don't want not to do it. And the last sentence reminds one of the

consequences, "Painful is the heaping up of evil". Notice this term, 'heaping up', (hutchayo?) 'piling up'. By doing something unskilful and making a habit of it, and setting one's heart on it, one is heaping up unpleasant consequences for oneself.

Vairocana: One of the worst habits of getting into is not doing anything in a way: just sitting at home, and just sinking into...

S: Well if you get into the habit of not doing anything, you just stagnate.

Vairocana: Yeah, right, if you are quite busy, and you have got an alternation between the two, it is like you can heighten one activity [17] so that you can sort of push the stagnant side out of the way, in a way. But if you're just stagnating, you just have nothing to do. I mean it is like you just do nothing all the time. (Pause)

S: Anyway, let's consider this principle in positive rather than negative terms. And therefore, go on to the next verse, where it is expressed in purely positive terms.

v.118: "Should a man once do good, let him make a habit of it, let him set his heart on it, happy is the heaping up of good."

S: It is very often easier to change ones habits or to set up fresh habits after a break or an interval, after you have been away say for a while, and then come back into your original situation. Come back in some different way, in some different capacity or just determined to do

things differently, to make a fresh start. Do you know the sort of thing I mean?

We all know that there is a sort of resistance to doing something new, to changing one's habits. Once you have done it, it is quite easy, do it two or three times and after that it is very often plain sailing. The most difficult thing is to make the start, to make the change in the first place. I mean you notice something of this sort, when people have been away to Tuscany and they come back with their new names, well at first it may be difficult to remember these new names, and use them maybe up to a few days even, but they get used to it, and the old name, even though you may have been using it for years is forgotten. One notices in one way, it was quite amusing in Tuscany last year, that one day everybody was Mike and John and George, the very next day everyone was some Ananda, some Jaya, or some thing of that sort, and at once all these new names came into use and people seem to get used to them within a matter of hours and of course they have continued ever since. So one can make these quite, as it were, dramatic changes, if one is sufficiently determined and get things moving in a new direction along fresh lines. You can give up old habits, you can switch, you can change. You might have had cornflakes for breakfast every day, since you were a child, but you can change. If you just take Muesli tomorrow, it might be difficult, and the day after, well after a while you will feel that it has always been as though you have always taken Muesli for breakfast every morning all your life. You'll just forget all the years and years and years that you were taking cornflakes, it is as simple as that, really. But it just requires that little bit of determination to make the change. But once you have [18] performed that positive or skilful action just once, well you can perform it a second time, and it is more easy, and third time easier still. Unless, of course, it involves matters where there are very deep seated resistances, which start coming into operation, that is a different matter. But if those are not there, then it

does become more and more easy to do what is skilful. And even resistances can of course be overcome. You have a greater depth than where they come from.

I think people can change much more than they think they can. Much more quickly, much more easily.

Chris: I notice with myself that with certain habits, I might be working very hard, to break a certain habit, all your attention is sort of on one area, but before you know it you have dropped all sorts of other little habits that you weren't concerned with, they have just fallen away.

S: Yes, because things are connected; there are little groups of habits you have just picked up the leading one, perhaps, which a lot of others go along with it, or, don't go along with it once you have discarded it. So the formation of habits is a very important thing. I think you really cannot live without habits. Otherwise you are constantly having to make decisions about all sorts of petty matters. You want to have settled those things once and for all, so you are able to do them with out thinking about them and devote your thought to more important matters. So this does mean that it is important to set up positive habits, with regard to the time that you get up, when you do your meditation, for how long, what your breakfast ... you don't want to have to endure agonies of indecision every breakfast time as between cornflakes and muesli, well make up your mind once and for all, even if you make your mind that it doesn't really matter, you'll just reach out for whatever happens to be nearest, well, that also happens to be a habit. "Just taking what is nearest". Making do with that, not bothering too much what particular kind of cereal there is that your having for breakfast.

Prasannasiddhi: Was not habit once mentioned as one of the three fetters?

S: That is true. (laughter) But that was habit as an end in itself. I mean, one must constantly review one's habits. I mean, it is not sufficient reason for doing something that you have done every day for the last forty days, or even ten years, you must constantly review your habits and ask yourself, "well are they helping me, are they functioning in a skilful way, are they skilful habits?" But there is a tendency for us to get into, keeping up habits just for the sake of keeping up habits.

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Because we derive a certain amount of comfort and security from them. But that is not what we should be gaining from our habits, that sort of feeling. But there is that sort of tendency, there is that danger, so therefore we need to keep our habits constantly under review, and sometimes, even change our habits, in a sense, just for the sake of changing them. That is to say, so we don't become attached to certain things just for their own sakes. I mean habits, skilful habits, are meant to help us to change, not to be hindrances to change. And we shouldn't hesitate to give up habits, if the larger interests of our personal development require it. It is, for instance, quite good to get into a certain set of habits, say, if your living in England at one's own centre, in one's own community, getting up at a certain time, meditating in a certain place, but supposing you go off to Tuscany where that is all that is broken up, but that is not a bad thing, because you are breaking up a particular set of habits here in England for the sake of hopefully a break-through there in Tuscany, and the formation perhaps of an even more useful set of habits on an even higher level with which you can then come back. So, from time to time we need to review our habits otherwise they do become, or can become

hindrances. We should use our habits or make use of the principle involved in the formation of habits; not let it use us, so to speak.

But a time may come, maybe not for a long while, when we do have to be ready to drop anything, any cherished habit, even maybe any useful habit at the drop of a hat, and do something completely new and something completely unexpected. And it is quite good, if later on we are sometimes in such situations, not too soon, not too prematurely, otherwise we will only be unsettled, in a quite negative sort of way. But later on, we may have to be prepared for a complete abandonment of long cherished habits. We need enough sort of routine even, first to be

able to sort of grow and develop but not so much that we actually start settling down in a worldly, pseudo-spiritual sort of way. Our spiritual community shouldn't start to become our home, to which you are attached in much the same way that we are attached to our home, so that we resent even being outside our spiritual community because it is so comfy and so cosy and so convenient now. But it may take quite a few years to get into that sort of state of mind, so for the time being one is concerned, yes, with settling down in one's spiritual community in a positive way and developing skilful habits and forming skilful friendships which become stronger and stronger.

I think at present in the FWBO that the need is rather for an emphasis on the formation of skilful habits and [20] in a sense settling down, and developing friendships on a long term basis and pledging oneself, I won't say committing oneself, but pledging oneself to a particular centre, and a particular community for a period perhaps of several years, because there has been so much moving around, on the part of at least quite a number of people. They have not been able to put down any roots anywhere. So I think there needs to be that sort of emphasis for a while in the case of quite a number of people. It is true that a rolling stone doesn't gather any moss, but the trouble is that a rolling stone if he isn't careful doesn't gather anything at all. And far from polishing himself by rolling around, he only chips a few more bits off. But anyway one can see the value of forming positive skilful habits, at least provisionally.

Roy: Sometimes people can have very good habits, they are very much self-orientated, but there are those habits at times they get other people in the way of these good habits for them, so I think that it would be point to review these positive habits for them...

S: Because certain habits may make it very easy, very convenient for you to lead your life, but those habits if you follow them very strictly may make interaction with other people in outside situations virtually impossible. Because sometimes you won't drop the habits that you have formed for anything or for anyone, even in fact a situation of emergency. And that means the habits have become as it were ends in themselves. Well, you may have developed the perfectly good habit of meditating every morning at seven o'clock, that is an excellent habit and one to be encouraged but, supposing, just as you're going to enter the shrine at seven o'clock someone sort of staggers up who has injured himself seriously and is bleeding and needs immediate attention, but you say "No, I must stick to my habit, I have got to go and meditate" and you just go straight into the shrine room and leave him on the doorstep, well there you are making your habit, admittedly your skilful habit an end in itself, rather than allowing it to be overridden by more serious considerations. But sometimes one does find people doing this sort of thing. Because sometimes it isn't always easy to judge, one has to



bear that in mind, whether something is of sufficient importance for you to break your skilful habit for the sake of that thing. Sometimes it isn't easy to see which is the more important. But there are sort of cases where it is glaringly obvious as in the one that I mentioned. You must not be too open to disturbance then, otherwise you end up not developing any habits at all. And a life without habits is a very difficult life indeed. A life where there are no sort of regularities can only be a chaotic life.[21] I think that only a quite spiritually advanced person could stand a life of that kind. Anyway talking of regularities, I'm afraid our morning tea is a little overdue. (Pause)

So have we said enough about this question of habit, have we disposed of habit? Is there any further point that needs to be made? I think that the main point is that we can hardly help forming habits, habits do make life a lot easier, but we have to be quite sure that we are forming positive habits, skilful habits, and also we need to be constantly reviewing them so that we can be quite sure that they are helping us, rather than hindering us in our individual development. A habit should never become an end in itself.

Tejananda: Would it be valid... I have said this several times in introductory talks that I have given that you can almost look at the spiritual life in terms of changing bad habits for good habits, rather than totally overcoming habit. Is that a valid way of expressing it?

S: Oh yes, I think that one might say that one assumes that ones habits are at the best mixed, a mixture of skilful and unskilful habits, so, the next step is to create habits which are only skilful. But then, one might say, that there is a further stage a long way on, where one gets rid of even skilful habits, where one is able to act completely spontaneously, according to the needs of the moment. But that isn't an easy thing to do, perhaps not something that one should aim to do immediately. But perhaps one shouldn't certainly speak to the beginner or perhaps not to anyone for a long time, in terms of completely getting rid of habits. I mean, that is, in a sense, eventually what one has to do, in the sense that whatever you do springs immediately out of the needs of the moment and your awareness of those needs, rather than being based on any precedent. So, what most people need to do now is develop, form habits which are entirely skilful, and then keep them constantly under review, to make sure that they are contributing to their individual development. I mean, for instance, you might have developed a habit of getting up at a certain hour every morning, say six o'clock, that is good, but you should keep that under review, because in the meantime you might have had to stay up very late every night, maybe you don't get to bed before twelve, one, for certain valid reasons, well you then have to review your habit of getting up at six every morning, because that may no longer be the best thing for you to do, even though it was originally the case. So all right, you review it, and reform habit, maybe you get up at six [22] thirty or even seven, in view of the later hour at which you are now going to bed, that is only sensible, rather than sort of sticking to your habit of getting up at six in the morning regardless. So, a good habit is never an absolute, its goodness is relative to circumstances and to your present stage of development. But there is certainly an advantage in forming what I might call provisional good habits because it means that there a lot of matters about which you don't have to think too much, they look after themselves because you have already taken a decision with regard to them. Also the system I think likes rhythm. Think what it would be like if you always went to bed at a different hour, and got up at a different hour. I think that your system wouldn't like it, it would have a jarring effect. So the system likes rhythm. It likes the recurrence of certain things at regular intervals, like food and sleep and so on. So one can take advantage of that fact and that means developing positive habits and basing your whole spiritual life upon a

positive habitual programme, so to speak, without allowing it to become rigid or to become an end in itself. You should be quite prepared to interrupt your programme for valid reasons, but they must be really valid reasons; and not otherwise. All right, lets go on to the next verse:

v.119: "As long as he bears no fruit, so long the evil doer sees the evil he has done as good. When it bears fruit in the form of suffering, he recognizes it as evil."

S: So, here indirectly a very important principle is enunciated, that actions do have consequences. It is as simple as that. You must have heard the little story about Dhardo Rimpoche; one of our friends went up there not so long ago, and they asked Dhardo Rimpoche, perhaps a little naively, whether he thought that all the children being educated at his school would leave it with a good sound understanding of Buddhism. So Dhardo Rimpoche said that he would be quite satisfied if they all left it with an understanding of the fact that actions had consequences. (laughter) So this sums it up. What does it mean if you are aware, if you understand that actions have consequences? Well it means that you can act in a responsible manner and you cannot really be an individual, cannot be truly mature, unless you can act in that sort of responsible manner, realizing that is to say that actions do have consequences for yourself and other people and therefore you should be careful of what you do for your own sake and for the sake of other people. Should engage in skilful rather than unskilful activities because actions do have consequences. And it really is as though [23] very often people don't realize that. For instance, people driving recklessly, taking risks, overtaking vehicles in a very foolhardy sort of way, they don't seem to realize that actions do have consequences. This is rather an extreme example, but it holds good all a long the line. It suggests the ability to look ahead, to exercise foresight, to think about the future, not to be simply completely overwhelmed by the present.

Vairocana: People seem to know that actions have consequences, but it is not an experience to them in some sort of way.

S: Well it is the difference between a merely theoretical understanding and actual insight. You think perhaps by good luck or by chance you'll just escape whatever consequences there might have been. So in the case of most people, or at least many people, you only realize that actions have consequences when you suffer...

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S: ...bears no fruit, so long the evil doer sees the evil he has done as good. When it bears fruit in the form of suffering he recognizes it as evil".

Prasannasiddhi: I have just been studying one of your tapes from the Sutra of Golden Light. In that you brought up this subject of actions having consequences, and you were saying that in society it seems that there is so much going on that things become so confusing that it is like one whole map, a sort of whirlpool of things and you lose touch with this fact.

S: Yes you don't know what is the result of what. In order to understand that, sometimes you have to simplify the situation as you do when you go on solitary retreat because you may not know whether certain mental states of yours are the result of circumstances, external conditions, or of factors that are within you. So you go away, you remove yourself from your

original circumstances, you go on solitary retreat, and then you find out whether it is coming from without, whether it is coming from within. But yes, very often the situation is so complex, you don't really know, you are unable to see what is producing what, What you're responsible for and what other people are responsible for.

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Chris: Does this mean that the evil-doer will only learn when he suffers?

S: I think that there are some people who do only learn when they suffer, who don't learn otherwise, unfortunately, who, if they don't suffer, don't learn. I mean the next verse envisages the opposite state of affairs; the next verse says, as long as it bears no fruit, so long as the good man sees the good that he has done as evil, when it bears fruit in the form of happiness, then he recognizes it as good. I mean, even in the case of a well-meaning person, you may not be quite sure that you are doing the right thing; it is only when it works out in the right way, and you experience positive results, then you can be sure that you have in fact done the right thing. So it is as though our hold on this law of cause and effect, our hold on this principle that actions do have consequences isn't really always very strong, even in the case of those whose actions are in fact quite skilful. They are not sure. They are at least not sure what sort of result is going to come about. I mean, sometimes it is like that even with meditation; you may not be sure for a while whether the meditation is doing you any good or not, because you don't get or you don't seem to get much in the way of consequences in terms of experiences or changes in your level of consciousness. So in a way you sort of peg away at it, more or less in a sort of blind faith. But after a while you do start perceiving, or other people start perceiving, that certain positive changes are taking place, so then you start feeling, yes, meditation does work. Actions, in this case, the action of meditating, does have consequences.

Abhaya: You think this is just through lack of awareness, or lack of developing a faculty which is "learning"?

S: I think that much of it is bound up with the difficulty we have of extrapolating ourselves, so to speak, into the future, and this is bound up with the weakness of our reflexive or self-consciousness. I mean, you are familiar with this distinction that I have made, which is a common one, a general one, between simple consciousness and reflexive consciousness, as it is sometimes called, or self-consciousness. Do you understand the point of the distinction of difference between the two? Is this clear to everybody? What is the difference, can anyone say?

Vairocana: The fact that you are aware of yourself doing something, you are aware of yourself.

S: Yes; now can you be aware of yourself in the future, experiencing the consequences of actions that you have done in the past, without [25] reflexive consciousness? You cannot. So if there is, in you a preponderance of simple consciousness over reflexive consciousness, you will find it quite easy to, as it were, live in the present, but you will find it very difficult to, as it were, imagine yourself as living in the future, and as experiencing then the consequences of what you are doing now, because your reflexive consciousness is weak, because you are not really much of an individual, not fully an individual. So this awareness of the fact that actions have consequences is very much bound up with the question of reflexive consciousness and the strength or degree of your reflexive consciousness. Therefore only an individual can be

ethical, an individual by definition being among other things, one in whom there is reflexive consciousness as distinct from simple consciousness.

Abhaya: But don't you think the mechanism is that often we might do something which is unskilful; it is not that we haven't got the ability to project ourselves into the future, see what the consequences are, but we deliberately don't want to, because of the desire and the drive to satisfy whatever it is...

S: Well, I suppose it basically amounts to the same thing. If there was any genuine apprehension of the fact that actions did have consequences, with our reflexive consciousness sufficiently developed, we could not in fact refuse to see that fact, but we are able to close our eyes to it just because it is so weakly developed and it is virtually no more than a theoretical consideration. We lack imagination very often.

\_\_\_ : I am reminded of the Karuna bhavana, where, in the first stage, you consider that you see a person who is suffering and then you see a person who is acting unskilfully and you consider that that person is going to suffer as a result of those actions and that is quite an important part of the tone of meditation.

S: Yes, because you can be quite sorry for the person who is performing certain actions, even though he seems to be having a good time performing them, because you can see where that is going to lead in the long run.

\_\_\_ : And similarly with the Mudita bhavana, you consider that the people are happy as a result of good actions, skilful actions and again that seems to be a very important basis for that emotion.

S: Yes, because you can see that people are on the right path and you can rejoice in that.

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Abhaya: I'm still not quite sure about that, it seems to me that it is more like the drive for maybe satisfying an instinct is stronger than the desire to develop that imaginative faculty. It is not that the imaginative faculty - I mean that is why the imaginative faculty is weak, simply because we don't want to do that, we don't want to develop it.

S: Mm, yes, well this in a way applies to the spiritual life, generally; there is a sort of force almost which is holding us or even pulling us back all the time. As the first verse makes clear, "restrain the mind from evil", he who is sluggish in doing good, his mind delights in evil"; it is almost that that is the "natural" tendency. It doesn't mean that man is sort of evil in a sort of theological sense or metaphysical sense, but we have to reckon with the fact that the tendency to act unskilfully is very, very strong and very, very powerful, for one reason or another, maybe, sometimes we just deliberately close our eyes to possible consequences. But that also means in a sense that we don't really see them clearly enough to begin with, otherwise we just couldn't close our eyes to them. If our sight amounted to insight, well, it would be impossible. So in that case, there would be certain things we just could not do, however strongly we were tempted, however strongly we were attracted; we saw, we would see their consequences so clearly that we just could not do those things, however much in a sense, we wanted to. And of course a further stage would be where you saw the undesirability of doing them so strongly that you could not even desire to do them.

Antonio: It is as though our attraction to do something blinds us from actually seeing the consequences of it.

S: Well that is also why it is very important to be able to see the ethical ideal in positive terms, so that there is something that attracts you strongly or at least begins to attract you strongly. It is not just a question of restraining yourself from the unskilful, but allowing yourself to be drawn towards the skilful, seeing that as really very attractive and appealing and desirable. You notice these two phrases that we didn't go into very much in the previous verses, "painful is the heaping up of evil, and happy is the heaping up of good"; especially the latter, "happy is the heaping up of good". When you reap the pleasurable, the positive consequences of the skilful actions that you have done. Well that can be a very, as it were, exhilarating experience. But until that has happened, you can really be doubtful whether you are on the right path at all, even in such cases as meditation, or study, or the spiritual life generally, because [27] sometimes it seems dull and dry and nothing much is happening, and you start wondering whether you haven't been a fool, if you hadn't got involved with the spiritual life, well, you could have had your own house by this time, and a car, and all the rest of it instead of that you have spent the last two or three years slogging away in a Co-op and you might wonder, well, whether it was really worth it, whether you have really gained, whether you have really benefited from it at all. There might be a sort of intermediate period where you have very serious doubts about everything in that sort of way, because you haven't really come upon this great heap of good that you have been piling up all this time, it hasn't yet come into view.

Chris: It seems that happiness is not a very good guide of whether you have been heaping up...

S: No, not in the short term anyway. What short term is, is very difficult to say. It might last well for quite a long time, maybe a decade.

Chris: The spiritual life is sometimes called the happy life, so there might be an interim period...

S: Well, yes; the spiritual life is a happy life but I think that you have got to get really into the spiritual life; it has really got to be the spiritual life, not just the struggle to get into the spiritual life. Yes, the spiritual life is a happy life, but that is not to say that the struggle to get into the spiritual life is necessarily a happy life; that is rather a different matter. It is a question of defining exactly what one means by the spiritual life. I mean, for instance, in the Dhammapada, the Buddha's disciples are represented as saying "Happily indeed we live, we who call nothing our own"; well, do we call nothing our own? (laughter) Well if we do call this our own and that our own, well, how can we expect to be happy in that sort of way? The spiritual life is indeed a happy life but the question is "are you leading the spiritual life?" You may be trying to lead it but that is a little different.

Chris: To come back to my question, perhaps you could say that that was a guide of leading, or that was an indication that you were leading a spiritual life?

S: Yes, I think that it would be very difficult to imagine within a Buddhist context someone genuinely leading a spiritual life and being miserable. They might be having to face difficulties, and even undergo suffering, but they wouldn't be miserable, they would be

basically happy and content.

[28]

Antonio: At this point would we have to recognize or reflect on the consequences of things? It seems to me that mindfulness in a way, has got an element of foresight.

S: Yes. There is one formal aspect of mindfulness or awareness which is called "awareness or mindfulness of purpose", that is to say awareness of the reason why you are doing something, and this is an integral part of awareness or mindfulness in general; it is not enough to be aware of what you are doing, but you must also be aware of why you are doing it. I think that we went into this in Tuscany when we studied the Satipattana Sutta. I mean for instance, you are walking along the road; all right, it is good to be aware of yourself as walking, but also you must be aware of why you are walking, where you are walking, where you are walking to, for what purpose, because you could be quite aware or mindful of the process of walking, but you could be walking somewhere to do something quite unskilful. So it isn't enough that you are aware of what you are doing, you must be aware also, of course, why you are doing it and be aware that the purpose, the end of the activity is in fact itself a skilful one. I mean, for instance, you can overeat, you can overeat mindfully in a limited sense, in the sense that you are aware of every mouthful. But if you have awareness of purpose, and awareness of why you are eating, which is to maintain health and strength so that you can lead the spiritual life, then that awareness of purpose would hinder you from overeating.

Prasannasiddhi: I suppose that this is something that you have to keep under constant review as well, why you are actually doing certain things.

S: It is not enough simply to be aware of what you are doing and leave it at that, you must ask yourself "well, why am I doing it?" And the reasons for doing it may change, so therefore you have to keep that activity under review. Anyway, let's go on to 121.

"Do not underestimate evil, thinking that it will not approach me. A water pot becomes full through the constant falling of drops of water; similarly the spiritually immature person, little by little, fills himself with evil"

S: So "Do not underestimate evil"; do not underestimate the power of evil, do not underestimate your tendency to form habits, so don't think that, well, it is just for this once, what does it matter even if it is unskilful, it is just this once", don't think in that sort of way. You know the sort of thing that I mean; do not underestimate [29] evil thinking it will not approach me, that is to say, there no will be no unfortunate consequences. A water pot becomes full by the constant falling of drops of water, similarly the spiritually immature person, little by little, fills himself with evil. And it is very tempting to make an exception, just this time. But if you do something unskilful once, the chances are that you will do it again, and again. In that way you will, in the words of the Dhammapada, fill yourself with evil; you will become as it were evil, because you are doing unskilful action, you are performing unskilful actions all the time. So you will just be a mass of unskilfulness. So don't think that you can afford to allow exceptions. You shouldn't think, "Oh well, if I just go out and get a bit drunk just one night, it won't make all that much difference"; no, because you might, well, do it next week and the next. It might become a habit.

Antonio: It seems just calling it an exception, and saying, "It is just this time", is the excuse

for doing it, even though you know that you know that it is going to be repeated later on.

S: You ignore the fact that you may well repeat it, you close your eyes to that, because, as I said before, your reflexive consciousness perhaps is weak, or you allow yourself to forget that fact that you are likely to do it again and develop a habit. You say, "well, just this once", and you may, in a sense, believe that it is only going to be this once. But at the same time, in your heart of hearts, you may know very well that actually you are setting up a habit, perhaps you even intend to. But you disguise that fact, even from yourself. You disguise even from yourself, the fact that you will be going to do that thing again and again in the future. But you say, you bluff yourself as well as other people - usually it is more easy to bluff yourself than other people - you say, "well, just this once, it won't matter, it won't make any difference; evil will not approach me, there won't be any unpleasant consequences"; that is not to say, again, that one doesn't want to go to extremes, that a strong minded person might not be able to that. You would have to be a very strong-minded person, you would need to be very clear and very sure what you were actually doing. But don't underestimate evil. Don't underestimate the power of habit. And don't think that you are the exception that rules are all right for other people but in your case, it doesn't matter. There is that tendency, sometimes too. So we underestimate evil, and we also underestimate good, as the next verse makes very clear.

[30]

Do not underestimate good, thinking it will not approach me. The water pot becomes full by the constant falling of drops of water; similarly, the wise man, little by little, fills himself with good.

I mean, this is really quite encouraging, because we are sometimes discouraged by the fact that our admittedly feeble efforts to pursue the spiritual life don't seem to be bearing much in the way of fruit; there doesn't seem to be much in the way of results. But it is a very slow and gradual process, usually; there aren't any dramatic breakthroughs or overwhelming revelations and you aren't sort of snatched up into the seventh heaven or even the third; you remain with your feet planted firmly on the earth, or may be not so firmly planted on the earth or even sunk in the mud. And you know, you need to constantly remind yourself that it is a slow and gradual process a process of constantly-repeated increments of the good. But good is accumulated; if you just go on constantly performing skilful actions in one way or another on however humble a scale, you will change yourself, you will in the end transform yourself. And maybe people you haven't seen for years will notice the difference, maybe a difference that you don't notice. You don't think that you have changed. You don't feel that you have changed. Or perhaps you may, but other people will certainly notice it, it may be quite evident to them, quite striking to them.

Prasannasiddhi: I suppose this is one of the benefits of sort of kalyana mitrata, in the sense of friendship with someone who has been practising skilful deeds for a long time, and so you can actually see that he is in a happier state, the way that he is receiving the benefits of his good actions.

S: Yes, especially if he tells you that, well, five years ago, he was really neurotic and miserable and he nearly committed suicide; when you hear all these things and then you think, "that person, he really must have changed because look at the state he is in now, so the spiritual life must work, because it certainly has changed that person". Sometimes one can see this. Those people who have been around in the FWBO, say, for ten years, they can see

definite changes in quite a number of people, so they can see that the methods like meditation, and communication and institutions, to use that term, like spiritual communities, even men's spiritual communities, they do work, they do have an effect, at least for large numbers of people. You can see changes taking place. I can look back, to just give you a simple example, on people who, say not so many years ago, were so nervous that they couldn't stand up in [31] public and speak even a few words and are now giving beautiful lectures on the Dharma. So there has been such a change, such an increase in this case of not only knowledge of the Dharma, but self-confidence. Now they have got self-confidence, which they didn't have before. So one has seen a change in these sort of relatively simple ways. People who were very scattered, one sees as becoming more concentrated; people who were emotionally negative, one sees as becoming emotionally positive. One sees this, certainly over a period of five, six, up to ten years; one can see it very clearly, one may not see much of a change in the course of a year, though sometimes one does, even in the course of a year; but even in the case of a lot of people, one certainly sees it over a period of four or five years. I think, in the course of a period of seven years, the changes can be quite dramatic, when you compare the person as they were before and the person that they are now, after seven years; big changes can take place, even though the individual steps might have been very small, almost unnoticeable, minute.

Vairocana: You made a comment earlier, that people can change a lot quicker than they think. Something like going to Tuscany...

S: I think that this is true too... It is really astonishing, it is really quite staggering; I don't want to build up anybody's expectations unduly, whether for themselves or for other people, but when one thinks it was only three months, three miserable months, that went so quickly but at the same time such great changes seem to take place, people were noticeably different almost without exception, even those who didn't get ordained were different, not to speak of those who did get ordained at the end of the three months. And sometimes one saw - one sometimes pinched oneself to see whether one was still awake - one saw the change taking place from one day to another, especially the day before people were ordained and the day after. I mean, if one hadn't seen it, one might hardly have believed that a change could take place in that sort of way, not that the work was just done all within those twenty four hours; no, there had been a buildup. But it was as though the change became really manifest, and especially when people had new names - that seemed to underline the fact that they really were new people to a great extent, at least one experienced them very differently than they were before. I think when they got back to their original centres and communities, other people could see the change in many cases, if not in all, perhaps. So one can change, and sometimes one can change more quickly than one would have believed was possible. A lot, of course, does depend on circumstances and conditions. A positive [32] environment really does help; that is quite important, even if you come away for a week-end like this, it might not seem much, a Friday evening, a Saturday, and not even the whole of Sunday, and the prospect of work, perhaps, on Monday morning, but nonetheless, a lot can happen. I used to quote, ...a couplet which was quoted by Dr Johnson; I think it was from a gravestone, a tombstone, a couplet attributed to someone who had been killed as a result of a fall from his horse, he had died instantly; the couplet was supposed to have been spoken by the dead man, "Between the stirrup and the ground, I mercy sought, I mercy found". Just at that instant of falling, when he had actually been killed, his whole mental attitude had changed from being an irreligious to a religious man; that was the meaning; he had been, as it were, converted in that instant, in the face of death. So that sort of thing is possible, ignoring the Christian



context and language, but taking the principle, you can change instantly, even quite dramatically, though that is rather exceptional and requires exceptional, one might even say, existential circumstances and conditions to make it possible, to force you to it, to compel you to it.

Abhaya: But when even that happens there has been, say, this accumulation of falling drops of water over a long period of time and suddenly, the dramatic eruption of a new person.

S: Very likely, yes... but it could be in the case of people who have been going to Tuscany, that they have been putting in a lot of effort for along time, but circumstances were against them. But when they are in Tuscany, circumstances are helping rather than hindering so they don't only reap the benefits of their actual studies and meditation there, they reap the benefit of all the things that they were doing before as well, but which, so far have not shown much in the way of fruit. They don't start completely "de nova".

Prasannasiddhi: It also points that you don't experience the results of your old actions immediately.

S: You don't, I used to talk a lot about this in connection with meditation, and I used to say that after a meditation, you need to be quiet for a while, because sometimes, the results do not come immediately; they might come after half an hour, because you might have been struggling to be concentrated, and so on, and the period of meditation might not have been long enough to enable you to be concentrated; that is, say, even after you have come out of the shrine room, the momentum set up by that effort continues, and if you are just quiet, and not doing too much [33] for half an hour or so after the meditation, you may start experiencing that. So therefore it is important that you shouldn't sort of jump into things, if you can possibly help it, immediately after meditation. Well that is one reason for not doing that sort of thing. There can be this after-effect once the obstruction that you were grappling with has sort of died away. So I am quite sure when you go away into a situation like that of Tuscany, or solitary retreat, or you go to Vajraloka, you do start experiencing the results of things that you have set in motion earlier on, but which you were prevented from experiencing the consequences of, just due to unfavourable conditions, because you have put energy, you have put effort in and that will eventually bear fruit. If not now, then later on.

So therefore the Buddha says, "Do not underestimate good, thinking it will not approach me; the water pot becomes full by the constant falling of drops of water; similarly, the wise man or spiritually mature person, little by little, fills himself with good"; so here again, sometimes one gets discouraged, doesn't one, thinking, "well, what is the use, half an hour of meditation every morning and maybe half an hour in the evening, and just a bit of study now and then, and a bit of human communication, it is not much, what good is it?"; but the fact is that you are doing it every day, every day of every week, every week of every year, and it is having an effect. You are actually filling yourself with good, little by little, sooner or later, especially as the situation becomes more favourable, circumstances become more favourable; that will manifest, or that will be manifest. Of course it is encouraging if we get quick results. I think nothing is perhaps so encouraging as that, say in connection with meditation, a really good experience. But it is, again, surprising that people can very quickly forget the experiences that they have had. That is one of the reasons why some spiritual teachers recommend the keeping of a spiritual diary, because you can sometimes browse through that spiritual diary, especially during a dry period, and remind yourself of the positive experiences that you have had, and

which you have forgotten. If the present moment is so important, if you are miserable in the present moment, you can lose contact with the fact that you ever have been happy. You might even make such statements as, "Oh, I am always miserable, the whole of life is miserable, I have never enjoyed any happiness, forgetting quite blissful periods that you have enjoyed in the past, because you are so much immersed in the misery of the present. You need some sort of reminder, perhaps, and maybe your spiritual diary will be a reminder of that sort.

[34]

Prasannasiddhi: What about a reminder of when you are in a blissful state, that you have actually been in a bad state in the past, so that you have to keep up the effort?

S: You have to keep up your efforts, yes. Of course, sometimes you can become so positive that you don't need to remind yourself that you were unhappy in the past, but that might be a long way off. I remember, in the case of one of our friends, he had been in a very painful and unpleasant mental state for several years, and he kept up his meditation and other practices very, very regularly, very scrupulously, because for several years he couldn't forget the sort of state that he had been in and he didn't want to slip back into it, whatever happened. So .. not that he had to remind himself of the state that he had been in, he couldn't forget it, not for quite a while, and the fact that he couldn't forget it meant that he made sure that he kept up his regular meditation and everything else that he was doing, because he was so concerned not to slip back; he just couldn't bear the thought of slipping back, even a little way into his previous state, because it had been so painful and so unpleasant. So that is a sort of good, a constant reminder.

There is also another aspect of this whole matter which is that we don't always appreciate the progress made by other people, not to say, not appreciating the progress that we are making ourselves. We have to be very careful not only not to see ourselves as we were, rather than we

are, but careful to see other people as they are, and not as they were. We have to be careful to keep our eyes open to the possibility that they have in fact changed, and be willing to see that, ready to acknowledge that, and treat them differently because they are now different.

Antonio: It seems that if you have high expectations of people, it helps them to change in a way as well.

S: Yes; if you are always expecting that people will do foolish things, well, the chances are that they will do foolish things, but if you are constantly expecting that, or if you manage to convey to them that you are really expecting something good from them, well, the chances are that they will rise to the occasion, so to speak. Your feeling must of course be a genuine one, it mustn't be just be a sort of ploy. You mustn't say, "Oh I am sure you would never do such and such a thing", it mustn't be a species of emotional blackmail. You must have a genuine confidence in that person, genuine confidence in their potentiality. And that can be very encouraging and inspiring and spiring. Again [35] it is a question of emphasizing the positive, rather than the negative. But this whole question of not underestimating the good, is very important, in not underestimating one's own efforts, not underestimating the facilities at one's disposal; sometimes I think that within the FWBO people don't often appreciate the facilities that they have got, and this is quite unfortunate, because unless they appreciate them, they won't make full use of them. I mean, I am using the word, "facilities" in the widest sense, for instance, that one has got a healthy human body, that one is young; these are

extraordinary advantages, and one has come into contact with the Dharma, one has got leisure, one is free from any painful disease, one is free from illness, one has strength, one has spiritual friends, one has facilities for study, facilities for practising meditation, one has all these things, what more could one possibly want? So, sometimes we forget how valuable these things are, how rare, in fact, these facilities are in the world, that they are not available everywhere throughout all periods.

So one mustn't underestimate good in the sense of underestimating the facilities for the practice of the good and the development of the good, which are in fact at one's disposal. Think, for instance, how easy it is to get hold of books, how easy it is to get hold of the scriptures in one's own language, translated. A few hundred years ago literacy wasn't very general, there was no such thing as printing, books were very rare, books had to be written by hand and the chances of you getting hold of one and being able to read it must have been very remote indeed, at some periods of history, in some places; the fact that one has got leisure, nowadays, some people seem to think of leisure almost as a sort of curse, that you cannot work, that you cannot go to work, that you haven't got a job in a factory or office, they seem to think of this as a misfortune; that seems really strange. They have got leisure, which they could use creatively; most people don't seem to have woken up, that is, the unemployed or the potentially-unemployed, don't seem to have woken up to that fact yet. They have got a wonderful opportunity; here they are, actually being supported by the State; the State is paying them in a way that people in many parts of the world would regard as lavish, and paying them for what? Well, not even to look for a job, because they don't even seriously expect them to do that, because they know that there are no jobs, so what is the point of looking? So here you are, you are being paid to do what? Anything that you please.

END OF SIDE A ...

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...S: Anything, but people don't seem to see this as an opportunity in this sort of way. It is really extraordinary. I mean, you could say this is the greatest achievement of our civilization, that we have got three million people being supported, and able to do what ever they want to do.

Abhaya: But the trouble is, of course that we have been so strongly conditioned into the work ethic.

S: Yes, they feel somehow, vaguely guilty, or so I am told, I haven't actually met any of these people but I am told this, (laughter) that they feel vaguely guilty, that they really want to work, this is what one is told. I am taking this as so.

Abhaya: But it is beginning to change now because they are making unemployment more socially acceptable than it used to be, because they have to, because there are no jobs.

Prasannasiddhi: Maybe we... I think that it has been brought up before that we should go round some of the Unemployment agencies and kind of put up posters or something.

S: Have you tried this in Norwich?

Abhaya: I have been thinking about it recently, actually; there is an area that we could do a lot

of good work in, stimulating the unemployed in a very positive way.

S: Yes indeed, keeping them unemployed, if possible, (laughter) or rather, getting them employed in a better sense, because I mentioned the other day, that I think ... my thinking arose out of a comment I heard on the radio in passing that a certain bishop, of all people, had actually said that we would have to look at leisure more positively and encourage ourselves to think in terms of there never again being full employment; and then it did occur to me that, maybe, full employment was a sort of freak in terms of economies; it wasn't something that you could expect all the time, I don't know much about economics, in fact, I probably don't know anything at all, but it does occur to me that under modern conditions - I know of the complexities of modern economic development - it could be that full employment is actually an impossibility, that maybe full employment is only possible when you have got an enormous market which you are actually exploiting, so if there is no market for you to exploit, in the way that there were markets, say, in the last century, well maybe full employment is not possible for everybody all over the world, and maybe the fact that in [37] all the Western industrialized countries, there is a large unemployed section of the population means that they have reached a higher level of development, one could say, even economically speaking. So one must think that, well, we have reached a stage now where the economies are of such a nature, that we can actually support several million people unemployed, that is to say, several million people potentially occupied doing higher things. But this is what has happened in the past, on a more modest scale, because countries like India, and Burma and Tibet have supported enormous armies of monks in monasteries, I mean, who are sort of unemployed, let us say, non-productive in the economic sense, and they were supporting them to meditate and study and maintain the higher culture of that particular civilization, so should we not be thinking in those terms, should we not bless ourselves that our economic system is such, it is so strong, that we can support three million people who don't have to work, who don't have to be productively employed and we can pay them to live fairly decently, so surely this represents an enormous cultural and spiritual opportunity, that we should not miss; far from apologising for it, we should be proud of it, this seems to be what culture is all about, what civilization is all about, that you can support people who have sufficient leisure to be able to devote themselves to higher pursuits, and have, therefore, an

extremely healthy and positive effect on the whole community. So maybe we should inculcate this sort of point of view and maybe even make it a feature of our advertising:

"Unemployment is an opportunity. Learn to meditate", or whatever.

Prasannasiddhi : I sometimes thought that the unemployed figures were a reflection of, like in previous times, perhaps more cultured times, when society was in a better state, there would have been in England, say, the equivalent of three million monks actually even in England even in Christian times, whereas now in modern times we have we have very few monks very few people leading purely spiritual lives yet in a way, we still have got the basic energy of that, but nothing is being done with it.

S: Another difficulty is that a lot of the people who are living, as we say, on the dole, think that they are very hard done by, that the dole is very small, they want more money, for more material goods, so we have to tackle that sort of problem also, that sort of miccha ditthi. People should realize that even on the dole, by world standards in terms of underdeveloped countries, they are really quite well off, they have got their basic needs of life. And they

should build on that sort of [38] basis, but in cultural and spiritual terms, not think in terms of getting more in the way of material goods and services. I mean, quite a lot of unemployed people have got cars still, well admittedly they are second-hand cars and not very good ones, but they have got cars, which most people in countries like India couldn't dream of possessing. There, they think themselves lucky and well-off if they possess a bicycle or a scooter. If you have a scooter in India nowadays, I saw on my recent visits - well you are definitely upper middle class.

Abhaya: But I have heard that there are moves afoot, I don't know how true this is, to re-examine the whole terminology and structure and sooner or later, it won't be unemployment benefit, but it will be something more positive.

S: Well, even the word benefit is positive. In my young days it was always called the dole, National Assistance, a sort of hand-out. Something you went along to rather unpleasant offices and queued up and sort of cap in hand to receive and more often than not you were given a good lecture about laziness and not looking for a job, and liquidation and not being in work and so on. A man wasn't a man unless he had a job. Wives didn't want husbands sitting around at home all day, making the place untidy, disturbing their arrangements, always demanding cups of tea.

Abhaya: I think that that is quite an important aspect of the whole thing, that a man is not a man unless he has a job, I think that goes quite deep.

S: Well, in a sense that is true, but a job should not be defined too narrowly. You are not really a man, not really a human being if you are not working on something, if you are not putting your energies into something, if you are not growing and developing. But the economic side of it is almost quite secondary.

Chris: I suppose for many people that their actual purpose is embodied in their job.

S: Right, and in any case working in an office, typing, is that really a man's work? I mean, one author I read said that any job that a woman can do is not a man's job, not a man's work. Now one can look at that statement in various ways, some of them might be controversial. But even apart from that, well, the question is, is she doing it, really? But even apart from that, one needs to think, well, even if you can get a particular job, is that job worthy of the efforts of a human being? In other words, one has got to think of the job also in terms of Right [39] Livelihood. You don't just want a job, you want Right Livelihood. But yes certainly a more positive attitude to leisure, I think that we should apply to this one much more, we might well find a big response. Anyway, perhaps we had better end there for the day. We have got half-way through which is good.

End of day one.

Verse 123: "As a merchant travelling with a small caravan with much wealth avoids the dangerous road, as one desirous of life shuns poison, so should one keep clear of evil"

S: This is pretty clear, pretty straightforward, but is there any particular significance in the examples that are given, the merchant travelling with a small caravan and the one desirous of life shunning poison?

Vairocana: I was going to say that in both cases they are quite easily overcome, a small caravan is quite easily overcome, and you can die quite easily by taking poison.

Abhaya: Also the caravan image suggests that you have accumulated a certain amount of merit, so you have got to look after that.

S: Yes, a small caravan and much wealth. Or much comparatively speaking perhaps, much for such a small caravan, the overall image is one of the journey isn't it? The merchant travelling with a small caravan perhaps through the desert and he avoids a dangerous road. Why would he avoid the dangerous road? What might happen, why is the road dangerous, what makes it dangerous?

William: Bandits.

Prasannasiddhi: A precipitous road.

Vairocana: Merchants usually get robbed.

S: Yes, so this suggests that as you are travelling along with your load of merit, you may be, so to speak, ambushed. So what does that suggest? That sort of image.

Chris: It is your wealth that attracts the bandits.

S: So what do they do? Being attracted by your wealth.

[40]

Vairocana: Well they try get it off you.

S: Yes, but how do they do that, what is the essence of the situation?

Vairocana: They threaten you.

S: I wouldn't say that they threaten you. Bandits, if you have read any sort of travel stories, what do they try to do, how do they try to rob you, do they announce their intentions, what is the essence of their...

\_\_\_: It is the unexpected.

S: It is the unexpectedness, yes, so this perhaps suggests that when you are travelling on the journey of life with your little load of merit, what you have got to be on the watch for is the unexpected attack. So what is it in our lives which in our own experiences corresponds to this unexpected attack, this ambush that may be sprung at any moment.

Vairocana: I suppose it is our own lack of awareness in a situation, that things just take us by surprise, we are not on the ball.

S: Give some example, how can you be taken by surprise by something that happens and at once gives rise to very unskilful mental states on your part.

Vairocana: Well somebody could get at you in some sort of way, and before you know it you try to sort of defend yourself, and attack that person verbally and get yourself into negative states.

S: Does it happen even more specifically than that? I mean surely logically one ought to be always expecting an attack, expecting to be ambushed by Mara so to speak. But what is it that lulls one into a sense of false security? Just like perhaps the merchant thinking that he is quite safe, when he isn't, so what is it that lulls one into that sense of false security?

Abhaya: A certain continuity of it not having happened for some time.

S: You start forgetting again. Or you may be in a quite positive state and maybe feeling a bit exhilarated and because of that you become a bit unmindful, we see this sort of thing happening quite a lot, we have seen it happening on retreats. But sometimes the unexpected can just strike you. But it suggests that one should always be on one's guard. You are like a merchant travelling with a small caravan and much wealth. And the much wealth is perhaps significant. Much is a relative term, but it is quite a lot so far as you are concerned. You have accumulated quite a bit of merit, you don't want to dissipate it. One of the things [41] that can dissipate merit so to speak more quickly and easily than almost anything else is a sudden outburst of anger. I don't mean just annoyance, but real anger, real hatred almost, and I do know that quite a lot of people if they have this experience, they feel quite shattered afterwards. It is as though whatever merit they have accumulated, whatever sort of emotional positivity they have built up over a period of years perhaps appears to be immediately dissipated, just in a matter of minutes. It is all blown. People coming off retreat find the same sort of thing. Someone wrote me a letter only a few weeks ago, saying that they had come off retreat in a quite positive state, went back to their own centre and community, but almost immediately for reasons that they couldn't understand, started behaving in a really foolish sort of way and within a day all their emotional positivity was just blown and they felt quite upset about it afterwards. That sort of thing can happen. So it is as though you need constant mindfulness, constant awareness to guard or to safe-guard your gains so far because until you reach the point of no return, until you reach the point of Stream Entry, they can be dissipated at any moment. Can be blown at any moment, by apparently quite trivial things. You notice this if you get into an argument with somebody, if you are not very careful and watch every step in the argument and everything that you say, you can find yourself getting into a very negative sort of state. And the discussion develops into a rather nasty sort of argument and the argument can then end in disagreement and in a few cases even in blows. And sometimes you are at a loss to understand in retrospect at exactly what point things started to go wrong, so you have to watch quite carefully. Because Mara, as it were, lies in ambush, well I say Mara, but there are thousands of Maras lurking in ambush all over the place.

So "as a merchant travelling with a small caravan and much wealth avoids a dangerous road", or "as one desirous of life shuns poison so should one keep clear of evil". What is the force of this image, "just as one desirous of life shuns poison"? What is the significance of that?

Vairocana: You know that it is alien to you.

S: Well it is an obvious sort of thing to do. If you really are desirous of life of course you will shun poison. But here are people desirous of happiness and not shunning evil, I mean if you really want to be happy, if you really want to progress well just shun evil, in the same way

that someone who is desirous of life shuns poison. Evil is poison. [42] It may taste very nice, but the effects aren't so pleasant. In other words one has to realize that unskilful mental states are really dangerous, unskilful actions and unskilful words, these are really dangerous things. It is not that they are not going to have any effect on you, they are going to have an effect. It is going to be a quite bad effect, it is going to be a dangerous effect, a mortal effect ethically speaking, spiritually speaking, you are going to do yourself real harm. (Pause)

Vairocana: I suppose it comes back to the fact that you don't know if something is poisonous or not sometimes, until you have actually tried some of it, and suffered from the ill effects.

S: Well this is covered by a previous verse, isn't it? "As long as it bears no fruit, so long the evil doer sees the evil he has done as good, when it bears fruit in the form of suffering, he recognizes it as evil" And if one cannot be sure or if one isn't sure, well in any case exercise caution, tread carefully, if you're not sure if there is a robber lurking behind that sand dune, well proceed very circumspectly. (laughter) Or not even lurking behind that sand dune, the robbers may be lurking among the palm trees in that delightful oasis. On the last Tuscan, we had a talk from someone about crocodiles, and that was quite interesting. Who was it who gave that talk?

Prasannasiddhi: Silabhadra. "Crocodiles and Fierce Fish"

S: Ah yes, perhaps you should ask him for details if you're interested. Anyway let's pass on. I think that has made that verse sufficiently clear.

Verse 124: "If one has no wound in one's hand, one may safely handle poison, the unwounded hand is not affected by poison. Similarly, no evil befalls him who does no wrong."

S: Let's look up the word for ... yes, it's 'papa'. This in a way seems pretty obvious, doesn't it? "If one has no wound in one's hand one may safely handle poison. The unwounded hand is not affected by poison, similarly no evil befalls him who does no wrong". There are perhaps possibilities of misunderstanding lurking in this expression, handling poison. Do you see what I mean?

Abhaya: Or playing with fire.

S: Yes, if you are sufficiently clever you can get away with it, you can get away with it, but only if you do no wrong. In fact the only way in which you can avoid being harmed by evil is just having nothing to do with it. I mean the implication is not that if you do [43] ... if your hand is unwounded it will not be affected by poison and therefore you can handle poison, in the same way if you are a good man, evil won't affect you, so therefore you can do evil. That is not really the point, not the line of thought.

Chris: So what is meant by handling poison?

S: Well handling poison means handling poison. It is just the point of the comparison is that it's as it were a little unexpected. It is as though you might expect the Buddha as it were to say "well if one has no wound in one's hand one may safely handle poison, because the unwounded hand is not affected by poison, therefore if you reach a certain spiritual state, you can do those things which may be unethical in the case of less developed people, but they



won't do you any harm", you might be expecting the Buddha to say that, but he doesn't go on to draw that conclusion, he goes on to say, "similarly, no evil befalls him who does no wrong", you see what I mean, it is a slightly unexpected sort of twist. I mean in India, there is in some spiritual circles a sort of antinomian tendency, as we call it in the West, that is to say if you reach a certain level of spiritual development you can act either in what appears to be an ethical or unethical way, you have gone beyond good and evil. But the Buddha is so to speak denying that you can go beyond good and evil in that sort of way, he says "no evil befalls him who does no evil". Who does no wrong.

Antonio: It suggests as well that doing no wrong you may get out of an ambush safely. If something befalls unexpectedly on you and you do no wrong, you...

S: Right, yes it doesn't matter, you don't have to bother about the ambush, to get out of it somehow. Well of course to pursue the analogy one in some cases may, but rather badly damaged, at least you have a nasty shock at the very least, and you might have been robbed of at least some of your goods, lost at least some of your merit, come out minus a few tail feathers, so to speak. (Pause) So having your hand unwounded doesn't mean sort of having reached a state where you may safely do evil. Having your hand unwounded means not doing evil. Again it is another sort of form of what we talked about yesterday, that one is the exception, to the rule. It won't happen in your case.

Prasannasiddhi : It is not enough to be just clever, and cunning, that is not really... you can still do unskilful things , the thing is that you have just got to be honest and straightforward and do what is right.

[44]

S: What about this point that will be pursued in the next verse: "No evil befalls him who does no wrong"? The actual text says (Nati papan apukato)? There is no evil for him who does none. The translation is a little more explicit than that, but is it literally true that if you do

no evil, if you do no wrong, no evil will befall you?

Vairocana: Not really, no, because there must be past karma in a way.

S: Well it is still befalling you, and it is still unpleasant.

Vairocana: But you are not doing anything, you may not actually be doing any evil, but it is like you have still got certain tendencies to overcome, so maybe just experience...

S: Well the English term evil is a little ambiguous, because evil can denote a mental state, an unskilful mental state, and it can also denote an unpleasant experience, it can also denote suffering. So the no evil befalls him who does no wrong, does not mean that the just man, the innocent man will never have to suffer, even suffer unjustly. But that suffering, even though it is unjust, will not affect his mental state. Evil will befall him outwardly, he may suffer, he may even be killed, but the fact that he is doing no evil means that his mental state remains positive, remains skilful. He is suffering evil but he is not doing evil, that is the more important thing. I think this point is discussed in the Socratic dialogues by Plato, and Socrates maintains that the good man, the just man cannot really in a sense suffer even, because his mind remains inviolate. He can only suffer externally, which is in a sense not really suffering

at all.

Abhaya: But suppose you are in a positive mental state and somebody is say berating you mentally, which can be quite an unpleasant experience and maybe you would suffer as a result of that, you would experience that as a painful mental experience.

S: Well not only that, if someone treats you in that sort of way, in an extreme manner, they can even actually change in a sense your mental state. I mean if you are not of a sufficiently high level of development. You haven't reached that point of no-return, their persistence can gradually wear you down, however much you may try to hold on to say your temper, you may lose it and, you may explode. So this means that we have to be very careful about what sort of situations we allow ourselves to get involved in or even the sort of people that we allow ourselves to get involved with. Because the people with whom we associate closely are able to affect us quite deeply in a positive or a [45] negative manner. So this is in a way quite unfortunate, that people can in fact get at us, they can in fact at least for the time being destroy or at least weaken our positivity. And we are not safe, well again they are like robbers lying in ambush, or maybe they are not so much like robbers, as like friends, pseudo-friends who are supposedly travelling with us as part of the caravan, but who are only travelling with us in order to rob us.

Abhaya: But I was thinking take a case where you manage to maintain your positive mental state, that is you don't react, you don't hit him or you don't fight back verbally, but even so, whatever he is saying is quite painful, so that means that one can have a situation in which one maintains one's positive mental states but at that same time one is also suffering.

S: Yes, but evil is not befalling you in the sense that you are not committing any evil, not succumbing in a sense of not actually committing.

Abhaya: But presumably when you get, is this true?, when you get to the point of no return or a certain level of spiritual development, even that sort of verbal mental berating will not effect you in the same painful way, is that true?

S: No, it wouldn't affect you in the same painful way, though of course if someone was to beat you, yes you would certainly feel that, but you wouldn't react. I mean the Buddha we are told suffered physical pain when a splinter of the boulder rolled down on him by Devadatta, went into his foot. The Buddha certainly suffered physical pain, he suffered physical pain when he had the attack of dysentery shortly before his death, but it did not affect his mental state, we are specifically told this. Well we are told this on other occasions in the Buddha's life.

Abhaya: I was thinking of the instance where someone insults him and he says what happens there, it just reverts back to the person who..

S: Yes, but in the case of the less developed person, well, he can experience mental suffering, he finds say the being berated by another person quite an unpleasant experience, but nonetheless he is able not to react, not to retaliate. But then there is a further case where he does in the end give way, he does perhaps become angry and retaliate, so that means that for so long as you are not spiritually developed your mental state is in the power of other people, practically speaking. So I think one has to remember this and if you are so [46] weak that

your mental state is in the power of other people, you have to be extremely careful with whom you associate. You see what I mean? It is a bit like the question of drink, the question of liquor. I mean you may know for instance that you can take one glass of wine, it is not going to affect your mental state, you take two it is going to start affecting it, you take three glasses you have no control then over your mental state, so since you know that once you reach your third glass you have no control over your mental state, you must take steps to ensure that you never reach that third glass. You see what I mean? That is within your control, it is within your control whether you come to the point of taking that third glass. But once you have taken it, things are no longer in your control, they have passed out of your control. In the same way, it is in your control with whom you associate, but once you have associated or started associating or are in the company of a certain kind of person, your mental state is no longer under your control, it is only under your control so long as you don't associate with those people. So therefore one has to exercise extreme care and caution. I mean there may be certain people that you know just irritate you if you spend too much time with them, so your mental state is under your control to the extent that you don't associate with them and you have the capacity not to associate with them. But once you are in their company, well you have in effect no control over yourself any more. You have surrendered your mental state into their keeping practically. So you should avoid such a situation. So therefore spiritual friendship becomes all the more important. Because your spiritual friends are people to whom you can entrust your mental states so to speak. And bad friends are people whom you cannot, to whom you should not as it were entrust your mental state. It is not that people affect us just a bit. I mean sometimes they can affect us totally. They can change our mental state, they can rob us of our skilful mental state and replace it with something very different. So if you find that the company of a certain person perpetually irritates you, rubs you up the wrong way and leaves you sore and angry, it is best if you are a beginner so to speak in the spiritual life to avoid that person. Otherwise your mental state is in that person's keeping, that person's custody, you no longer have charge over your own mental states. And the same applies to situations in general. Run away as quickly as possible. (laughter) It may be escapism but it is a good healthy positive skilful escapism. Don't imagine yourself to be a sort of spiritual hero, who can battle on, no. You won't be battling on much [47] longer, you will just be on your knees and defeated. And a dead hero is of no use to anybody. "He who fights and runs away lives to fight another day" (laughter). Or even he who doesn't fight and runs away, at least he lives to fight possibly another day. In spiritual life as in biological existence survival is the important thing. Spiritual survival in this case.

Abhaya: It is a question of knowing your own strengths and weaknesses and being realistic about it.

S: Yes indeed. I mean there are certain people, you may have every sympathy for them, but you cannot spend even half an hour with them, without feeling thoroughly drained. Maybe for the rest of the day. As much as you sympathize you may under certain circumstances at least avoid such people. Supposing that you know you are going to be giving a talk half an hour after seeing that particular person. You should avoid seeing that person before giving that talk, you don't want to be drained of your energy, before you stand up to give the talk.

Prasannasiddhi: Do you think that the spiritually developed person, say the person who has gone beyond the point of no return, is he a person who even if he is right, spent ages right in the midst of all sorts of unskilful activity, he would maintain his positive state or is he someone who is just skilful enough to know that his company affects him, and so he builds a

situation ...

S: Well one can imagine a situation in which say someone who is a stream entrant is in a thoroughly unsuitable situation. He will not lose his skilful mental state, but of course the conflict may be so great that he may die, do you see what I mean? Because he is unable to lose his skilful mental state, but nonetheless great pressures are brought to bear on him externally, so that will not have any effect mentally but it may have a physical effect. But he wouldn't succumb mentally, he wouldn't succumb spiritually.

Prasannasiddhi: It would have a physical effect, what, it would just wear him down...

S: It would wear him down physically. Yes.

Vairocana: I don't quite understand why it would wear him down physically.

S: Well there is as it were nothing else to be worn down. It has an effect.

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Prasannasiddhi: He is experiencing some, he has to resist, he has to put a sort of barrier, and so that doesn't get to the heart of him, it does sort of wear him down.

S: Yes, or he may lose his will to live. I mean even if he is spiritually positive and incapable of falling back, he may not feel it worth while to go on living under those circumstances, what is the point? So in that way he loses his will to live. If he loses the will to live, the chances are that he will die. But that doesn't matter because if he is to remain alive at all, if he is to go on living, it is only so that he can go on developing even further. If that has become difficult, well one doesn't see any point in continuing to live so if the will to live also fails, well there is very little chance that he will survive.

Abhaya: That is quite a thought, isn't it.

S: But what cannot happen is that , if he is a Stream Entrant... What cannot happen is that he falls back mentally or spiritually, I mean that just cannot happen. I mean anything can happen, but not that.

Prasannasiddhi: One thinks of Kshitigarba ... goes into the hell realms presumably on his own, entirely surrounded by unskilful mental states.

S: Because in his case, as a Bodhisattva, his is a voluntary descent because he knows so to speak his own strength, he knows what he can do, he knows he can do that. But anyway the point that we were making originally was that even though you are in a highly skilful mental state, it doesn't mean that only pleasant experiences are going to befall you. I mean this is sometimes where the theist sometimes gets into difficulties, because the theist thinks that, well, God is looking after everything, that God is protecting one, and especially apparently that God is protecting the righteous. So when something unpleasant befalls such a person, say, when one is bereaved, one of the phrases that springs to their lips very easily is, "Why should God do this to me? I have led such a good life, I go to church every Sunday, I have never harmed anybody, I have never killed. I have been a teetotaller all my life, I have been faithful to my wife, and then this happens, maybe my son is killed in a motor accident, why

does God do this to me?" As if to say well your good life is a sort of insurance policy taken out against accidents, but it isn't, because the web of existence is so complicated that sometimes the good also has [49] to suffer. So the fact that you are leading a good life doesn't necessarily mean that you are never going to have to suffer, even in a way that may seem unjust in the sense that you don't seem to be getting your just deserts. Perhaps you will in the long run, we don't really know, we can only hope. But at least we can be sure that if you are leading a genuinely ethical and spiritual life, that your mental state will not be affected by what befalls you and that after all is the main thing.

Prasannasiddhi: You mean that we don't know that if you keep performing good actions that things will get better?

S: Well we don't know as a matter of direct perception that one day you will be as it were rewarded. It is nice to think in those terms, even though suffering befalls you now, it will all be made up later on. I think one shouldn't even think in those terms. It doesn't matter in a sense, because the main thing is that you preserve your own positive, skilful, mental and spiritual state. You shouldn't need the satisfaction of a sort of reward to look forward to. In a sense, virtue is its own reward, or at least that is how you should feel about it. It is not for the sake of something else of an external nature.

Prasannasiddhi: The law of Cause and Effect would surely say that if you do perform good things ... what you're saying sort of goes up another level beyond sort of cause and effect in a sense.

S: Well I say that we don't know. I mean, yes, the Law of Cause and Effect is there, but it works itself out in a complex sort of way. It may not be that in, say, ten thousand years time in some previous or future existence, you are exactly recompensed for what is happening to you now. It may not work out like that, and you may not mind, you may have forgotten all about the sufferings of the present existence by this time and not want to be recompensed for ... You may be into something even much better and higher by that time, and have no time to bother with these trivial recompenses. I mean, it is rather like, even on the ordinary level, suppose, you do have a minor accident and there is some small sum due to you from the Insurance people; well it may take a long time coming through, and maybe a couple of years later it comes through; you have forgotten all about it. And then one day you get a letter and a small cheque, maybe for fifteen pounds or something like that, and you have really forgotten all about the little trouble that you had two years before, and you don't really feel that [50] if it hadn't come you wouldn't have missed it. Do you see what I mean? It is not that all during those two years, you have been looking forward to receiving that small cheque as recompense for your suffering or inconvenience or whatever. But it comes.

Chris: If you were looking forward to that fifteen pounds, it would have a rather limiting effect on your outlook.

S: Yes, indeed it would. You might have spent that amount in stamps in correspondence, reminding them that it was due to you, and wondering why it hadn't come along.

Prasannasiddhi: So the virtuous or spiritually developed person has sort of reached the stage where his virtue is so sort of strong that his belief in virtue just ...he is just virtuous.

S: Yes, he doesn't think in terms of recompense, as it were, for virtue in, as it were, material terms. He does find sufficient recompense, so to speak, or in a manner of speaking, in virtue itself. Otherwise, it is like expecting to be paid for meditating. I mean, the fact that you meditate and that you enjoy it, and that you get into a higher mental state, well, that is surely enough in itself. Maybe you only need recompensing when you don't or cannot do it, not when you do it, not when you are successful. But that is not to say that a recompense may not, under the Law of Karma eventually come. But I am only saying that if you are genuinely into the spiritual life, you will not be over-concerned with recompense which takes any form other than that of the experience of the spiritual life itself. You won't be concerned say with recompense in the form of material blessings. You won't expect, because you are leading a good life, therefore, God or under the Law of Karma you will have a happy life in the material sense with lots of good things.

Abhaya: So it comes back to the point that you made, that we should be process-orientated and not goal-orientated.

S: Well, yes and no, because you can be goal-orientated in the sense of the Ultimate goal, but not think in terms of the spiritual life as you are leading it now, providing you by way of karmic recompense with certain material advantages and blessings.

Abhaya: It does say in the Jewel Ornament of Liberation, if you lead a virtuous life, it will bring riches.

S: Well, yes in the long run. I mean it doesn't say that you should lead the good life for that reason or hanker after those riches or always be thinking about them. They'll no doubt come along in due [51] course.

Tejananda: If you want riches there is probably a more direct way.

S: Yes indeed. Just sign on. (laughter) But in the short term at least, one shouldn't always be expecting a corresponding recompense in material terms, in cash terms, so to speak, for every small advance in virtue.

Abhaya: What about in ... I was going to say, in pleasure terms or satisfaction terms?

S: Well, what could give greater pleasure and satisfaction than the fact that you are leading the spiritual life itself? In that sense the spiritual life should be, in subjective terms, its own reward. You shouldn't be leading it for the sake of some reward extraneous to itself. If you lead it for the sake of anything, it is only for the sake of a deepened experience of the spiritual life itself.

Anyway the next verse approaches the matter from the other end, so to speak, and not that of the innocent person to whom the evil befalls, but from the point of view of the evil person who offends the innocent person;

Verse 125: "Whosoever offends against the innocent man, one who is pure and faultless, to that spiritually immature person, the evil that he has committed comes back like fine dust thrown against the wind"

S: So what does this mean? What sort of situation does this verse envisage? You cannot really harm another. You are doing harm to yourself; well, in a sense you can harm others, but it depends on the degree of purity and faultlessness. You cannot harm, let us say, a Stream Entrant really in any way. You can inflict physical suffering upon him, even perhaps a certain amount of mental suffering, but you cannot harm him in the sense of deflecting him from his spiritual life or interrupting his spiritual development, you cannot do that. But in the case of, say, a lesser person, you can do that. You can hold him back, you can induce unskilful mental states in him. But you cannot do that in the case of one who is truly pure and faultless. In that case, the evil that you have been trying to do to him will come back to you. Even in the case of your being able to influence and effect the mental state of another person in an unskilful way, well, that evil will come back as well, perhaps it will come back even doubly because you have actually succeeded in your evil attempt and that is even worse than attempting and failing. But I think if we take this verse [52] too literally, I think that it is over-optimistic, that you cannot actually harm someone who is pure and faultless. If he is pure and faultless to the extent of being a Stream Entrant, then you cannot really harm him, but if he isn't as pure and faultless as that, you can harm him. You can harm him mentally and spiritually by holding him back, by inducing by your actions or words unskilful mental states in him. So that is a quite terrible responsibility to bear, that is a truly evil action. But how do you come to suffer, in the one case or the other, whether you succeed or whether you fail, how do you come to suffer?

Billy: Well, it would effect your state of mind. You would be in a bad state of mind if you did this.

S: Yes, the fact that you are not only in a unskilful mental state yourself, but that you are actually trying to induce unskilful mental states in others is a really quite terrible state of affairs. One is reminded of that episode of the Buddha's encounter with Tilapato(?) the actor-manager, do you remember this? Tilapato was an actor manager in the Buddha's day, who approached him and said, "I have heard there is a sort of tradition that we actors, when we die, go to the heaven of the laughing gods, because during our life-time we make people laugh, so we go to the heaven of the laughing gods". So he asked the Buddha this question, whether this was true that they went to the heaven of the laughing gods. The Buddha asked him not to press him on this point, but Tilapato did press him, and in the end, the Buddha said, "No, actors, when they die, go to hell", because he said "themselves subject to greed, hatred and delusion, they induce mental states of greed, hatred and delusion in other people, by their acting". So this wouldn't be true for all actors, no doubt, but no doubt it is true of quite a lot of popular entertainers; they do actually induce states of greed, hatred and delusion in other people, so this is a very terrible thing to do, to disseminate your greed, hatred and delusion, to have this unwholesome, unskilful effect on other people. I mean, if you are conscious, if you become aware that you are in that sort of mental state, well, it is like a person with an infectious or contagious disease, you should isolate yourself from other people and not sort of spread your mental states, so to speak. It seems, sometimes, that people almost deliberately spread it, and want to spread it. And that is very, very unskilful, that is the height of unskilfulness. If the Bodhisattva represents the height of skilfulness, the one who wants to share his [53] skilful mental state with as many beings as possible, someone who does the opposite of that, and wants to share his unskilful mental states with as many people as possible, is obviously at the height or depths of unskilfulness. Of course, the person concerned may be under a delusion; well, that is also an unskilful mental state. He may genuinely believe that he is doing good. But that only makes things worse. What about people

who perpetrate sick jokes? I think I was talking about this yesterday, wasn't I? About these Monty Python films? I cannot help regarding these as quite unskilful. Some people might argue, well, you give people an outlet for their unskilful mental states, but does it mean that the unskilful mental state is discharged and you are liberated from it and freed from it and can rise above it, does it mean that? No, I think what it usually means is that you have only indulged in it and it has become, if anything, stronger than it was before. So these sort of people have a lot to answer for, people who produce and direct and act in films, the effect of which on the public mind, is definitely unskilful, not to speak of people who write in that sort of way.

Duncan: I don't quite understand how humorous films can be unskilful?

S: Well it depends what you're humorous about. I mean, if you make a joke of say, violence, well that seems to me to be the height of unskilfulness, because you are suggesting that violence doesn't matter, it is just a joke.

Duncan: Yes I see.

S: I mean, you are finding pleasure in the contemplation of suffering of other living beings, even though it is only living beings as depicted on the screen, but if you are not careful, the sort of transition from the screen to real life, especially as what appears on the screen is so life-like, it can be very easy.

Duncan: So you would say those little Tom and Jerry cartoons are very unskilful because of all the violence.

S: I cannot remember seeing... at least, I think I have a long time ago. I think even with things like that, you have to be careful, where violence is sort of made funny. I think that you have to be quite careful about that. That is why I think that you have to be also careful about any sort of humour that is based on cynicism or ridicule or anything of that sort because of the negative emotional element that is involved. It might seem very innocent, I am sure that there is such a thing as innocent humour, but perhaps it is significant that [54] innocent humour seems very rare. Good-natured humour is quite rare. It only too often seems to have a streak of ill nature in it. It is always at somebody's expense, putting somebody down. Someone mentioned yesterday Irish jokes; well, the Irish joke no doubt puts the Irishman down. It isn't a joke at, say, the expense of his cleverness or his intelligence or superiority; no, it is exactly the opposite. Paddy is shown to be pretty stupid, pretty thick. Same with the Scotsman, these Scottish jokes, the Scotsman is shown to be pretty mean.

\_\_\_: Glaswegians anyway.

S: Well, a Scottish joke is a Scottish joke. So I think, yes, that maybe humour is one of the things we're talking about, maybe humour is one of those situations which are really a sort of ambush, where the unskilful is lurking. But you think, well, it is only a joke and someone gets a bit annoyed, a Scotsman gets annoyed at all these Scottish jokes, so one thinks he is a bit thin skinned, can't he take a joke? But it is not just a joke that he is being asked to take; it is an assault of negativity sometimes in the disguise of a joke.

Chris: Through humour we often can express something quite negative but because it is



humour, it is sort of allowed.

S: Yes, it is a rather unfair way of getting at someone, because if he objects, you say, "Oh, can't you take a joke, you don't have a sense of humour?" And in England at any rate, not having a sense of humour is almost a capital offence. (laughter)

Chris: It can actually be a genuine negative expression.

S: Yes it can. In the same way cynical remarks, well, you are allowed to get away with them, because, well, it is sort of a joke. But actually, the point that is being made, may be quite deeply negative.

Chris: So is it that humour is sort of neither positive, nor negative, it is just another form of expression, that will just express whatever state of mind that you are in?

S: I think that the nature of humour is something that requires investigation. Freud has gone into this, he has got a book on "The Joke" as it is called in English, though it isn't quite "joke" in the English sense. It does seem as though the joke represents a sort of energy release, but it can be under circumstances which are, so to speak, negative. You can take pleasure in something that is negative, pleasure, say, in somebody else's suffering.

Chris: I have heard that the Buddha never laughed, he smiled.

[55]

S: The Buddha did say, according to the Pali Canon on one occasion, he said, "Laughter which shows the teeth is madness", if you have cause to show your pleasure, it is enough if you smile. Maybe he was thinking of those hearty guffaws, which are not very elegant, one might say. But you can often tell what people are laughing about from the quality of the laugh. I mean, the laugh which people laugh when, say, it is a dirty joke is quite different from the laugh when it is just innocent fun. This is something which struck me a few years ago. When I was on an Order Convention, I forget the exact occasion, I forget whether it was something that I had said, or whether it was just something that happened, I think it may have been just something that happened, that someone did something which people thought a bit funny, maybe some little slip or mistake, but I noticed that the laughter was entirely good-natured; there was no negativity in it, and everybody laughed. It was a happy, quite positive laughter, and it struck me that that was very, very rare, especially having so many people laughing at the same time, but in a genuinely happy, emotionally positive way, without any element of emotional negativity or unskilfulness. And this struck me, in a way as marking quite a step forward as a whole, that one could experience laughter in that sort of way, on the part of so many people. It was a very different kind of laughter from what one usually hears. It was much lighter and genuinely happy, and the happiness did not feed on anybody's suffering, it was not at anybody's expense. But so often, there is an element of almost sadism in a lot of our laughter. So here again, it is a sort of ambush-type situation. You are not necessarily in a positive state just because you are laughing; it depends what you are laughing at and how you are laughing; so that needs to be, perhaps, watched as well. So watch it next time a person tells a Scottish joke or an Irish joke or a Jewish joke; just watch how you react; maybe it is really not very funny, not if you think about it, or shouldn't be funny.

Anyway, anything more about that, or shall we pass on? It reminds me, this whole question of

not accepting a reward; it reminds me of Hegel's rather sarcastic remark, which is, I think mentioned in all the histories of philosophy, where someone spoke to him about heaven and reward and all that, so he said, rather sneeringly, "well, do you expect a trinkgeld for not murdering your mother?" You see what I mean, trinkgeld being some sort of trinket or ornament or toy.

Antonio: It seems that expecting the reward affects the result of the [56] positive action?

S: Oh yes. I mean one could say that if you are doing something, simply for the sake of the reward that you get out of it, you are not really involved with the doing of that thing. I mean, this brings us to the area of work and employment. Quite often in the world, people do a job, but they do it just for the sake of a wage packet or salary cheque that they get at the end of the week or the end of the month; that is the situation. But supposing you are working in a co-op, you don't work in that sort of way, do you? I mean, your work in your co-op is your life, so to speak. You are giving everything that you have got to that work because you believe in it, because you believe in Right Livelihood, and you believe in the whole situation in which your Right Livelihood takes place. So supposing a situation arises where two people work in the co-op, and one says, "If you work extra this afternoon, then I will give you extra money"; it means that the whole co-op situation has been undermined, doesn't it? I mean, you are introducing the reward element. I mean people are not, so to speak, willing to do the work because the work needs to be done, but they are willing to do it if they get some extra money for doing it. So I think we have to watch that sort of situation developing.

Antonio: It seems to stimulate greed instead of actually...

S: You are giving what you can and taking what you need, that is the principle in a co-op.

Chris: It means that you are one step removed from the activity that you are engaged in.

S: Yes, because you are not engaged in it for its own sake.

Chris: It is a bit like meditating to achieve a positive state of mind, rather than just sort of meditating.

S: Though in a sense, you are meditating to achieve a positive state of mind, because the distinction is an artificial one, because meditation is, or meditation does consist in that positive state of mind. So, if you say that you are meditating in order to achieve a positive state of mind, well that is no more than saying you are meditating in order to meditate, because the positive state of mind is not something extraneous to the process of meditation in the same way that money is extraneous to work that you do, or the goods that money can buy are extraneous to the work that you do. Otherwise it would be like [57] your recompense for doing the work is being given more work to do, but clearly it is not like that. So you are not really committed to doing something when your reason for doing it is extraneous to the activity itself. You are not really committed to doing something if your reason for doing it is extraneous to the thing itself, whether you are doing it for money or whether you are doing it even for the sake of reputation, or even a sort of ego-satisfaction...

Abhaya: What about debts, community debts, and you are working in, say, a Right Livelihood situation to clear your debts.

S: Well, presumably you would rather not be in that situation. I mean there is some small admixture of ulterior motive, but if it is debts that you have incurred in the past and you have no other way of paying them off, well, all right, maybe you can accept that admixture for the time being, but you are not working in a sense, in that way, from free choice. You would rather have a situation in which you could not think in those terms at all.

Chris: Presumably, there you are committed to paying your debts off.

S: Well, when I used the word, commitment in the first instance, I was using it in a fuller sense than "yes, you are responsible for paying off your debts", but when I was speaking in terms of being committed to the activity that you are doing, I was thinking in terms of commitment in a spiritual sense. Otherwise, how ridiculous it would be if someone said, "Well, I will go and live in a community and be a member of a community provided I am paid for it. Well, in the case of work it really should be like that; one should look at it in that sort of way. It seems really ridiculous that you only work on condition that you are paid for it. Your work should be such an enjoyable activity that you would like to do it anyway, whatever the work might be, it may not be necessarily physical. But I think that that is the test of whether you really want to do something, whether you would be willing to do it even if you weren't paid for doing it, assuming you could continue to do it even if you weren't paid for doing it.

Prasannasiddhi: Sometimes it is a bit more kind of - the situation seems a bit more existential than that; it just seems that that is the thing to do whether in your mind you might actually prefer not to work, you might like to sit around in soft armchairs and listen to beautiful music and drink wine or something like that, but you just see that existentially, you have to work and so you therefore enjoy...

S: But that seeing means that you are doing what you want to do. I believe that everybody in the long run does what they want to do, not [58] that what you may want to do is necessarily always pleasurable in a sort of superficial sense. I mean, for instance, you may want to write. That may be really what you want to do, but you may not find it easy to write, it may be a struggle the whole day just to put down a few words on paper, but that is what you want to do, even though it may be very difficult, even painful at times, but you accept that, that is what you really deeply want to do, and what, in a sense, you most enjoy doing. So the fact that something is difficult and even painful doesn't mean that it isn't what you really want to do, and that you aren't, in a sense, even enjoying it, because doing things which you find painful out of a sense of duty, which you don't really subscribe to, well that is a different kind of situation.

Prasannasiddhi: I suppose you have also got to watch it; if you do have to do something, well then, in a way, you should enjoy doing it as well, rather than ...

S: Yes, though the enjoyment may not be just in the form of a superficial pleasure, it may not be easy, it may be quite difficult and tough and even at times painful but nonetheless, it is, on the whole, enjoyable. Or in a deeper sense, enjoyable in the sense that there is nothing that you would rather do instead, at least, in that sense. Anyway perhaps we should stop there just for our morning tea.

Abhaya: When I hear you saying all these things, it strikes me more and more as common

sense, it is very clear.

S: Quite a bit of Buddhism is just common sense, in the sense that you should not leave the Buddha to find out all that, or make all that clear. That is why the Buddha often said, as Subhuti quoted yesterday, "Let any reasonable man come to me", he doesn't say someone who is half-enlightened already, let him just be reasonable, that is all that is required, sensible, yeah? Sensible might be better than reasonable. What you need is a sensible person to talk to.

"Some beings arise by way of conception in the womb; evil doers are born in hell. Those who do good, go to heaven, those who are free from the violence, transcend conditioned existence all together"

S: [quotation of above in Pali]. Those who are free from the defilements or the biases, they are paranibbanized. The word is used [59] in its verbal form, rather than as a noun, usually in Pali. Anyway what is the general subject matter of this verse?

Tejananda: The results of actions.

S: The results of action, yes. Can you draw any sort of inferences, for instance, "some beings arise by way of conception in the womb". It just says some beings, it doesn't say what sort of beings, it doesn't refer to what they might have done or not done, and then it says "evil doers are born in hell". And "those who do good go to heaven", so what does that suggest about those who arise in the womb?

Duncan: They are neither very evil, nor very good.

S: Yes, neither very evil nor very good; presumably, by "womb" is meant the human womb, that is to, say born as a human being. So it suggests that if you are born as a human being, it is because your karma is rather mixed. So you seem to have four classes of people: those whose karma is mixed, both good and evil, those whose karma is evil, who have committed unskilful actions; and those whose karma is good, those who have committed skilful actions; and those whose karma is neither good nor bad, not a mixture of both, but neither in the sense of higher, something that transcends karma altogether. But again, the more basic principle, still, is that actions do have consequences. If one doesn't want to think in terms of heaven and hell and so on, well, at least one has to think in terms of skilful actions having positive consequences, unskilful actions as having negative consequences and those actions which are truly skilful or positive, having no reactive consequences at all, they have only what we can describe as cumulative or creative - well, "reactions" is not really the term here. The fourth kind of person goes, so to speak beyond both good and evil; he is going from good to greater good, up the spiral.

Abhaya: Can I ask you what I suppose is a philosophical question? You were saying last night, as you define transcending good and evil, you say that the spiritually mature person accumulates so much good, the momentum is so good that he goes out of sight, so to speak...

S: I was thinking of the person who had gone beyond the point of no return.

Abhaya: I read your little booklet on Buddhism as a philosophy of religion where you say that there are the two types of conditioning, and according to Buddhism, the whole of reality is

subsumed under some [60] kind of becoming, either positive or negative...

S: Either what I have called cyclical or what I have called spiral.

Abhaya: But then that left me wondering, well, what about what is referred to in Buddhist philosophy as the Unconditioned?

S: Ah, I have dealt with that; I think it is in an edited extract from a seminar in one of these coming Mitratas, I think it is the next one, because it is as though one does have a sort of, yes, contradiction, but what I have said there, very briefly - I have discussed it at greater length in the extract - is that the incomposite is not the simple in as it were, the chemical sense. One mustn't think of the incomposite as being something which is static. The incomposite, the (asankata?) or the uncompounded is something which, by its very nature, goes on becoming, as it were, more uncompounded all the time. One mustn't take the static terminology as indicating a static reality. It is unchanging in relation to the cyclical order of things, but it is not unchanging, as it were, within itself. Do you get the point of the difference?

Abhaya: It's unchanging with respect to or in distinction to...

S: It is unchanging in the sense that it is constantly and consistently spiral, so the spiral, as spiral, doesn't change in relation to the cyclical as cyclical, but the spiral is, after all, a spiral, and the nature of a spiral is to ascend constantly. But I have discussed it at greater length and more fully in this extract, because it is one of the questions that came up in Tuscany, because that language of the Uncompounded which is a sort of static or, what I call, spatial language, seems to conflict with that dynamic language which one uses when speaking of the spiral. But it is sorted out in that particular, quite lengthy extract. But I think nowadays that probably the dynamic model so to speak, is more acceptable, more understandable, more intelligible, than the static model, though I have indicated that both models, as models, are equally valid, but the dynamic

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[61] model seems to be more appropriate for us to use at present, not that the other model is invalid.

Anyway, this particular verse enunciates a general principle that I think is already quite clear, however, one might apply it specifically. As for the defilements, the asavas, you can consult The Three Jewels, the Stages of the Path, I have dealt with them there. Under the last of the stages, that is to say, the stage of the Knowledge of the Destruction of the Asavas. Let's go on to verse 127 then.

127: "Not in the sky, nor in the midst of the sea, nor yet in the clefts of the mountains, nowhere in the world, in fact, is there any place to be found where, having entered, one can abide free from the effects of one's evil deeds".

S: Well this verse simply states the inexorability so to speak, of the Law of Karma. But what does it really mean? How is it that one can't ever escape from the effects of one's evil deeds, or one's good deeds?

Billy: This is still conditioned existence and it is always going to affect you if you're in the conditioned.

S: But there is another reason too. Is the deed so, as it were, separable from you? Because when you commit any kind of action, whether of body, speech or mind, skilful or unskilful, that modifies your own being. If you act differently, you become different. Your actions are not, as it were, detachable from you, whether they are your thoughts, your words, or your actual overt deeds. It is not that you sort of remain in the middle of them all, and they are all extraneous, just like the branches of a tree, extraneous to the trunk. You don't remain unaffected by what you do, because you are what you do. And everything that you do modifies your being. It may not modify it at once, but it modifies in the long run, if you perform certain actions a sufficient number of times; there is a very good example of this in one of Oscar Wilde's works called "The Picture of Dorian Gray"; some of you might have read that. Anybody read it? So, do you remember the, as it were, moral there? What is the moral? I always regard Oscar Wilde as a very moral writer, his writings seem to have a great big moral always which is pretty obvious, but anyway, in this case, what is the moral, that your actions do affect you? Because the story is roughly of this handsome young man who wished to remain always handsome and was granted that wish. But the changes brought about in his appearance, in his expression, by his actions, all registered on his portrait, on his picture [62] hence the "Picture of Dorian Gray", so he remained even after fifteen, twenty years, the same carefree, handsome, innocent-looking young man, but the features of the portrait changed and became, in the end positively hideous and repulsive, because that is what happens. Your actions do affect you, your thoughts do affect you, so how can you escape from the results of your own actions, because you cannot escape from yourself? I mean, that is not the whole of it, because the fact that you are a different person, a changed person of course means that things affect you differently from what they would have done if you hadn't performed those particular actions, or thought even those particular thoughts. So I don't think that we need necessarily see the Law of Karma as something operating sort of external to us, rather like the police. You are Karma. It is not that the recompense is waiting, as it were, outside of you, to pounce upon you from outside. I mean, it is there with you all the time, it is there with the action itself, it is another aspect of the action itself, because it is modifying you, it is changing you, it is having an effect upon you, so how can you escape the consequences of your own actions wherever you may happen to go, because you carry yourself with you. So how can you ever, in a sense, not be rewarded for the good that you do? The good is its own reward in the sense that you have modified your own being by that good action in a positive manner, in an upward direction; what greater reward could there be than that? So your actions, good and bad, are all that you can take with you. I remember in this connection, seeing during the war a staging in the form a ballet, I think it was, of that Medieval morality play called Everyman, where this is very beautifully illustrated. I remember the story roughly is that someone is at the point of death, Death, God's messenger has come to Everyman, Everyman is the sort of hero of the play called "Everyman" and Death summons Everyman to go on this journey to be judged and Everyman goes from one person to another, desperately seeking for someone to accompany him; he goes to his kinsmen, but they can't accompany him; he goes to his friends, they can't accompany him, his wealth can't accompany him; there is only one thing that can accompany him, and that is his good deeds, and he is looking around for his good deeds and he cannot find that; "good deeds" is personified as a female character and he is looking in all directions for his good deeds, because he has learnt that only with his good deeds, or "goode deedes" in Medieval English (laughter), can go with him. So he reaches this point where he sort of exclaims, "My goode

deedes where art thou?"; so a faint voice comes [63] .. a very faint voice comes from below the stage; it says, "Here lie I close in the ground, your deedes have me sore bound, that I can neither stand nor stir". So, he hastens to undo all the ropes that he sort of is tied up in, which of course he has tied, himself. So it is very powerfully dramatized in this sort of way, that only your good deeds can go with you, or your bad deeds, as the case may be, because they are you. You are not really separable from them. We speak of your deeds and your actions as though they are separate, like your house or your children, or your money, but they are not. They are you. You cannot but take them with you, and that is all that you can take with you, wherever you happen to go. Just to speak a bit about this Medieval morality play, it was written by some anonymous monk in some monastery in the Middle Ages, but in some ways it is a quite remarkable anticipation of Buddhist teaching. It isn't that it brings in God and all that, it isn't especially very Christian, because if it was genuinely Christian, well, it wouldn't bother about taking his goode deedes with him, he'd just get some good, convenient Papal indulgence to take along with him, and make quite sure of it, and make quite sure that he had had the Last Sacraments ... dispense with any necessity for good deeds.

Chris: It reminds me of Lady Macbeth trying to wash ...

S: Ah, yes, it is indelible, yes.

Chris: She says "All the perfume of Araby..."

S: "...or India cannot sweeten this little hand", yes. She says, "Out, out damned spot". So you would have to cut out a piece of your own flesh, as it were, because you have done the action, it is your action, it adheres to you, it is part of you, in fact; you cannot cut it out, without cutting out a chunk of yourself. And this is in fact one of the basic teachings of Buddhism, that you are your actions, actions are not something sort of stuck on to you from the outside, you cannot shake them off. They are not just yours, even, they are you. Well this is reflected even in proverbs like, "Handsome is as handsome does", "Being is doing"...(Tape change over)... Shall we read the last verse which is slightly different.

Verse 128: "Not in the sky, nor in the midst of the sea nor yet in the clefts of the mountains, nowhere in the world, in fact, is there any place to be found where, having entered, one will not be overcome by death."

[64]

S: So what is the point of that statement? Do people in fact try to escape from death in the same way that they try to escape from the consequences of their own actions? Do people, so to speak, think that they can escape from death? Do they really think in this sort of way, obviously not consciously, but in some other way?

Chris: We try not to think about it.

Abhaya: It is just like that although we see death all around that sort of secret feeling that it just won't happen to us

S: Yes, it seems quite remote, especially when there are people who are older than you, still around, still going strong. I think you only perhaps start thinking quite seriously about death when the majority of your contemporaries have already passed on, and you find that you are

surrounded only by people much younger than you are. But if you are still surrounded by people who are quite a bit older than you, it is very difficult to think, I think, seriously in terms of death. But the fact that people older than you are still alive is no guarantee at all that you are going to be alive even tomorrow, whatever the statistics might suggest, so there is no refuge from death, the verse is saying, and you have got to face it one day, whether it is in a palace or whether it is in a hovel, in sickness or in health.

Prasannasiddhi: Do you think that this is quite straightforward or perhaps there is a personification of death for the Indians of that time, so that, similar to the person who reaps out ... tells you what you have done wrong.

S: Well death is sometimes personified as the Yamaraja, sending his messengers to you.

Vairocana: Death seems to sort of, just suggest that whole thing that you are immediately going to be confronted with all your past actions, that you try and run away from them.

S: Because there is this tradition that at the moment of Death, your whole life passes in review, before you in an instant and people who have, for instance, been drowned and then resuscitated afterwards, quite often say that they did in fact have this experience. I mean, at least one friend of mine had that experience and he told me afterwards that it did in fact happen just like that, he saw his whole previous life in a flash, every thing that had ever happened to him, suddenly unrolled.

Vairocana; But most people don't really know that that is going to [65] happen, but somehow it is as if they do know that it is going to happen in a way.

S: Yes...

Vairocana: Of course if you've had quite a positive existence, or you are happy, you would not be afraid of dying.

S: I have found that quite a lot of very old people don't mind dying; it is as though your will to live just sort of fades away after a certain age, and you just carry on from day to day. I mean, I do know several very old people, people in their eighties and nineties, who say this, quite cheerfully: "Well, I don't know if I am going to live till tomorrow, but I'll just carry on". They don't seem to be bothered by it at all. And this seems perfectly natural.

Vairocana: That is because it is more immediate, because they know it is going to happen, whereas for most people it is not very immediate.

S: I don't think it is just that they know that it is going to happen, but I think that there has been an actual change in their consciousness, even a change in their being; they have sort of withdrawn from full participation in the world, they don't have any ambitions left. They don't sort of definitely want to go on living, the will to live has reduced considerably, and they don't mind dying, they just accept that they are going to die, in an almost animal-like sort of way, but nonetheless in a positive way. But in a way, death represents the sort of paradigm of the inescapable situation, because there are lots of situations that we would like to avoid if we possibly could, and perhaps we can sometimes avoid, but death represents the sort of situation, maybe unpleasant situation, which you cannot avoid in the long run, which you are



going to be obliged to face. It is a bit like, say, going to the dentist, it is an unpleasant experience, so you put it off as long as you can. Well, in this particular case, you can go on putting it off and off and off, and until maybe toothache drives you to the dentist, but you cannot put off death in that sort of way. So it represents the sort of situation that cannot be put off, because you have got to face it, whether you like it or not. And we sometimes do rather shirk unpleasant encounters, don't we? You have got to tell somebody something unpleasant; you put it off, you don't like having to tell them, even if it is, "sorry, you cannot go on that particular retreat" or something like that, you don't like to face them and tell them that bad piece of news. So death represents the almost archetypal [66] unpleasant situation which people aren't willing to face, but which they have to face sometime, even though, as I have said, the very old people seem to reconcile themselves, in fact, to facing it, perhaps by not even thinking about it very much.

Tejananda: Does that mean that by facing up to death, or trying to face up to death, that will enable us to be more apt in facing up to other unpleasant consequences?

S: Well if death does in fact represent the ultimate unpleasant experience, well, if you can really face up to that, you can face up to anything, but can you face up to the fact of death, and how can you know unless you are actually facing up to death at that very moment, quite literally. It is easy to fool oneself.

Vairocana: If you believe you are going to be reborn, it is not such a disastrous thing, assuming that you are reasonably evolved, you'd actually perceive it as another experience in a way, a very strong, one.

S: You might even look forward to death as a quite interesting experience to find out what it is really like, having heard so much and knowing so little.

Antonio: So is this phrase of "the dying mind doesn't tell a lie"...the knowledge that one is going to die becomes more positive...

S: Well yes, you can afford to speak the truth, because, after all, there are not going to be any consequences, you can say anything. No one can get at you, because you are going to die. You can say things that you hadn't dared to say before, because what did prevent you saying? Well, fear, ultimately, the fear of death, but now you are dying, what is there to fear any more? You can say what you like, no one can get at you, no one can come back at you, no one can punish you, you are just going to elude their grasp. So sometimes people do speak the truth on their deathbed, if not before. One notices - I have noticed that in the case of very old people again, sometimes they are much more outspoken than younger people, and especially the middle-aged people, because they are going to die any time, they don't... they have nothing to gain, they have nothing to lose, they don't mind, so they say what they think. So old age, especially extreme old age, assuming none is in good health, can give a sort of freedom in the case of a healthy person.

Prasannasiddhi: Well perhaps it is not that they say whatever they want to say, or think that they ... or .. maybe they actually say what in a way .. what is actually the right thing to say, because they are no longer afraid. It is not that they just go a bit wild...

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S: I am not suggesting that they go a bit wild, but they have known all the time what perhaps things were really like, and they are able to say now, because no one can get at them, perhaps, I mean they are not in danger of losing their job; they have retired maybe fifteen or twenty years before. It is like that a bit, maybe, with some very famous people in their extreme old age, even if they are living under a government that is not very sympathetic to them, they know that they cannot be touched, because they are so famous, it gives them a sort of immunity, so they can say what they like, pretty well, and get away with it. Tolstoy got away with saying quite a lot which nobody else could have said, just because he was world famous, and a very old man. But sometimes, you cannot get away even if you are world famous and a very old man, as Mahatma Gandhi discovered; he didn't get away with saying what he thought; the situation was too sort of highly charged for that.

Prasannasiddhi: That was something that I felt in the film, one of the impressions I got of the Indians was that they weren't afraid of death, but on the other hand, they almost didn't really treat it with ... they were almost too willing to sort of give their lives up for any cause, almost, it seemed, rather than really thinking about what was really skilful. It was as if death didn't really matter any more, and so they would throw themselves...

S: I don't whether it is because Indians, that is to say, especially Hindus believe very deeply in Karma and rebirth or whether it is, for some other reason, but they certainly don't seem to be affected by the idea of death so strongly as perhaps Europeans and Americans are; they seem to treat it almost, sort of lightly, they are much more ready to sacrifice their lives, at least, at that particular period, perhaps it is difficult to generalize, I don't know whether the same holds good now, say thirty, forty or fifty years later. But one notices in the case of the episode in South Africa, that Mahatma Gandhi, though apparently simple, appealed to them quite skilfully because under those pass laws, a policeman could actually enter the home of an Indian to demand his wife's certificate or whatever it was; so Indians, especially orthodox Hindus, are very touchy about the honour of their women folk; so the subtle suggestion was that a policeman is allowed into your home when you are not there to actually speak to your wife, and Hindu wives don't usually speak to strange men, and to ask her personally for her certificate, as if to say, well, if you have got a strange man inside your home speaking to your wife, well anything could happen, especially if it is a policeman, so that is a very, very touchy point for the orthodox [68] Hindu, the honour and chastity and all that, of his womenfolk, and they identify with that very strongly, if their womenfolk are dishonoured, they are dishonoured. And, yes, they could feel that so strongly that they would rather die than allow that to happen, so he was in a way quite cleverly, despite his apparent simplicity, playing on these sorts of feelings. We find that difficult to imagine because we don't feel these sorts of things so strongly. But I mean, in some societies, it is felt very, very strongly indeed. Even if someone looks at your wife in an undesirable way it is very strongly resented, even to the point of murder. Anyway, we have got some time left, so we need to sort of... any further points emerging from anything that we have studied, this couple of mornings? Anything that needs going into a little more, perhaps? Any little tangent that you would like to fly off at?

Vairocana: I would like to fly off at a tangent a bit. Something that came to mind about death and the bardo realms, trying to be aware all the time, even when you are dreaming, trying to be aware, you don't seem to find very much in Buddhism about dream-analysis; does Buddhism encourage dream-analysis in any sort of way? Dreams seem quite important; is there any text where that is referred to, to analyse your dreams, or is this not encouraged?

S: There isn't much about dream analysis in the modern sense, that is true, though traditionally dreams are regarded as having significance. In the Mahavastu, there is a whole series of dreams given, I think eighteen dreams, that the Buddha had before his Enlightenment, and there is also an interpretation of those dreams, you could say, even in a way, a rudimentary way, a sort of analysis. I think perhaps one of the points that needs to be made about dreams from a Buddhist point of view, I think the modern tendency under, say, Freud's influence is to regard dreams as sort of reflecting your deeper, more basic sort of desires, whereas Buddhism would see dreams perhaps more in the way that Jung saw them, perhaps to an even greater extent than that, as, in a sense, reflecting some part of what one can only describe as one's higher nature; in dreams, you can have an intimation of something beyond what you have achieved already. In dreams you can not only experience yourself as an animal, so to speak, but also experience yourself as an angel, so to speak, so one needs to look at dreams, perhaps from that point of view also. You are temporarily emancipated from the body, and maybe the drives of the body, and the interests of one's mundane life and you can have, according to Buddhism, in dreams, glimpses of [69] some higher world, or better state of affairs. So one should perhaps look for that also in dreams. You should not treat dreams just reductively.

Prasannasiddhi: So the Freudian is more ... he goes backwards into the more animal...

S: Yes, very roughly and crudely speaking; the Jungian tends to go forward more. I would say that Buddhism also goes forward and perhaps, and certainly beyond the Jungian interpretation.

Vairocana: Jung saw dreams very much as compensation.

S: Well there is that element, at a very simple level, one finds that even in the case of animals and children. In the case of a small child, you might, say, forbid a small child to do something, and it says, it might say, "Oh I did that in the night", meaning that they dreamed they did it; it is clearly a compensation. Well, a starving man can dream of food, I have known people who have dreamt that they were on retreat. Perhaps they were people who worked in co-ops.

Vairocana: And people on retreat dream about working in co-ops.

S, I have never heard that one, but perhaps they do, perhaps they can not get away from the co-ops as easily as they thought. I have heard of people giving lectures in their dreams and even taking yoga classes in their dreams; sometimes people have been overheard at night talking in

their sleep, and taking yoga classes. And some people have dreams of doing a puja, and meditating; so clearly, this shows what their deeper preoccupations are.

Vairocana: I suppose what applies in the waking world, applies just as much in the dreams as well, because you are sort of wandering about in your dreams... you have just got a lot more freedom in your dreams.

S: Yes, well, the objective world doesn't interfere, you can spin any little fantasy that you please. You can be a king or you can be an Emperor, a dictator.

Prasannasiddhi: So you think that dreams have no kind of moral form; even though it is on a dream level, it could have a sort of ... it could be an avenue of reality in the sense that karma acts in dreams as well.

S: Well, you can dream of karma acting, but the general Buddhist view is that you are not, as it were, morally responsible for dreams and if [70] you dream, say, that you are committing a murder, it is not that you have in fact committed a murder, even though it may show that you have got that violent tendency . But karmically speaking, you cannot be said to have committed a murder, because that is an overt action, actually taking someone's physical life, which of course, in the dream you have not done.

Prasannasiddhi: Perhaps in your dreams, you take someone's life and then in your dreams, someone might take your life, so it is as if there is a balance.

S: It could just as easily happen. I think the great weakness of, say, dream analysis in the modern sense is that you are concerned all the time with yourself; it is your dreams, your feelings, your mental states, I think, and I am speaking more specifically about our own Movement, about the FWBO, I think there is an over-preoccupation with one's self, rather than with things outside one's self, things needing to be done, or people needing to be helped. So I think that one has to be quite careful that one's dream analysis doesn't become indulgent, and narcissistic. Do you see what I am getting at? And if you do study your dreams it should be with a view to self-understanding, so you find a key in your dreams to understanding yourself better, so as to enable you to function better in the world from a spiritual point of view, not just function in the ordinary way. Quite a few people in the Friends write to me telling me about their dreams, especially when I figure in them personally, as I do in all sorts of strange ways. Sometimes it seems a bit self-indulgent, this preoccupation with one's own dreams.

Prasannasiddhi: Some people seem to have an attitude towards their dreams as if they are going to get something from their dreams, which they aren't actually getting in their waking life. They seem to think that that is where all the richness is, that is where all the fun is, is in their dreams. They are eager to probe their dreams, instead of enjoying their waking life, and then if dreams occur which are good, well, that is good too.

S: Yes.

Vairocana: Sometimes you cannot help being preoccupied by your dreams especially when you have a sort of recurring dream, which is quite important.

S: Mmm, well then of course, you have to try to find out what it means, what, so to speak, the dream is trying to tell you.

[71]

Vairocana: Trying to face up to the actual dream itself.

Prasannasiddhi: I was just wondering about the actual Dhammapada, itself, I was wondering about the verses, would the ... did they actually come from the Buddha himself or...

S: Most of the verses so far as we know came from the Buddha himself. The Dhammapada is

an anthology, though it is a very early anthology. Some of the verses are found in other parts of the Pali canon. But other verses are found only in the Dhammapada. But it would seem, judging from the terminology and the kind of Pali and so on, that it is one of the somewhat older portions of the Pali canon. It is probably not as old as the oldest parts of the Sutta Nipata, and the Udana, but it is pretty old, nonetheless. There was a Sanskrit equivalent, which was called the Udanavarga, which has many verses in common with the Pali Dhammapada. That doesn't survive in Sanskrit, but it was translated into Tibetan and there is an English translation of that Tibetan version, though we don't have a copy of it in the Order library. It is a quite old translation, which is out of print.

Prasannasiddhi: So, could these be represented as things that the Buddha himself said.

S: Well in the case of verses, it is always a bit doubtful, even though it is easier to compose verses in Pali than it is in English. But I think it is very unlikely that the Buddha produced, as it were, many verses. I think that the likelihood is that, well, we do know that this did happen, that some of his disciples who had a turn for versification sort of put his teachings into the form of verses so that it could be more easily remembered. We know that for instance in the case of Vangisa, one of the Buddha's own disciples, that he encouraged Vangisa to do this, that when he had said something, or given a teaching, he encouraged Vangisa to actually put it into metrical form, so apparently it could be more easily remembered. So there could well have been a number of people among the Buddha's disciples with this gift, who versified his teachings and made them into, as it were, ballads even, that could be recited and chanted as people went around.

Prasannasiddhi: The Buddha would say something that was quite pointed, quite sort of sharp...

S: Well, it could be that sometimes the Buddha himself produced verse of this kind himself, that is certainly not impossible. Well, tradition represents him as doing just that. But no doubt, when he gave a more [72] lengthy and detailed exposition of things, he also did, we know, he must have spoken in prose.

Prasannasiddhi: So we could regard this as actually at one time or the other, the Buddha would probably have said something similar...

S: Yes, we can regard the Dhammapada, as on the whole, reflecting a quite early stage in the development of the Buddha's teaching, and no doubt reflecting much of the actual teaching of the Buddha himself, though it is very doubtful that we can guarantee that any particular verse in its present form was uttered by the Buddha just like that. And perhaps we will never know that, not until modern conditions of knowledge.

But the Dhammapada is of course one of the best known of the Buddhist scriptures. There are many English translations and of course I'm in process of making another one myself; I'm not satisfied with the existing ones. They're either sort of too pseudo-literary, or not literal enough, or clumsy.

Vairocana: What one do you think's the best? Apart from your own.

S: Radhakrishnan's isn't bad, and this one isn't bad - by Buddhadatta. It's quite a good

translation but quite often a bit clumsy; the idiom isn't quite English, a bit awkward. I hope to finish my translation sometime. I've done well over half, I think. It's not a difficult job; the thing is finding time to do it.

A translation to be avoided is the Penguin one by Mascaro. That is all dreadful. It's not even a paraphrase.

Vairocana: Very Christian.

S: Yes, yes - and sometimes quite inaccurate.

Prasannasiddhi: Could you give again the ones that are actually worth reading?

S: Well, I've mentioned, I think, the Sutta Nipata - as one of the older Pali texts - and the Udana...

Prasannasiddhi: Sorry, I meant the actual versions. You said Buddhadatta, I think.

S: Oh yes, Buddhadatta. This is Buddhadatta. This is the only copy I've ever seen, though it is in the library. It's out of print. Radhakrishnan isn't bad though it needs to be read with caution because he Hinduizes a bit - but it's not bad. Max Muller's translation is still quite readable though inaccurate in one or two places.

Vairocana: And one by Nyanaponika Thera - or is it Narada Thera?

S: Narada's is not bad, but the English is sort of quite flabby and dead; there's no bite in it. Whereas the Pali is very pungent, very sharp, very pointed, as it were. Narada's version doesn't reflect that at all, though it is quite accurate. But the language is, as I said, [74] flabby. I mean, I think the most important thing about a translation of the Dhammapada is it must have punch, because the Pali does have punch. If the translation doesn't have punch it misses one of

the most vital features of the original text. You can see some of the Pali's very terse. I mean, for instance, this line: Parinibbanti anassara. We have to translate that rather clumsily - here Buddhadatta translates it as "The undefiled ones become extinct." Well, "extinct" - it's dreadful! Introduces endless misunderstandings: the goal of Buddhism is to become extinct. Well! (Laughter)

It would be more correct to say "transcendentalized" because it's a verb, not a noun. If you say "attain Nirvana", you weaken it because you separate Nirvana as a static goal from the process of "its" attainment which the text doesn't do. "Those who become free from the asavas" - that's a very clumsy paraphrase - they actually Nirvanize". They go up the Spiral; or they ascend the Spiral. Could also be translated "the unbiased nirvanize." (Pause)

It's very useful to be able to consult the original text in such cases I think if you want to study a text seriously you really need to be able to consult the original - or at least to know what the key terms in the original are, at the very least you need to know that. Well, for instance, supposing you knew no Pali at all and you just read "The undefiled ones become extinct". Well, would you be able to guess from that if you were just a newcomer that the word in the

original was Nirvana as a verb? You'd just take it as, well, Buddhism teaches extinction as the goal, you'd take it quite straightforwardly like that.

Abhaya: Did you read that novel by Gore Vidal: "Creation"?

S: I've dipped into it; I haven't read it yet. I did look at his portrait of the Buddha.

Abhaya: Because that's his view: that the goal of Buddhism is extinction. It's awful.

S: The Buddha seemed quite a worthy sort of person but quite strict and [75] cold and severe and dry. Some early translations of the White Lotus Sutra speak of "extinct Buddhas" and extinct Buddhas actually appear on the scene and speak! (Laughter) They're dead but they won't lie down! (Laughter) It's not surprising that the non-Buddhists - even relatively sympathetic ones - believe that as a Buddhist you believe that the goal of the spiritual life is a state of extinction of, not only suffering, but life itself, existence itself, that your goal is a void in that sense, especially when they come across Sunyata translated as "the void" - well, (chuckling) it becomes perfectly and obvious - Buddhism is a philosophy of the Void, of Nothing, nihilistic. Do you still come across these misunderstandings at Centres among people?

Abhaya et al.: Yes.

Tejananda: A lot of the popular books on Buddhism contain precisely those words, especially ones that you find in schools.

S: Oh dear, we'll have to do more about that; maybe start protesting more.

Prasannasiddhi: Maybe start writing a few books that actually do put it across properly.

S: Well, it's not enough to write the book; you've got to get it accepted by educational publishers and that isn't an easy matter. We've got one or two quite odd little books that do circulate in schools with quite odd things about Buddhism. Anyway, we are getting a bit of a foothold in schools these days. Quite a few Order Members have been giving talks in schools and that's very good.

Vairocana: There's quite a lot of school visits now as well.

S: Do they come along with any definite sort of idea about Buddhism?

Vairocana: Usually they do, yes - but just very limited ideas.

S: I mean, are they surprised when they meet you at the Centre or when [76] they see the Centre? Does it correspond to their expectations or not? Or did they not have any expectations? or are they maybe not quite sure or clear whether it's a Buddhist temple or a Muslim mosque or ...

Vairocana: A lot of them seem actually semi-indifferent when they come. You get one or two who ask questions. A lot of them just spend a lot of time looking at the ceiling. (Laughter)

S: Oh dear. Who usually talks to them?

Vairocana: Well, anybody at all who comes in.

S: I hope you don't mean that literally.

Vairocana: No, no. I've shown a few around. I think though when they're with teachers they don't tend to ask very many questions, but I've noticed when you take them through and split them up from the teachers then you get questions.

S: So that would seem to be a desirable thing to do - to get them away from the teachers. Maybe you ought to lay on a tea for the teachers. (Indistinct - several voices at once)

Chris Pegrum: I'm sure the teacher would be very pleased to hand over if they could only hand over to somebody that can handle children.

S: I'm sure they'd have full confidence in someone like Parami as able to handle any number of children - or Sagaramati. I don't know about Scottish children; I'm sure Ajita can handle them.

Chris: I did show some children round the LBC and I found they were delighted in the huge Buddha there. I gave them incense to get them involved. They were about 14. (Pause)

S: Have you been in any schools recently?

Abhaya: Quite a few in the last year.

S: What has your experience been?

Abhaya: I find the younger ones are not so readily interested but fifth formers and sixth formers had some quite interested - not always but one or two - have good responses. Except that in one or two cases the teacher tends to try to take over and ask all the questions; I had that problem with one teacher - got into a heated discussion about Christianity.

[77]

S: Oh dear. Well, perhaps it needs to be made clear beforehand in a tactful way.

Abhaya: It's quite a difficult situation that; when the children are a bit shy and they haven't seen you before and they need drawing out and the teacher keeps on coming in with questions.

S: Well, we could have a discussion - you could say to the teacher - afterwards, but let me deal with the children myself.

Abhaya: And in most cases - with fifth and sixth formers - I've done a little bit of meditation, say ten minutes of the mindfulness of breathing, often - and that's been quite interesting.

S: Teacher doesn't try to take over then. (laughter)



Tejananda: I did one a couple of weeks ago with about forty or fifty sixth formers and the teacher said that I could just let the lot of them go off and just keep those that wanted to stay to do a meditation. So I did and about fifteen stayed. The teacher went away for a while I gave the instructions; then he came back. Afterwards apparently somebody asked him if he'd done the meditation as well. He said he'd sat there and prayed; he was a Christian. But it was quite good.

Abhaya: I find the biggest challenge in that situation especially with younger children is pitching it so that you engage their interest. It's quite difficult to do that unless you're in practice with that kind of audience.

Chris: Do you give talks or a slide show?

Abhaya: Talks.

Vairocana: I haven't found slide shows very good either. We showed a slide show at the LBC and it didn't go down very well at all; they just didn't seem to take to it. They fidgeted about quite a bit. Mind you, I don't think the slide show was a very good one; it was too long drawn out.

S: Kids, after all are pretty sophisticated. They're used to watching well produced TV programmes. Whatever the content of the programmes they are well produced very often. And your very old-fashioned, almost sort of Victorian, slide show is not going to go down very well.

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Chris: You need a really good video.

S: Yes, yes - something really slick and up-to-date with a few interesting technical features that maybe some of them could get interested in anyway. (Pause) It's not like India where for many people a slide show is quite an event and a novelty especially in the villages. (Pause) What about misconceptions? Did you explain any misconceptions about Buddhism in schools?

Abhaya: Well, this idea that the aim of Buddhism is extinction, that does tend to ... it must come through the literature, the little literature that they come across. So you have to emphasize the positive side of it very strongly. Also, very, very strong through what the teachers have told them is that Buddhism is monks with yellow robes and shaven heads; they're quite surprised that you don't come in robes.

S: Well, that's what they see on TV because that is colourful.

Abhaya: That's what Buddhism is exclusively. So they're very surprised that there's no monk and you don't have a temple; so you've got to break down that very narrow conception of Buddhism.

S: Well, sometimes they suspect that they might not have got the real thing.

Vairocana: Also that Buddhism's quite selfish as well, that meditating's quite selfish.

S: Ah yes, I remember encountering that one repeatedly; that Buddhism was a selfish religion, or even that religion itself was selfish because you were preoccupied with saving your owl soul instead of helping other people.

Vairocana: I think the LBC and the whole complex must challenge that quite a bit - just the general attitude of co-ops and us being ...

S: Well, a few years ago even the idea of Buddhists actually working - as Buddhists - was quite a novel one - to Buddhists. To some Buddhist groups in Britain - outside the FWBO - we now, the FWBO is that Buddhist group that actually has co-ops. They see us entirely in those terms. It's so unusual from their point of view that you should take Right Livelihood to that extent. (Pause) Anyway, perhaps we should leave it there.

(Break) (Tape ends)

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